

# INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL ANNUAL

VOLUME EIGHT

1972



THE Dr S. RADHAKRISHNAN INSTITUTE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

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1972

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THE Dr S. RADHAKRISHNAN INSTITUTE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

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## P R E F A C E

There has been considerable delay in bringing out the present volume of the *Indian Philosophical Annual* which is for the year 1972. Part I of this volume contains the proceedings of the twelfth All-India Seminar on "Sri Aurobindo and the Concept of Evolution" organized by the Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras in September 1972, and Part II covers the proceedings of the thirteenth All-India Seminar on "The Concept of Person" held in March 1973. Part III contains three special articles.

This volume has been published by utilizing the grants from the Government of Tamil Nadu. We are grateful to the Government of Tamil Nadu for the financial help. We are thankful to the authorities of the University of Madras for providing the necessary facilities for the publication of this volume.

The Editors are not responsible for the views expressed by the contributors.

Recently, the Centre has been named the Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy.

Madras  
September 15, 1976

**V. A. Devasenapathi**  
**R. Balasubramanian**  
Editors

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PART ONE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINAR  
ON  
SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION

*T. M. P. Mahadevan*

SRI AUROBINDO AND  
THE CONCEPT OF  
EVOLUTION

*Introductory Speech*

The All-India Seminars which this Centre arranges for, periodically, constitute an important phase of its activity. The object of these Seminars is to bring together scholars from the different parts of the country, and make them present papers on a set theme, exchange views and discuss the deeper implications of their own contributions. These Seminars have proved to be fruitful in bringing out seminal ideas, and it is hoped that they will help, in course of time, in promoting cross-fertilisation and enrichment of our philosophical traditions.

Eleven All-India Seminars have been held so far, besides an International Seminar. The themes of these Seminars included basic philosophical problems, key-concepts that belong to philosophy in general, and selected traditions and notions in Indian philosophy. The titles of the seminar-themes may give an idea of the range already covered :

- (1) The Meaning of Metaphysics (5th All India Seminar).
- (2) The Problem of Method in Philosophy (7th All India Seminar).
- (3) The Concept of God (11th All India Seminar).
- (4) The Concept of Liberation and its Relevance to Philosophy (8th All India Seminar).
- (5) The Concept of Progress (4th All India Seminar).
- (6) Indian Philosophy and Social Concern (2nd All India Seminar).
- (7) Determinism and Moral Freedom (6th All India Seminar).



- (8) Karma and Rebirth (1st All India Seminar).
- (9) The Concept of Māyā (3rd All India Seminar).
- (10) Advaita-Vedānta and Western Thought (10th All India Seminar).

In the Gandhi Birth-Centenary Year, a Seminar was devoted to Gandhian *Weltanschauung*.

The papers presented at the Seminars are published in *The Indian Philosophical Annual*, of which six volumes have so far appeared.

The International Seminar which was held in December 1970 had for its theme 'Philosophy: Theory and Practice.' The proceedings of this Seminar are being printed and will soon be published.

The present Seminar, which is the twelfth in the series of All-India Seminars, is dedicated to Sri Aurobindo whose birth-centenary the world is celebrating this year.

Tamil Nadu can legitimately feel proud that the great mystic and prophet chose this region as his home for spiritual *sādhana* and for scaling the supernal heights. It is well-known that Sri Aurobindo reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910, and lived the rest of his earthly life there. The Tamil language fascinated him, as also Tamil sacred literature. He has rendered into elegant English the first decade of verses from the *Kural* of Tiruvalluvar, and a few *pāsurams* of the Ālvārs, including gems from Āṇḍāl.<sup>1</sup> It was his stay in South India, says Sri Aurobindo, that first seriously turned his thoughts to the Veda.<sup>2</sup> As is well-known, it is his insight into the secret of the Veda that gave a distinctive character to his teachings, and became the source of his unique philosophy of evolution. The more he came into contact with the Tamils and the Tamil language, the greater grew the conviction in him that the racial divisions between Northern Aryans and Southern Dravidians was a myth of the philologists who were hasty in their conclusions, and themselves realized their mistake later on. While a distinction may be made between Aryan languages and Dravidian, Sri Aurobindo's study led him to believe that the original connection between the Dravidian and Aryan tongues was far closer and more extensive than was usually supposed and the possibility suggested itself that they might even have been two divergent families derived from one lost primitive tongue.<sup>3</sup> After careful and close analysis of words and word-formations, he has been able to show that "large families of words supposed to be pure Tamil are identical in the mass, though not in their units, with the Aryan family," and that the dissonance

of Tamil itself with the Aryan tongues was probably "due to an early separation and an extensive change of its vocabulary during its preliterate ages."<sup>4</sup> Those of us whose mother-tongue is Tamil cannot but feel grateful to Sri Aurobindo for applying his acute mind to the vexed problem of the origins of speech, and for his discovery that Tamil is not unrelated or alien to Sanskrit.

In selecting a theme for this Seminar we had no difficulty, because the concept of evolution — if 'concept' it may be called — as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo is central to his philosophy, and is also of great contemporary relevance. Uncritical evolutionism was conspicuous in the philosophical thinking of the last century. The statement in evolutionary biology addressed to man, "You are descended from the ape" was sought to be expanded in evolutionary philosophy into "You have risen from matter through life and mind". "The theory of evolution has been the key-note of the thought of the nineteenth century," says Sri Aurobindo; "It has not only affected all its science and its thought-attitude, but powerfully influenced its moral temperament, its politics and society."<sup>5</sup> The application of the theory in philosophy has led to a reductionism: the reduction of all reality in its roots to matter. But, when the first flush of enthusiasm began to wane, the inherent defect of materialism has come to be recognized by the evolutionary philosophers themselves. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "The materialistic view of the world is now rapidly collapsing and with it the materialistic statement of the evolution theory must disappear."<sup>6</sup> Some of the recent philosophers of evolution have attempted to present modified versions by conceiving of the process of evolution in terms of a vital urge, or as a *niśus* towards the Deity. But none of them has succeeded in taking the evolutionary vehicle out of the rut of naturalist-empiricism. It is in this context that Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism has to be appraised.

India has had its own tradition of evolutionary philosophy. According to the Sāṅkhya, the world is an evolution from Primal Nature which is called Prakṛti. Puruṣa or Spirit plays only a passive role in the world-evolution, and is not implicated therein. In the presence of Puruṣa, it is said, Prakṛti evolves into both psychological and sensory powers, on the one hand, and physical factors, on the other. The Sāṅkhya view is that of *prakṛti-pariṇāma*, evolution from Primal Nature. There is thus a quasi-materialism implicit in Sāṅkhya. Rejecting *prakṛti-pariṇāma-vāda* as an untenable view, some Vedāntins sponsor *brahma-pariṇāma-vāda*, according to which it is *Brahman* or the supreme Spirit that evolves into the world. Since only a part of *Brahman* manifests itself as the world, the integrity and purity of *Brahman* are not affected, according to these thinkers.



Sri Aurobindo would accept *brahma-pariṇāma*, but he differs from the traditional view in regard to several aspects as also from the Western views. (i) He would agree with the modern evolutionist that Life evolves from Matter, and Mind from Life. But it is not brute Matter that is the source of evolution; there is Spirit involved in Matter. Evolution is preceded by involution. Or, one might say that there is a double evolution: The evolution, in the Indian sense, of the world of Mind-Life-Matter from the Spirit, and the evolution, in the Western sense, of Life, Mind, etc., from Matter. (ii) Sri Aurobindo differs from the Western linear conception of evolution. Adapting the concept of cycles, he conceives of evolution as a spiral. In this spiral progress, there are "climbing greetnesses," and "each step sets its foot on a higher rung and opens to a clearer, larger and fuller scope and view of the always sacred and always self-manifesting spirit in things."<sup>7</sup> (iii) Manhood is the present stage reached by the evolutionary process. But man, says Sri Aurobindo, is "a transitional being; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring but troubled and limited mundane existence."<sup>8</sup> Man should take a second birth, divine birth, *divya-janma*. It is that to which all the other births are "a long series of laborious steps. An involution of spirit in matter is the beginning, but a spiritual assumption of divine birth is the fullness of the evolution."<sup>9</sup> (iv) Divine birth is supramental birth. The supermind is as distinct from mind, as man is from the animal. It is by the descent of the supermind that the entire evolution will be transmuted and transformed, and rendered divine. What the integral *Yoga* aims at is to cause the supermind to descend, so that the next item in the evolutionary agenda may be completed, i.e., the emergence of a supramental or gnostic race of beings.

These appear to me to be some of the salient points in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual evolutionism which, I am sure, will engage the attention of the scholars who are participating in this Seminar. To set at naught a possible misconception, I may add here that the concept of evolution is not irrelevant or unhelpful to Advaita Vedānta. As a venerable preceptor of Advaita says:

"In the tradition of Vedānta, the doctrine of evolution serves as the ante-chamber to the doctrine of transfiguration. When once the doctrine of evolution is properly understood, then the doctrine of transfiguration follows of its own accord."

*vivartavādasya hi pūrvabhūmiḥ  
vedāntavāde pariṇāma-vādah,*

*vyavasthite'smin pariṇāma-vāde  
svayaṁ samāyāti vivartavādaḥ.*<sup>10</sup>

We are happy that His Excellency Sri K. K. Shah, Governor of Tamil Nadu, is with us today to preside over the inaugural meeting. It will be remembered that he inaugurated the last seminar held in March this year, and delivered an insightful address on the concept of God which was the theme of that seminar.

We thought we were extremely fortunate when the Hon'ble Dr Karan Singh has found it possible to accept our invitation to inaugurating the present Seminar. Apart from his intimate association with the world-wide celebrations of the Centenary of Sri Aurobindo's advent, he is the author of a significant study of Sri Aurobindo, as *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*. With rare penetration, Dr Karan Singh presents in this book the Great Master's *Weltanschauung* which he aptly characterizes as "stunning in its daring ambitions and immensity." Commending this work, the late Prime Minister Nehru stated in the Preface which he contributed: "It is significant to note that he should have devoted himself to his studies and more particularly to this analysis of the political thought of Sri Aurobindo during a crucial period of our history, instead of occupying himself with the normal activities of Indian princes, that is, shikar, polo and high society." Much to his disappointment and regret Dr Karan Singh has to cancel his visit to Madras at the last moment.

In connection with this Seminar, an exhibition of books and pictures has also been organized, which will be declared open by the Hon'ble Mr Justice T. Ramaprasada Rao, immediately after the inaugural session.

May I now request Your Excellency to conduct the inaugural proceedings?

#### Notes

1. See *Sri Aurobindo-Birth-Centenary Library*, Volume 8, pp. 397-406.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 35.
3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 36.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 539.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 225.
6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 225.
7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 237.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 17, p. 7.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 241.
10. Sarvajñātman, *Saṁkṣepa-śārīraka*, ii, 61.



*Karan Singh*

## SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION

Sri Aurobindo's concept of spiritual evolution lies at the heart of his teaching, and can be considered to be the key concept in the imposing edifice of spiritual thought and practice that he has left for us. Most of you participating in this Seminar are far better acquainted than I with the details of his theory, and I will therefore not even attempt a summary of the theory. I will, instead, mention a few points that have occurred to me from time to time, not with a view to venturing into the sterile arena of intellectual disputation, but rather in the hope that discussion on these problems will itself help to clarify in our minds Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution.

The first problem is with regard to the time-span or evolution. As I understand him, Sri Aurobindo holds that the process of creation began when, for some inscrutable reason which it is really impossible to grasp while one is within the space-time continuum, the Supreme Reality without in any way lessening its own absolute character plunged into the diametrically opposite pole of densest matter. Because the Spirit was involved in matter, the inevitable process of evolution began from the very moment of creation. After aeons, life began to manifest itself in matter, first in primitive forms and then in the slow and tortuous process of upward evolution. After a tremendous gap, mind first appeared among living creatures, ultimately culminating in the human race in which intellect assumed the dominating role.

According to Sri Aurobindo, therefore, man is by no means the final phase of evolution. He is, rather, an intermediate creature with his feet still deep in the mire of matter and his mind striving upwards towards the Divine; a ladder, as it were, between densest matter and absolute Spirit. For the first time with the emergence of man there is

a creature which is self-conscious and which, therefore, can, according to Sri Aurobindo, co-operate with the forces of evolution to speed up the process which before him had taken place automatically in the long, slow workings of nature. As I understand it, Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is specifically designed to speed up this process of evolution by bringing to bear directly on this earth the power and force of the Supramental.

Speed, however, is a comparative concept. Compared with the earlier process of evolution which took millions of years the next phase may be quicker, but the fact remains that with mankind today in the possession of weapons with unprecedented destructive capacity, the time at the disposal of the race appears to be very limited. To put it more bluntly, even the supramentalization process of Sri Aurobindo appears *prima facie* to be extremely slow when viewed in the context of the fact that mankind is in imminent danger or extinction due to technological 'progress'. Thus the question arises as to whether Sri Aurobindo's theory that a final solution of mankind's problems lies in the next step of spiritual evolution, takes adequate cognizance of the growing divergence between the lower and the higher knowledge, the *parā* and the *aparā vidyā* of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. The question is urgent because the divergence between the *parā* and the *aparā vidyā* poses a grave threat to human survival.

The second problem that I would like to raise is with regard to the Overmind. With my limited understanding of Sri Aurobindo, his view is that above the present mental level of mankind there is first the level of the Overmind and only beyond that the level of the Supermind. If that is so, why should the next leap in evolution try to go directly to the Supermind without taking the next logical step in the ladder? It may well be that I have not fully understood the concepts of Overmind and Supermind, but this is a question which has often occurred to me and I thought I might bring it out on this occasion.

The third and the final point that I wish to make is with regard to physical immortality. I am not quite clear as to why in Sri Aurobindo's system there should be so much stress upon the transmutation of the physical world including our bodies. While I fully realize that the human body today is an extremely vulnerable and fragile instrument, and needs to be strengthened immeasurably in order to fit it for the divine quest, physical immortality seems to me to be a snare and a delusion. If, of course, what is meant is that we are to create a new body with the power of yoga, that is an entirely different matter. The *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (II, 12) specifically says:



“*na tasya rogo na jarā na mṛtyuḥ  
prāptasya yogāgni-mayaṁ śarīram.*”

“There is no disease, no old age, no death for him who has obtained a body made of the fire of yoga.” There are also the continuing traditions of the Bodhisattvas, the Siddhas, the Adepts, the Masters - call them by any name - who are reputed to be able to retain their astral bodies almost indefinitely and to appear in physical form at will. If this is what Sri Aurobindo meant when he spoke of bodily immortality, I withdraw my objections immediately. However, if our actual present physical bodies are meant, then I must admit that I much prefer the concept of *bhāsmāntam śarīram*.

*Pritibhushan Chatterji*

THE PLACE OF MAN IN SRI  
AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY  
OF EVOLUTION

I

Sri Aurobindo in his philosophy combines a serene spiritual outlook with a dynamic activism. His mission has been to spiritualise the material, to immortalise the mortal, to divinise the human. He assures us that though "man starts from the animal vitality and its activities", "a divine existence is his objective" and he calls upon all "to fulfil God in life."<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo looks upon the entire universe as spiritual. The Spirit is the support and principle of all existence. All the infinitely varying objects of the universe are the self-expressions of the Supreme Spirit. They all emerge from the Spirit and to the Spirit they all return. The Spirit or Brahman is the supreme unity besides which nothing exists; but this unity is indefinable. In his approach to this Spirit Sri Aurobindo avoids the two extremes of rigid monism and uncompromising pluralism, and adopts what he calls the integral view. This integral view comprehends Being in its multi-dimensional fulness. From this integral standpoint Sri Aurobindo rejects neither the One nor the many, neither the Being nor the Becoming. He looks upon the One and the many as parts of a single pattern, Being and Becoming as varying rhythms of the same reality. He offers a comprehensive metaphysical synthesis, reconciling change with permanence, evolutionism with eternalism. The integral view of the unity of Brahman provides for the preservation of individual activities along with the comprehension of the cosmic consciousness. If the entire universe is permeated by one supreme consciousness, "the individual is a centre of the whole universal consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

II

Man's highest aspiration is for perfection; he longs for freedom and mastery, for pure truth and unmixed Bliss. But this aspiration of



man is in flagrant contradiction with his present existence and normal experience. It may be apprehended therefore that man's highest aspiration will never be fulfilled. But a closer scrutiny of Nature would show that such contradictions are part of Nature's general method. Nature is constantly moving towards harmony through reconciliation of all contradictions. But this reconciliation is effected only through evolutionary progress.

But what is evolution? We usually speak of evolution of Life from Matter, and Mind from Life; but taken in this sense, evolution simply describes certain natural phenomena without explaining them. Why is it that mind is evolved out of life, and life out of matter? We can reply to this 'why' only if we presume that life is already involved in matter and mind in life, that matter is 'veiled life' and life is 'veiled consciousness'. To explain the new emergents of evolution, we have to presume prior involution, says Sri Aurobindo. The whole universe is the self-expression of *Sacchidānanda*, i.e. the Supreme Reality which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Involution is the process by which the universal Consciousness-Force<sup>a</sup> puts limitations upon itself, and veils itself by stages down to the level of inconscience, i.e. matter. The opposite process is evolution by which the universal Consciousness-force gradually unveils itself and manifests its hidden powers. Thus involution is the process of Spirit's descent, while evolution is its ascent. The progressive movement of evolution passes through the following stages: matter (*jaḍa*), life (*prāṇa*) psyche (*caitanya-puruṣa*), mind (*manas*), Super-mind (*vijñāna* or *ṛta-cit*) and Existence (*sat*). Evolution is preceded by involution, and involution moved through the above stages in the reverse order. Upto the present stage of evolution matter, life, and mind have emerged, and there is no reason why it should not move to the emergence of the Supermind. The emergence of the Supermind is the establishment of Divine Life on earth; and the inner significance of the terrestrial evolution is the greater and greater manifestation of Divine Consciousness in the material universe. Says Sri Aurobindo, "If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter, and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth."<sup>4</sup>

Thus evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not a mere change, a mere mechanical process, a result of chance variations. It is all through marked by a triple process of widening, ascent, and integration. As involving a process of widening, evolution expands the field of operation of each principle; as involving the process of ascent, it means a progress from grade to grade, from the lower to



the higher; and as involving the process of integration, each subsequent evolutionary stage takes up within itself and assimilates the features of the preceding stage. It is not true that the lower level mechanically or accidentally moves forward to the higher; but it is some influence of the higher that compels the lower, so to speak, to evolve the higher. And this 'compulsion' or 'pressure' can work as the higher was involved in the lower by a prior process of involution. In other words, evolution is possible because there is an upward-tending force from below along with a drawing-force from above. This is how the *nisus* of evolution can be explained. The process of evolution being preceded by that of involution does not involve any dry vicious circle, for each step involves an expression of the infinite richness of the Supreme Being.

Evolution, to be sure, is not merely cosmic, but also individual. Like the three-eyed Śiva evolution too seems to be three-eyed—its one eye is turned downward (indicating the descent of the Spirit), one eye is turned upward (indicating ascent), and one eye is turned inward towards the soul. Just as the Spirit progressively evolves itself in the cosmos, so also it presides over the progressive evolution of the individual soul through different births. "The soul," says Sri Aurobindo, "had a prehuman past, it has a superhuman future."<sup>5</sup> He states further: "Human birth is a term at which the soul must arrive in a long succession of rebirths and it has had for its previous and preparatory terms in the succession the lower forms of life upon earth...Then the farther question arises whether, humanity, once attained this succession of rebirths still continues...Man is to move from the ignorance and from the little life which he is in his mind and body to the knowledge and the large divine life which he can compass by the unfolding of the spirit...The imperfection of Man is not the last word of Nature but his perfection too is not the last peak of the Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

### III

The individual evolution proceeds according to the same principle as the cosmic. Hence the evolution of man may be traced to the inconscient matter, and the evolution in matter is possible because of the presence therein of a self-creative Reality. The physical nature contains within her the urge of the Spirit; and in the human mind the Spirit becomes conscious, though it divulges its secrets partially but not fully in man. This accounts for the immense importance of the individual being as he rises in the evolutionary scale. "This importance," points out Sri Aurobindo, "can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal. Thus can be explained the necessity



for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of the cosmic self and Consciousness and of the Supreme Reality."<sup>7</sup>

The emergence of the individual indicates that there is no retrograde movement from manhood back to animal life as some popular theories of transmigration assume. The transition from animal life to human life means a decisive conversion, and it seems impossible that a conversion so definitely made by Nature can be reversed by the soul. Even supposing that there may be a partial reversion to an animal form, the normal law must be presumed to be a recurrence of birth in human forms for a soul that has risen to the human level. And a succession of births is necessary, for one single birth cannot fully express the infinite potentiality of the Divine Life.

The emergence of man does not, however, indicate that man is the crowning consummation of evolution. The life of an individual is affected by passions and impulses, and he can overcome the divisions and conflicts within him by aspiring after and moving towards a higher level of consciousness—the level of the Supermind. Indeed, within the law of his own being, within his *svabhāva*, there is the promise and potency of something higher and nobler which he may realise. He may therefore joyfully grow into a higher pattern by exceeding the limits of the lower. Says Sri Aurobindo, "Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own; the evolutionary oestrus is there in his parts of life and mind, the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him...In him, then, the substitution of a conscious for a subconscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour immanent is a sure sign of Nature's will for a higher way to fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status."<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that the ideal of Supermanhood is man's own ideal of self-perfection. It is something which he must realise through active effort, otherwise he will not automatically be raised to this level. It must be conceded that there is not the least possibility of the entire human race rising *en bloc* to the supramental level. "What is suggested," clarifies Sri Aurobindo, "is nothing so revolutionary and astonishing, but only the capacity in the human mentality, when it has reached a certain level or a certain point of stress of the evolutionary impetus to press towards a higher plane of consciousness and its embodiment in the being."<sup>9</sup>

The Supermind is not a mere dream. The cosmic evolution points to the possibility of the emergence of the Supermind. By the

practice of *yoga* the individual mind may also rise to the level of the Supermind. As a result of *yoga* the individual self will be united with the Divine Self, the terrestrial will be united with the transcendental. This is called Integral Yoga. The integral *yoga* involves not only an ascent to the Divine, but also a descent of Godhead into the embodied nature. By this *yoga* Sri Aurobindo aims not only at rising to the level of the Supermind, but also making it a permanent station of Divine Consciousness. The individual mind must, however, make a complete surrender to the Divine. The Superman of Sri Aurobindo's vision will possess power; but this is not mere physical power. He is no Titan, but will be permeated with spiritual force. He will be a sort of channel through which Divine activity will pour upon the world. The Superman at its highest reach will be 'the Divine Gnosis, the Wisdom-Power-Light-Bliss of God.' He will be on the supra-moral level—he will not cease to be moral, but will transcend morality by way of a higher development.

The future of mankind is not dark. Sri Aurobindo has prophesied the advent of new man in a new world. The new man is the Superman, and the new nature is Supernature. With their appearance there will be a kind of establishment of Kingdom of Heaven on earth, an advent of a spiritual religion of humanity. Sri Aurobindo characterises the religion of humanity as "the growing realisation that there is a secret spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one", and he tells us that humanity is the "highest present vehicle on earth" of this Spirit and that "the human race and human beings are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here."<sup>10</sup>

#### IV

It may be argued that reason is the highest faculty of man and as it has enabled man to master Nature, there is no further need for the supramental level. But Sri Aurobindo replies that though reason can play well its part in its limited field, it "cannot grasp *all* truth in its embrace because truth is too infinite for it."<sup>11</sup> Reason can deal well with the finite, the separate, the particulars, but as it cannot go to the root of things, it can never arrive at any final truth. The limitations of reason become very patent when it is confronted with the religious life, for in its deepest core religion is a search for the Infinite, the Absolute and is supra-rational. But this does not mean that any and every religion can be a guide of human life. The different religions, as we practise them, have confused the essential and the adventitious, and in certain cases have acted as a force that discourages life by emphasising renunciation and mortification. Sri Aurobindo remarks, "...a narrow religious spirit often oppresses and impoverishes the joy and



beauty of life, either from an intolerant asceticism or...because they (the Puritans) could not see that religious austerity is not the whole of religion."<sup>12</sup>

Today man is facing an evolutionary crisis, for he "has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego, and its appetites."<sup>13</sup> Sometimes man tries to find a solution by surrendering himself completely to the society. But no socialism which allows the social machinery to efface an individual is of any avail, for the individual is 'the key of the evolutionary movement'. Sri Aurobindo declares, "The individual does not owe his ultimate allegiance either to the State which is a machine or to the community which is a part of life and not the whole of life; his allegiance must be to the Truth, the Self, the Spirit, the Divine which is in him and in all; not to subordinate or lose himself in the mass, but to find and express that truth of being in himself and help the community and humanity in its seeking for its own truth..."<sup>14</sup>

So in the present evolutionary crisis through which humanity is passing there is no other solution than the one which is spiritual.

## V

From this brief resume it is quite clear that Sri Aurobindo has made a very notable contribution in the field of evolution, and is able to overcome the defects of many rival theories.

In the West the concept of evolution has been popularised by the mechanists. But the greatest difficulty of the mechanists is that they cannot explain the origin of life out of matter, consciousness out of life, and rational mind out of animal mind. Huxley and Tyndall, for example, admit that there is no experimental evidence that life can arise out of lifeless matter. Similarly, Spencer remarks that two volumes of his Synthetic Philosophy are 'missing' what would connect the inorganic with the biological and mental evolution. Sri Aurobindo comments, "The progress of Nature from Matter to Life, from Life to Mind, may be conceded; but there is no proof yet that Matter developed into Life or Life-energy into Mind-energy."<sup>15</sup> In respect of biological evolution Lamarck and Darwin cannot offer any happy explanation of the origin of new species. The variations that account for new species are, according to Lamarck, due to the influences of environment upon living beings, while, according to Darwin, such variations are spontaneous. But mere environmental influences cannot

create any new organ which was totally absent before, nor can mere chance variations account for the organic unity of new creatures. But Sri Aurobindo's theory has a decided superiority over the mechanical theories. His point is that evolutionary progress from matter to life, and from life to mind, could be possible because evolution was preceded by prior involution of the Supreme Consciousness. It is because the universal Consciousness-force veiled itself by stages until it assumed the appearance of a dense cosmic Inconscience that matter could develop itself to the stage of life and that again into the stage of mind. Evolution, for Sri Aurobindo, is not a *mere* change, but a progressive development from the lower level to the higher, and this development is possible only because of the prior descent of the Supreme Mind. What is at the back of the evolutionary process is to be understood in the light of Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's view of evolution is also different from Bergson's theory of Creative Evolution. According to Bergson, evolution is a spontaneous movement of the ever-changing vital force, the *elan vital*. It continually moves on, creating beings, and forms and never repeating itself in its infinite productions—it is ever original and ever progressive. Evolution is neither mechanical nor teleological—it involves neither a push from behind, nor a pull from the front. But Bergson does not explain why *elan vital* should move at all. Moreover, if evolution is to be progressive, it cannot just proceed in an unplanned fashion. But Sri Aurobindo shows that it is the urge for the realization of the Superconscient that already lies veiled in the inconscient matter that explains the onward movement of the evolutionary process. Moreover, Bergson's explanation of matter is also unsatisfactory. Matter is due to the reverse movement of the *elan vital*: it is comparable to the drops of water which fall back from the uprushing jet of a fountain. Here again Bergson does not tell us what suddenly puts the evolutionary process on a back gear. For Aurobindo, however, matter is nothing but veiled consciousness—matter is due to the process of self-limitation, of densification, of the universal Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's theory, though bearing some resemblance to Alexander's doctrine of emergent evolution, is on a better footing. Alexander takes Space-Time continuum as the ultimate stuff out of which matter, life, and mind have evolved by stages. He further holds that the whole universe is moving towards the evolution of Deity which is fundamentally different in kind from mind, which is as yet the highest evolute. The course of evolution is possible because each preceding stage contains a *nisus* or urge towards the next. But we are not told how the matrix of space-time which is 'a fluid of pure



movements' can evolve life and consciousness without having potentialities for them. But, as we have already seen, Sri Aurobindo does not face this difficulty as by his doctrine of involution he has shown that matter contains potentiality for life and consciousness. Again, the Deity of Alexander is different from the Superman of Sri Aurobindo's conception. Unlike the Superman the Deity is no infinite being, but is an empirical quality yet to be evolved in future, and is different from mind not in degree but in kind.

Thus Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution stands out separate from the traditional theories, inasmuch as it tries to discover a meaning of evolution by emphasising the supreme end which is being progressively realized in and through it. The entire evolutionary process is permeated and directed by the Superconscient creative energy, and it cannot therefore stop simply with the emergence of man. It moves on towards the Superconscient, so that the ground and the goal of evolution coincide in the end. It does not preach any ordinary type of teleology, but a kind of superconscious teleology.<sup>16</sup>

## VI

Perhaps the most important aspect of Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is that herein he has offered a unique philosophy of Man. For Sri Aurobindo man is "Nature's great term of transition", as Nature can move forward from the animal level to the divine level only through man. In man Nature has evolved a conscious means which may speed up the innate purpose of evolution, viz. 'the urge for an intrinsic Truth-necessity conscious in the will of an indwelling Spirit'. Man is not to be looked upon as "a mind, a life and body, but as a *soul* incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth."<sup>17</sup>

Sri Aurobindo emphasises the fact that the emergence of man is not just an event among events — rather it is a central episode of the empirical world pregnant with immense significance. Man appears to be an ambiguous phenomenon — he is half — animal and half-god. He is in between the forces of Nature and Spirit. But this ambiguity or abnormality is, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "not a thing to be at all deplored, but rather a privilege and a promise, for it opens out to us an immense vista of self-development and self-exceeding."<sup>18</sup> Man thus occupies a special position of honour in so far as he is destined to a higher divine life. No man should shirk his duty of self-development and sit idle, for 'to rest is perilous'. But though he accords a prestigious position to man, Sri Aurobindo does not look upon man as 'the last word in the evolutionary process'. He is

limited and yet he aspires to be infinite; he is relative and yet he feels an irresistible urge towards the Absolute. So man should transcend the level of humanity and develop the Superman in him. To be sure, this is no deterministic conception of development, for man must make genuine spiritual efforts to unfold his innate potentiality for a divine life.

Sri Aurobindo shows in this connection that the ideal of the Superman is no idyllic dream. The progress of Nature towards ever higher ideals strengthens our belief in this ideal. The possibility of individual evolution is thus quite in keeping with the character of terrestrial evolution. Sri Aurobindo is also practical in his outlook in so far as he tells us that the practice of integral *yoga* would help an individual in making progress towards the higher level. He is also aware that individual effort by itself is not adequate, and so it must be combined with Divine Grace. Man can ascend, only if the Divine descends to lift up man. This is well illustrated in the doctrine of *Avatāra* or Incarnation. As he comments, "If there were not this rising of man into the God-head to be *helped* by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarahood for the sake of *Dharma* would be an otiose phenomenon."<sup>10</sup>

The ideal of the Superman is no new theme; but the superman of popular imagination is an apotheosis of mere power or strength who does not care at all for values and norms. But the Superman of Sri Aurobindo's vision rises above the level of humanity not by physical power but by spiritual progress and *sādhana*. He cares more for inner conquest than for outward show of power. He converts his whole being into 'a channel of divine puissance'.

The doctrine of Superman has an important socio-political implication. While the Marxists and their followers interpret the social evolution as being determined by the operation of the inexorable historical forces, Sri Aurobindo argues that the course of human history is simply an expression of the gradual unfoldment of the Divine Design, and that with the unfolding of man's innate spiritual potentialities the unity of the world will be established.

## VII

Sri Aurobindo's view is born out of his authentic yogic experience, and even though one may not agree to all that he has said, one cannot miss the practical value of his teachings. His teachings, it may be noted, reflect the spirit of traditional Indian Philosophy. As he says, "This conception of a spiritual evolution with a final spiritual



perfection or transcendence of which human life is the means and an often repeated opportunity, is the pivot of the Indian conception of existence. It gives to our life a figure of ascent, in spirals of circles, which has to be filled in with knowledge and action and experience."<sup>20</sup>

Before we conclude we may briefly compare the view of Sri Aurobindo with that of Advaita Vedānta which is taken to be the apex of philosophical speculation in India. It is no doubt highly debatable whether and how far Sri Aurobindo subscribes to the Advaita doctrine of *māyā*. Still when Sri Aurobindo speaks of the involution of the Superconscient in the minutest particles of matter, he accepts in principle the Vedāntic notion that all is Brahman. Again the Superman of Sri Aurobindo is very like the *jīvanmukta* individual of the Advaita ideal. According to Sri Aurobindo, the goal of man is to develop the Superman in him and thereby to feel unity with the Divine Life, the potentialities for which already lie dormant in him. Similarly, the Advaita Vedāntin holds that liberation which is the highest end of life does not mean importing any new attribute from outside, but it involves a change in perspective which enables an individual to realise that he is one with Brahman. The unity or identity of the individual with Brahman is already there; only the necessary knowledge is required for understanding this. Similarly, the Divine Life already lies veiled in man, asserts Sri Aurobindo; but through spiritual efforts it has to be unveiled and manifested. Finally, to the highest spiritual vision of an Aurobindite as well as of an Advaitin, the Supreme One reveals a triple nature, Existence—Consciousness—Bliss (*Sacchidānanda*). Thus the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo incorporates into itself certain aspects of Advaita philosophy, and avoids what it considers to be the extreme views.

## REFERENCES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection, Vol. III), p. 45.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. Consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not an inert, passive principle; it contains a potential spiritual energy. Hence he does not speak simply of *cit* or consciousness, but of *citśakti* or Consciousness-Force.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 906.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 907-910.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 900-01.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1004.
10. *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 378.
11. *The Human Cycle* (Aurobindo International Centre of Education Collection, Vol. IX), p. 160.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
13. *Life Divine*, p. 1252.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 1248.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 988.
16. Sri Aurobindo calls the world a *līlā* or sport of the Divine Will; but even then it cannot be totally purposeless. To quote him, "All is a game or Lila; but a game too carries within itself an object to be accomplished and without the fulfilment of that object would have no completeness of significance." (*The Life Divine*, p. 995). The Divine purpose is, however, different from the conscious human teleology; hence it may be called 'superconscious'.
17. *The Human Cycle*, p. 305.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
19. *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, p. 217.
20. *Proceedings of The Indian Philosophical Congress* (Silver jubilee Session, 1950), p. 178.



C. T. K. Chari

SOME ISSUES ABOUT SRI  
AUROBINDO'S EVOLU-  
TIONISM AND MODERN  
KNOWLEDGE

We are celebrating the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's birth with flowery jubilation and the cornucopia of the season. Sri Aurobindo has been acclaimed, and rightly, as a great poet, patriot and seer of our *aryabhūmi*. He has revived ancient Hindu wisdom in an era of doubt and dissent. I am not concerned in this paper with Sri Aurobindo's great synthesis of yoga and its relevance to contemporary man. Nor shall I discuss whether or no Sri Aurobindo with his integral evolution has refuted Śaṅkara's *māyāvāda*. I propose to deal rather with the claim lodged for Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism that it is the 'meeting of East and West'. Dr S. K. Maitra has used the phrase with telling effect and it has been repeated by many others. Claims of this order are gargantuan even if we ignore for the nonce that 'East' and 'West' are apt to be dangerously misleading over-simplifications.

What precisely are we to understand by the 'meeting of East and West'? We may mean that Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism enables us to integrate the spiritual insights of the East with those of the West, assuming that the two 'spiritualities' are commensurable and not oddly discrepant. Or we may mean that Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism provides the key for synthesizing the spiritual insights of the East and the scientific or rational insights of the West. Using Northrop's picturesque symbolism, Dr Maitra hazards that we have to reckon with, not  $E = W$ , but  $E + W$ . And this is no lazy or otiose arithmetical sum of two quantities. The late Charles Moore remarked that Sri Aurobindo often painted a sharp contrast of Eastern and Western traditions. There must be no artificial addition of two cultures. No mere 'Asiatic modification of the West' or 'incongruous assimilation' is to be countenanced. We seek a 'subtle fusion' of the old Eastern wisdom with the new Western knowledge.



Adhering to the spirit of the formula, I would urge that East and West must be measured by their respective and distinctive measuring-rods before we talk of any *rapprochement*. Without questioning the immense scholarship which has already been lavished on Sri Aurobindo by researchers, I plead for greater depth and range in our comparative studies. Monumental comparative studies of evolutionism have been launched by Drs Maitra, Srivastava and Madhusudan Reddy. It has been argued that Sri Aurobindo's integral evolutionism corrects the deficiencies and lopsidedness of Western theories of emergence and creative evolution. Dr V. S. Naravane, in his *Modern Indian Thought*, fears that the epithets 'intellectualistic' and 'spiritual' applied to the evolutionisms of the West and the East respectively can be overdone. We can lay it on with a trowel and probably do so. It is said that Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism is not rattling off a whole set of stiff and clanking categories as in Hegel's *Weltgeschichte*. But would not Schelling's later evolutionism, with mystical overtones drawn from Jacob Böhm, provide a better parallel? Schelling derided the pretensions of a metaphysical logic which could not grow even two blades of grass and he boasted of his affinities with the Neo-Platonists.

Drs Haridas Chaudhury and Srivastava have described Sri Aurobindo's evolution as a widening, heightening and integrating process. The cosmic process is both a descent and an ascent, an involution as well as an evolution, a transformation of the lower as well as a creative emergence of the higher, a series of saltations as well as a continuity. It seems to me that there is danger in these discussions of being carried away by a crowd of metaphors. Admittedly Sri Aurobindo's spiritual insights are not to be encapsuled in a few colourful adjectives. It is claimed that in Western evolutionism the 'super-venient perfections' (the phrase is Pringle-Pattison's) come from 'above' and not from 'within'. Perhaps the 'interiority' spoken of here is a counterpart of de Chardin's *le dedans des choses*. But is the interiority altogether missing in Lloyd Morgan, Whitehead and J. A. Leighton, even if it is not there in S. Alexander, R. W. Sellars, and J. C. Smuts? Lloyd Morgan accepts a renovated two-aspect theory and requires no *deus ex machina* for the critical junctures in evolution. He distinguishes Divine causation from causality. The concrescence of each individual entity, in Whitehead's process, is internally determined and is externally free, a conspicuous instance of what is called 'categorical obligation. And what are we to say of G. P. Conger's successive 'epitomizations' culminating in the God-man? Dr Srivastava finds that J. E. Boodin's hierarchy of interacting fields, with God at the top, is far too pluralistic to admit of a creative advance. Is not the alleged defect removed in Leighton's more monistic version of the same theory? Whitehead's theory of process with its formidable panoply of some 4 or



5 ultimate categories, 8 categories of existence, 27 categories of explanation, and 9 categories of obligation, is no assimilation of the higher to the lower. On the contrary, the organic principle is explicitly extended to vibrating primates in physics and the superject comes out of the subject.

There is a basic question to be answered in some technical detail by exponents of Sri Aurobindo and de Chardin, especially as both these distinguished evolutionists, the latter a paleontologist, wrote in the twenties of the present century, in what I would call the pre-T. H. Morgan epoch of cytology, embryology and genetics. A principal virtue claimed for emergentism, holism and organicism, the last represented by biologists like J. S. Haldane, W. E. Ritter and E. S. Russell is that it absolves us from the fatal choice between a vitalism and a mechanism in our philosophy of biology. The vitalism may be the substantial vitalism of Pauly, Driesch, and Reinke, with perhaps *Kräfte zweiter Hand*; or the energistic vitalism of Moore, Assheton and Marcus Hartog with organisms having a monopoly of 'biotic energy' or 'mito-kinetic force'. Or else, vitalism may be simply the methodological vitalism of J. Arthur Thomson. Mechanism may be the dogmatic version of Loeb or the methodological variety sponsored by Needham. The emergentist escapes between the horns of the mechanistic-vitalistic dilemma by contending that the relata and the relations of biology are not reducible or translatable to those of physics and chemistry. Woodger provides a more sophisticated treatment of 'language' in biology. What precisely is the position taken up by Sri Aurobindo and Chardin on this question? Are phrases like 'life as a form of veiled consciousness' and 'frontal aspect of Mind and Super-mind', if they are not flowery substitutes for Schelling's spirit frozen in matter and his method of explaining *obscurum per obscurius*, surrogates for 'entelechies' and 'dominants'? Are the 'tangential' and 'radial' energies of Chardin counterparts of Broad's intra-ordinal and trans-ordinal laws appropriate to a purported logic of emergence? What is Chardin's 'cephalization' if it is more than the prosaic biological fact that, in bilaterally symmetrical animals, the head becomes the region of the greatest activity? Is the *fleche de l'évolution* a sublimated orthogenesis or a preferred molecular chain in organic chemistry?

I am unable to acquiesce in Dr Naravane's explanation that Sri Aurobindo deliberately preferred the French *le inconscient* to the English unconscious as a pointer to the mystery of consciousness locked up in matter. The word *le inconscient* was capitalized by French vitalists like Geley who wrote in the twenties. The title of Geley's major

work, following his *De l'être subconscient*, was *De l'inconscient au conscient*. Geley postulated a sovereign universal consciousness as the goal of human evolution. And contrary to some major Western expectations, he was a convinced reincarnationist. Is integral evolutionism a vitalism with a dynamo-psychism?

Dr A. B. Purani tells us that for Sri Aurobindo 'life emerges in the vital field'. What are we to understand by the term 'field' here? Are the postulated 'fields' the B-fields and M-fields of G. D. Wassermann acting as slight perturbation fields on transition probabilities and 'triggering' changes? Or must we fall back on Jordan's *Verstärkung*, with an unpredictable quantum event acting independently of others and initiating a change which is then magnified, avalanche-like to the biological, macroscopic level? Have we to do with a vaguely conceived general systems theory cast along Bertalanffy's lines? In any case, what is the fresh light thrown on, say, a gene mutating to white eye in the fruit fly *drosophila* within an area of 12 mu mu?

In some expositions of Sri Aurobindo, I have come across the statements that 'life is an energy that is building up in a universe that is running down,' that 'life is ectropic, matter is entropic'. If what is intended is a flouting of the second law of thermodynamics by organisms, I must demur. Why is not the generalized second law of thermodynamics set down by information-theorists like Brillouin debated? An increase of negentropy is the negative of entropy,  $\Delta N = -\Delta S$ . And if information is  $I$ ,  $\Delta I + \Delta N \geq 0$ . Following in the wake of Spemann and Weiss, Waddington and the Finnish workers, Lauri Saxen and Toivonen have warned us that if the field concept in biology is not to degenerate into a joker by which almost anything can be explained, we must make it more precise by speaking of 'individuation fields' and distinguish them from 'regions of competence' and 'organ districts'. Jane M. Oppenheimer, reviewing an extensive literature, in the *Survey of Biological Progress*, edited by Bently Glass, points out that the field concept in biology has proved less useful than its components, organizer and gradient.

I would suggest that, in our comparative studies of evolutionism, we should be engaged in some deep explorations of micro-and macro-cybernetics. It is argued by W. R. Ashby and other cyberneticians that the 'stability' and 'instability' of their systems cannot be assigned to any 'part' but to the 'whole'. Is this a global or holistic concept? Wiener argues that the time of cybernetics is not the Laplacian two-way time but the Bergsonian one-way time. F. H. George, in the Princeton symposium on automata, hints that a



sequential machine may be subject to a principle of uncertainty. Proponents of the Watson-Crick model and its variants have speculated on there being enough DNA in the germ cell to encode, say, 1000 large textbooks. If there are 20 amino-acids, figuring as a kind of protein alphabet, unaffected by 'inter-symbol influence', the Shannon entropy for the protein text is

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^{20} \frac{1}{20} \log_2 \frac{1}{20}.$$

The Watson-Crick model breaks down some 64 possible triplets into 'sense' and 'nonsense' sites. By Dancoff's principle, the organism will use as little information as possible without affecting its viability. We have a long way to go, however, in philosophy of science, before we can replace an ensemble of evolving genetic materials by varying values of Shannon's  $H$  and the probability function  $p(H)$ . Have students of Sri Aurobindo and Chardin any concrete suggestions to offer for unravelling the riddles of biological information?

In one respect at least, our studies of Sri Aurobindo's integral evolution *vis-a-vis* the Western theories of evolution are most regrettably incomplete. The Occidental theories were, as often as not, attempts to solve specific problems in philosophy of science. Bergson's *la durée* and Whitehead's epochal becoming, notwithstanding Grünbaum's trenchant criticism, carry the important suggestion that the time of consciousness may lack the continuity of metrical time. Is the time of certain anomalous drug states non-Archimedean? J. M. Burgers suggested, in the *Reviews of Modern Physics*, that Whitehead's successive prehensions may provide the key to the riddle of measurement in quantum mechanics, the Wigner paradox that during measurement the microsystem undergoes an irregular change seemingly not controlled by Schrödinger's equation. Bergson's theory of 'pure memory' was the outcome of a laborious study of aphasias. It has been invoked by Dr S. G. Soal of the London University to account for the 'sandwich effect' in some experiments in precognitive telepathy. Does Bergson's theory explain how Teitelbaum by a single post-hypnotic suggestion could induce a profound psychomotor disturbance paralleling completely Gerstmann's syndrome which involves a destructive lesion of the angular and supra-marginal gyri in the cortex? Does Bergson's theory also hold the key to the alleged Soviet finding of Livanov and his associates that a hypnotically-induced blindness was effective in abolishing the EEG response of the occipital lobe to light and that a hypnotic suggestion about the appearance of a non-existent strong light resulted in a depression of alpha activity in the EEG and this was often more marked than the response resulting



from an actual light-stimulus? Studies of Zen and transcendental meditation have been made in the context of EEG research by Grey Walter, N. N. Das and Gastaut, the Jesuit missionary Lassalle, by Akira Kasamatsu of Tokyo University and J. Kamiya. There is a current 'electronic yoga' claiming to use a bio-feedback for controlling autonomic bodily processes. Have students of Sri Aurobindo and Chardin specific hypotheses to offer in this difficult terrain?

We may censure Samuel Alexander for producing countless rabbits and pigeons out of his empty hat, space-time. I would protest, in passing, against the practice in textbooks of representing his evolutionary scheme by a 'pyramid'. Cosmic evolution for him has no grand climax; it is unending. Even his deity is relative, a higher emergent quality in relation to the lower. An open cylinder, the cross-section of which is space, with the vertical time-axis ranging from values minus infinity to plus infinity seems more suitable than Lloyd Morgan's pyramid. Leaving this pictorial detail aside, does Alexander hint, in the framework of his indissoluble space-time, at a novel solution, not necessarily valid but interesting, of the old riddle of Achilles and the tortoise? If the velocities of Achilles and tortoise are compounded according to Einstein's law of composition of velocities, hyperbolic functions can be used with great advantage. The Newtonian velocity, which is the ratio  $x/t$  of Zeno's two alleged divergent quantities, can be replaced by  $\text{arc tanh } v/c$  which is a single integral concept called 'rapidity' by Lindsay and Margenau. If we use a Lobatchewskian plane, a single co-ordinate suffices for all rapidities. Does Achilles overtake the tortoise in the 'after-cone', *Nachkegel*, of special relativity if not in the 'before-cone', *Vorkegel*? Have the Eastern theories anything to offer here?

Zachner, in his recent study of 'Evolution in Religion', dwells on the remarkable affinities between Sri Aurobindo and Chardin. Both entertained overwhelming beliefs in cosmic consciousness, cosmic evolution and the divinizing of man. Both produced their major works, Zachner says, during and immediately after the first World War. But does this mean that a profound meeting of East and West has come about even in the spiritual domain? Chardin dismisses Eastern mysticism as *perime*. Zachner translates the word by the mild 'dated'. Literally the French means out-of-date, what is no longer valid. Would Chardin have revised his drastic estimate of Eastern mysticism if he had made profound studies of Sri Aurobindo? I personally doubt it. Chardin's Christosphere, superimposed on the lithosphere, the biosphere and the noosphere, assigns a specific responsibility and duty to that new eschatological humanity, the Christian church. Chardin's 'omega-point', when God will be all in all in a



Pauline fashion, is a specific Christian hope rooted in the supposed Divine kenosis in Jesus, the single, unique, unparalleled event in which we have to participate. Chardin remained a Jesuit notwithstanding the doubts entertained by his superiors. His new man, *le Surhomme*, cannot be equated with the new man of Sri Aurobindo or with the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche. Max Scheler's New Humanity would perhaps provide a better analogy.

Sri Aurobindo reinterpreted the unending and recurring cycles of ancient Hindu metahistory as a progressive march in the cosmos, possibly as an opening spiral of some kind. It would be injudicious to suggest a logarithmic or Archimedean spiral. Sri Aurobindo retains, however, in what seems to me a retrograde fashion, the ancient Hindu dogma of rebirth which is essentially a cyclical conception. Dr Madhusudan Reddy calls the doctrine a 'characteristic Hindu belief'. He fears that Christians may not be very receptive to it. I make bold to say that Chardin would have rejected it, lock, stock and barrel. The difference is not to be glossed over, as if it were a minor detail about the destiny of man. I suggest in conclusion that a dulcet optimism about the mingling of East and West may impede painstaking comparative studies in evolutionism. I grant that East and West are looking curiously at each other, hoping to learn something worthwhile. But I must deny that they are united in any Darby-and-Joan fashion. In Henry Woodfull's delightful ballad, we can sooner move a scythian rock than shoot fire into Darby or Joan. They are simply exquisite pictures cut out in alabaster. Neither the East nor the West can rest content with caricatures.

*Sanat Kumar Banerji*

THE GROUP AND THE  
INDIVIDUAL IN THE  
HUMAN EVOLUTION

Evolution, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, proceeds through a double line of advance, a growth of visible forms and an invisible soul-development. In a broad sense, the genus or species, the group-body represents the first, the individual in the group the second aspect of this movement.<sup>1</sup> It follows from this view of the matter that the group must necessarily lag behind the individual in its attained level of consciousness. "For the initiation of the evolutionary emergence from the Inconscient works out by two forces, a secret cosmic consciousness and an individual consciousness manifest on the surface. The secret cosmic consciousness...while it organises...the body and mind of the individual being, it creates also collective powers of consciousness...but it does not provide for them an organised mind and body...it develops for them a group mind, a changing yet continuous group body. It follows that only as the individual becomes more and more conscious can the group-being also become more and more conscious; the growth of the individual is the indispensable means for the inner growth as distinguished from the outer force and expansion of the collective being."<sup>2</sup>

The process of group-formation in humanity, at least until it has reached a high state of development, follows primarily the external and physical methods adopted by Nature in the creation of living forms in the animal creation, "although its inner object is to deliver, to manifest and to bring into secure working a supraphysical, a psychological principle latent behind the operations of the life and the body."<sup>3</sup> The human groups started with the family, the clan, the tribe, the city-state, the small regional state. Each of these lived in the midst of other similar groups. Each of them developed a well-defined body and vital functioning held together by strong bonds of unity which in this early stage were mainly those of geographical



contiguity, a sense of real or fancied blood-kinship, a common economic interest. These gave them a strong sense of difference from the other similar units, which was aided by the constant threat or actuality of war with these others and which in its turn helped in creating within the group a strong sense of psychological unity.

The progress of these group-units has been from the simpler to the more complex organism. For the ultimate aim of evolutionary Nature seems to be, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, to manifest the Divine in all Its supreme complexity based on an inner Oneness of the whole.<sup>4</sup> Classes and castes were among the first subsidiary groupings to emerge in these early formations; the economic guild, the religious organisation, the nearly self-sufficient village community were the other developments that cut across the fiat uniformity of the early state. What led to these variations? The physical necessity of compactness was an important factor. Economic specialisation was another. The psychological element also came into play, for it determined class-types—the priest and the ruler, the toiler and the organiser of toil, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Sudra and Vaishya classes. And religion always played a dominant part. Sri Aurobindo has suggested in this connection that the emergence and domination of a particular class at a given moment of time is inevitable, since “the progress of all the individuals in a society does not proceed *pari passu*, with an equal and equable march. Some advance—others remain stationary—absolutely or relatively,—others fall back...That class will predominate which develops most perfectly the type Nature needs at the time for her progress or, it may be, for her retrogression.”<sup>5</sup>

There is also a deeper reason for this growing complexity of the group-life. Mankind is essentially one and must therefore one day realise its oneness. But the limited ego in which most of us live cannot feel this oneness except within a limited sphere. The effort of Nature has therefore been to help the ego enlarge its limits, and all the subsidiary group-units it forms within the larger group are meant as so many steps towards the enlargement of the ego. And most of these subsidiary units persist in more or less mitigated form when they are absorbed in the bigger units and man becomes readier to identify himself with these bigger groups. Thus, out of the warring city-states and tribal republics and regional kingdoms there emerges the early pre-national form of empire—the empire of Macedon, the Roman empire, the empire of Chandragupta Maurya. But the old divisions still persist, and sometimes emerge again in full vigour when the empire is gone: the recrudescence of the independent city-life in medieval Italy and the constant attempt at regional autonomy on the part of the Indian states whenever the imperial power showed signs of



weakness are typical instances in point. For, as Sri Aurobindo points out, "Nature...seldom destroys entirely the types she has once made or only destroys that for which there is no longer any utility; the rest she keeps in order to serve her need or her passion for variety, richness, multiformity."<sup>6</sup>

The coming of the bigger groups was a necessity. For without them, mankind would never proceed beyond the first steps towards his ultimate goal, the unity of the human race. But at the outset and for a long time, it has no clear conception of the form of this unity, although something in man seems to drive him towards it. Here the individual or a number of exceptional individuals takes the leading role. An Alexander dreams of world empire and breaks the isolation of the Greek city-states and the West Asian tribal or regional kingdoms. A Julius Caesar followed by an Augustus thinks of bringing together the whole of Europe and Egypt and North Africa and the Asian lands bordering on the Mediterranean and they erect the splendid edifice of the Roman empire. A Chandragupta Maurya brings together the ancient republics and kingdoms of India to make India safe from foreign attack.

But these early empires were doomed to decay; for in their premature haste to unite, they destroyed the vitality of the constituent units and themselves fell like a pack of cards against the more vigorous barbarian, the Teuton, the Slav, the Arab and the Hun, when their own strength had been sapped at the centre, through a top-heavy intellectual culture and a snapping of the moral fibre. Hence followed a long period of feudal chaos when Nature seemed to be preparing for a new and better creation, the slow emergence of the modern nation-form. This has been a crucial movement in the evolution of the human group. For, whereas all the earlier formations seem to have been more or less ephemeral, "the nation in modern times", says Sri Aurobindo "is practically indestructible, unless it dies from within."<sup>7</sup> It is the firmly united nation-group—using the term in the political sense—that Nature seems to have been in travail to bring into being. Even where the nation as a political unit had been destroyed for good to all intents and purposes, as for example in Greece, Italy, Poland, or where it has taken more than a millennium to give it a firm political unity, as in India and in all the great countries of the European world, the secret intention of Nature ultimately prevails. The empire group was no doubt revived for a little while in recent times, but none has survived. The reason is that it was an artificial creation lacking a real psychological foundation, whereas the sense of national unity has been a living thing. But whether in the creation of the modern empire or the nation-unit, the individual has had a striking role to play. It was



the king striving to assert his supremacy over the other estates of the realm that gave the nation its first form of unity. It was again the forethought and genius of a Washington, a Cavour or Bismarck—in the Asian countries the builders of the modern nation are household names—who helped form the newer nations through their patriotic fervour, their diplomacy and skill. In either case it was a conscious endeavour, unlike the more or less unconscious process of amalgamation that had brought together the clan, the tribe or the city-state. The modern empire too, like its prototype of early times, had been the creation of a few exceptional men, a Clive and Warren Hastings, a Napoleon III and Delcasse. One might even venture to suggest that it was some exceptional men again who presided over the dissolution of the modern empire, an Attlee or a De Gaulle, a strange irony of fate!

We may pause a little to consider some of the other ways in which Nature has been fulfilling her desire for variation through the various types of organisation within the group-life and the different culture patterns evolved in each. Sri Aurobindo discerns three main types in the first category, each marked by a particular kind of relationship established between the group and the individual. There is, first, the type that "asserts the State idea at the expense of the individual—ancient Sparta, modern Germany; another asserts the supremacy of the State, but seeks at the same time to give as much freedom, power and dignity as is consistent with its control to the individuals who constitute it,—ancient Athens, modern France. But to these two has been added a third type in which the State abdicates as much as possible to the individual...Of this type England has been until recently the great exemplar."<sup>8</sup> We may perhaps add that the Indian tradition has always favoured the type represented in this analysis by England. A consideration of these three types of internal organisation has an important bearing both on the past evolution of mankind as well as on its future.

The struggle between the group and the individual for supremacy has been a dominant factor in the human evolution. It has not only led to the various forms of political theory and organisation—monarchy and aristocracy, democracy, socialism and collectivism—in their various attempts at accommodation which have succeeded only in part so far: the quarrel between liberty and law, unity and uniformity still remains an unresolved quarrel. It has also had very important repercussions on the general evolution of culture patterns. As a general rule, it may be asserted that the predominance of the free individual has on the whole led to an efflorescence of art and literature, thought and science, and has given a strong impetus to the develop-



ment of spirituality among the nations which allowed this predominance. On the other hand, the overriding domination of the group-unit has made for the cultivation of will and character, perfection of law and order, the external efficiency of the group-unit. Thus, to take a few instances from history, "Greece developed to a high degree the intellectual reason and the sense of form and harmonious beauty, Rome founded firmly strength and power and patriotism, law and order, modern Europe has raised to enormous proportions practical reason, science and efficiency and economic capacity, India developed the spiritual mind..., the sense of the eternal and the infinite."<sup>9</sup>

In an apparent view, all this struggle for supremacy and the resultant discord does not give evidence of any ultimate issue. The constant struggle among the different group-units, from the beginning of history until today, for survival and growth, expansion and domination at the expense of the others seems to belie any hope of a future harmony. But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, behind all this struggle and conflict which man shares with the subhuman species, there is something in him which promises a better future. "In subhuman life there is a vital and physical struggle, but no mental conflict. Man is subjected to this mental conflict and is therefore at war not only with others but with himself; and because he is capable of this war with himself, he is also capable of that which is denied to the animal, of an inner evolution, a progression from higher to higher type, a constant self-transcending."<sup>10</sup> The signs of this inner evolution are clearly visible not only in the growth of the individual type from the gross physical man engrossed with the body and its needs, to the more kinetic type, the vital man who is constantly moved to action and progress goaded by his desires and ambitions, until we reach the balanced sattvic man who seeks to live by the reason, and the more highly evolved spiritual man who can at last break the bonds of body, life and mind, can live in an utter freedom of the Self; and it may be noted in passing that the various types of culture-patterns which have been developed in the different group-units are simply an elaboration on a larger more complex way of the progress of the individual towards a more and more evolved humanity. The group-units have also shown constant evidence of moving towards a more and more harmonious relation among themselves: there have been developing "the elements of what could be called international law or fixed habits of intercommunication and interchange which allowed the nations to live together in spite of antagonisms and conflicts."<sup>11</sup> There have also been conscious attempts at cultural interchange, for example, between India and the rest of Asia in ancient times, between Western Asia and Europe in the medieval ages,



and a mutual interpenetration of Asia and the rest of the world in our own day.

These are pointers to the future. The shape of this future is already visible though dimly, in the ideal of human unity which is "more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness,"<sup>12</sup> an ideal that has some day to be realised if mankind is to survive as a race; to eliminate war and evolve a form of world union based on the right of self-determination of all the nations big and small has become an imperative necessity of the future. Within the group-units too, the right of the individual to free progress will have one day to be acknowledged. "Social aggregates which stand in the way of this perfection of the individual", warns Sri Aurobindo, "must find their term and their day of change or destruction under the irresistible impulsion of progressing Nature."<sup>13</sup> What exact forms of the group-life would ensure these desirable ends is more than anyone can foresee. All one can do is to echo the words of the Master: "It is even possible that our original states was an instinctive animal spontaneity of free and fluid association (as is suggested by the ancient tradition of humanity), and that our final ideal state will be an enlightened, intuitive, spontaneity of free and fluid association. Our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods."<sup>14</sup>

## REFERENCES

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4. *The Life Divine*, p. 612.
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K. B. Ramakrishna Rao

SRI AUROBINDO  
AND THE CONCEPT OF  
EVOLUTION—  
THE ABSOLUTE POINT  
OF VIEW

In the context of Sri Aurobindo there are two levels from which 'evolution' can be spoken of: 1. The level of the finite being—what Sri Aurobindo calls the 'forms' and 'modes' of the Absolute, and 2. The level of the Infinite Self—the Absolute Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss.

'Evolution' in the technical sense of an 'integral progress' of beings through change, of the evolution of the lower into the higher, where the lower is not rejected but integrated into the higher, where the higher is the consummation of the lower, as 'life' of 'matter' and 'mind' of life' is not only acceptable as an explanation of the dialectics of reality, but is highly satisfactory when compared with all other evolutionary hypotheses. With this aspect of 'evolution' we are not concerned.

But can we speak of 'evolution' at the level of the Infinite or the Absolute in any way?

Obviously, the situation is difficult even conceptually. An Absolute or Infinite that 'evolves' is no 'absolute' or 'infinite.' At least that is what Indian philosophical tradition makes us believe. The specific descriptions of the Infinite as '*akṣhara*', '*aja*', '*nitya*', '*amṛta*', '*acyuta*' etc., have conveyed to us a sense that the being of the infinite is such that there is nothing required for it to fulfil, to desire, to accomplish. The Highest Reality is '*satyaṁ jñānaṁ anantaṁ Brahma*' or '*satyaṁ jñānaṁ ānandaṁ Brahma*'. It is '*ātma-kāma*', '*āpta-kāma*' and '*akāma*'. And therefore there cannot be any 'growth' or 'evolution' to it. It is the symbol for all Self-perfection, nay, it is the Being of Self-perfection. It is Fullness itself, '*pūrṇam*.'



It is a Unity of Existence, indivisible and eternal. Sri Aurobindo in the tradition of the Vedic seers accepts these descriptions, but invests Infinite with a dynamism rarely accentuated by tradition. However, even in tradition, dynamism is accepted but at the level of 'conditional existence' of the Infinite. But what makes Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is this investment of dynamism with the Infinite itself. It is this association which brings the Infinite to the context of 'evolution'. The Infinite or the Absolute is not simply '*sat-cit-ānanda*' but is '*sat-citśakti* and *ānanda*'. *Cit-Śakti* is 'Consciousness-Force', as Sri Aurobindo describes. With this vision of the Absolute, he gives us the lead to think of it as a being which is not simply 'status' but also as 'dynamis'. As such both these are existential to the Reality, viz., *Saccidānanda*.

This should be the true nature of Reality acceptable but for logical difficulties which are seen in the development of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. What are these?

Let us examine the concept of the Infinite as being existentially both 'status' and 'dynamis' and find out if ever it has any relationship with the idea of 'evolution' in the way it is usually understood. For Sri Aurobindo an Infinite Being, which has no 'force' to manifest is no Infinite. At its 'absolute' condition when no manifestation is, it should not be taken that the Infinite has no 'force' or 'power' in it. Only it is latent, it is in 'rest'; Sri Aurobindo says: 'Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest it exists nonetheless and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered.' This is the concept: 'Being is the Becoming' or as Sri Aurobindo puts it emphatically 'Becoming is the only Being.'<sup>2</sup>

Let us examine the notions of 'dynamis' in its relation to the Infinite Being, and 'becoming' in relation to 'evolution' as applied to the Infinite for a fair understanding of Sri Aurobindo's position.

Normally, with reference to the Infinite the differences between a 'dynamis at rest' and a 'dynamis in motion' should not be of any consequence. For neither of these 'poises' can affect the 'dimension' or the 'extent' that is 'Infinite'. On the other hand, with the operation of the dynamis as 'motion' if there is an alteration in 'extension' the 'original' condition could not have been 'Infinite', nor any 'future' condition would be 'infinite' as an Infinite that alters is no 'infinite'. But as conceived by Sri Aurobindo a 'dynamis at rest' is not the same thing as the 'dynamis in motion'. And with



the 'dynamis in motion' naturally the Infinite is altered. It becomes 'dynamic' in the real sense. If we are to understand the vision of Sri Aurobindo properly, this alteration does not cause the Infinity to suffer. For him an Infinite is Infinite whether it rests or acts. The alteration is seen only in its creativity, in its production of forms and modes. The Infinite that is Being becomes the Infinity that is Becoming.

Now, with regard to the 'becoming'. Though not all 'becoming' is 'evolution', certainly all 'evolution' is 'becoming'. When applied to the Infinite, how should this be understood? Should we say: The Infinite Being 'becomes', but does not 'evolve'? If the answer is 'yes,' it has obviously no charm for Sri Aurobindo. For him 'becoming' is not spoken of the Infinite only to invest dynamism with it. It is already there. All 'becoming', then, is actualisation of the potentialities at rest. And therefore, all 'becoming' is 'evolution'.

Here is a concept which is unique: The Infinite is Infinite even with 'alterations', and Infinite is Infinite even while it 'evolves'. It is a dynamic Infinite, dynamic in potential, and Infinite in actualisation. It is thus Sri Aurobindo guides us to discover a basis or a clue for a natural transition from the Timeless Eternity to Eternal Time. It is thus *Saccidānanda* is seen as the Super Mind, the Creator of 'forms' and 'modes'.

From the conventional or traditional understanding of what constitutes the Infinite, even though there is a departure here, there should not be any opposition to welcome the notion, for here on Reality is bestowed the much missing 'Force'. But the difficulty is perceived only if what passes for 'creation' or 'forms' and 'modes' is *involved in the evolution of the Infinite*. For, to say that the 'creation' 'forms' and 'modes' evolve, is different from saying that the *Infinite* 'evolves'. We cannot possibly ignore the implications of the position of Sri Aurobindo involving the Absolute in the 'evolution of the forms and the modes' and representing it as 'discovering Itself'.

Except that the Infinite Reality is regarded as evolving, Sri Aurobindo credits it with all other characteristics which tradition would approve, namely: immutability, eternality, indefinability, indivisibility, freedom, absoluteness. He calls it Self, Brahman, Perfection in itself needing nothing.<sup>8</sup> In short it is Self-existent Perfect, Fullness of Being. Against the background of this acceptance, may be it is hard to follow the implications of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution.



Any idea of 'evolution', even in its most inferior or crude connotation, should be opposed to the idea of Self-perfection or Fullness of Being. If so, how can the Absolute or the Infinite be called 'evolving'? Can there be an impulse natural or necessary?

1. Is it that the Self-existent Perfect is really not that Perfect or Full? Is it that it is in need of some 'realisation', even as Sri Aurobindo calls evolution or becoming is a kind of 'variable realisation of the possibilities already inherent' in being?<sup>4</sup>

2. Is the aspect of 'dynamis in motion' demanded to move in a 'natural' or a 'necessary' act of Self-fulfilment?

At the first instance we meet with an answer referring to a 'natural' poise of becoming. The Absolute is Free, free to move or remain eternally still. But when it chooses to move and, creates forms and modes, 'it can only be for one reason, for delight'.<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo places a great emphasis on this aspect of natural delight of Self-existence. Ānanda is 'delight of existence'. In its exuberance of Self-perfection, it is Śiva, dancing. It is the 'play' or 'Līlā', and so out of sheer Delight of Existence creation of forms and modes takes place.

This is an understandable position, if it is not stretched farther. That is, when an existential or real status is bestowed to forms and modes that emerge, and that are built up integrally with the fulfilment of the being of the Self-perfect, problems arise. In one of the most important passages of *The Life Divine* we read: 'If it then be asked why the One Existence should take delight in such a movement, the answer lies in the fact that all possibilities are inherent in its infinity and that the delight of existence...lies precisely in the variable realisation of its possibilities. ...Infinite being loses itself in the appearance of non-being and emerges in the appearance of a finite Soul; infinite consciousness loses itself in the appearance of a vast indeterminate inconscience and emerges in the appearance of a limited superficial consciousness; infinite self-sustaining Force loses itself in the appearance of a chaos of atoms and emerges in the appearance of the insecure balance of a world; infinite Delight loses itself in the appearance of an insensible Matter and emerges in the appearance of a discordant rhythm of varied pain, pleasure and neutral feeling, love, hatred and indifference; infinite unity loses itself in the appearance of a chaos of multiplicity and emerges in the discord of forces and beings which seek to discover unity by possessing, dissolving and devouring



each other. In this creation the *real Saccidānanda* has to emerge.\* For Sri Aurobindo these 'emergents' of the 'play' of delight are real, even as the 'play' is real, and the 'Player' is real.

How should these 'emergents'—the finite Soul, the indeterminate inconscient Matter etc.—be placed on the bosom of the Infinite? Being themselves real, are they developments 'within' or 'without' either spatially or temporally or in both? The entire picture being the process of 'self-discovery', and if the 'emergents' are 'extensions without', the 'evolving' Infinite must integrate them that in such an integration rests its fullness of being, a process which continues ad infinitum. On existential reasons it follows that, prior to the emergence of these forms and modes and their integration into the being, the Infinite could not have been that 'Fullness' or 'Perfection'. If so, the 'Natural' requirement for the Delight of Existence or Dance of Śiva was lacking, and the 'dance' would not take place.

As an alternative, if it is answered that the 'emergents' are only developments 'within', or are the potentialities or possibilities already inherent in the being and get actualised or fulfilled, it is still a picture of imperfection. In the case of a being of the stature of *Saccidānanda* something potentially existing but unrealised would be denying it its perfection.

In both the cases the needed 'fullness' for a 'self-delight' being lacking, perhaps we are invited to a re-thinking to get out of the difficulty. We are told, being 'free', the Absolute exercises a 'self-limitation'. This is 'Force in concentration' and is as true as 'Force in diffusion'. By the former it 'limits' itself, and 'plunges into inconscience' leading to the emergence of matter, life, etc.

This seems to be altogether a new answer taking us away from the original 'joy of existence' to a 'freedom of self-limitation'.

On the track of the new answer, supposing we ask 'why this self-limiting', the 'freedom' turns out to be a necessity': 'If there were no need of self-finding but only an eternal enjoyment of this play of *Saccidānanda*...then evolution and rebirth need not have come into operation.' The meaning of this is surprising—more than the fullness of being expressing itself in the eternal enjoyment of the play of *Saccidānanda*, there is a need or necessity for self-discovery. A being which has not discovered itself is not Infinite, not full, and so cannot have the delight of self-existence! How is this 'discovery' made? "If Brahman has entered into forms and represented Its being in material



substance, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness... man's importance in the world is that he gives to it (Brahman) that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible.'<sup>8</sup>

To summarise the position; the 'origination' of forms is for the evolution of the Infinite'. It 'originates' for 'evolving'! Whether the forms and modes that emerge come out of the 'play' of the Self-existent Fullness or out of a 'needless-need' for the 'self-discovery' of the Absolute, here is a conception of the Absolute which depends for its growth and development on the relative and the phenomenal, and expects a 'transfiguration' and the 'possibility' of a 'perfect self-discovery'. Is this a Fullness of being which requires no growth, or a growing finite requiring a fullness? Apart from its philosophical unsatisfactoriness, spiritually too this seems to be uninteresting.

Being opposed to the notion of illusory creation, even if the creative impulse is 'līlā' or 'play', and being opposed to the notion of the Absolute which is in no need to act, Sri Aurobindo launches on a difficult path of linking the Timeless Eternity with Eternal Time, the Transcendent with the phenomenal, the Fullness Immutable with the finite seeking fulfilment. May be, we are not to understand him literally, when he declares: 'Himself the play, Himself the player, and Himself the playground.'<sup>9</sup> 'Necessarily, when we speak of things passing into that from which they have come, we are using a language of only a temporal consciousness and must guard ourselves against its illusions'.<sup>10</sup> The statement is made with reference to *Saccidānanda* in its primal being, and perhaps it may be nearer to his intuitions of the concept of the Infinite, if we go by his warning. What flows out of Fullness of Being, and what emerges out of the play of self-delight — the movements of descent and ascent or involution and evolution — are to be treated more as metaphors than as real. Sri Aurobindo warns us even to treat 'delight' in delight of existence in terms relative to human consciousness. 'When we speak of universal delight of existence we mean something different from, more essential and wider than the ordinary emotional and sensational pleasure of the individual human creature.' It is a delight which is 'objectless'. It is a warning worth taking. If 'sat' and 'cit' are impersonal at the basis, how can 'ānanda' be other-wise?

The implications are worth noting: the 'movement in' and the 'movement out' are not literal, the 'enjoyment' not personal. An impersonal exercise of the 'Force' (*Śakti*) can be spoken at that level



as 'Fullness' and 'peace' only (*anantam* and *śāntam*) but not as 'delight' in the ordinary sense, for the impersonal being has no 'delight', no 'feeling' of delight. Without drawing these implications we find it hard to consistently stand by Sri Aurobindo, and by the direct and more expressive expositions of Sri Aurobindo regarding an Infinite Being that 'becomes' but which never ceases to be 'Infinite'.

Perhaps, if the intuitions of what constitutes Freedom that is the Infinite or the Absolute are properly had, or to say it even as Sri Aurobindo says, if the 'logic of the Infinite' is grasped in its true perspective, the whole of existence which changes can be explained and value and dignity of both the matter and the individual selves could be maintained without involving or committing the Absolute to a 'real' 'temporal' 'phenomenal' rounds. The most logical implication of the Upaniṣadic statement, 'sarvam khalvidam brahma' is the Freedom of the Absolute to be everything in its fullness. It speaks of an Absolute Realism or Realism of the Absolute, where to say 'matter is *also* Brahman' (as Sri Aurobindo does) may not be correct as to say, 'matter is Brahman.' As the Absolute has no compromises in being, neither matter comes out of it, nor matter is *matter*. The non-dualism of the Absolute is so complete that there is neither 'within' nor 'without', and everything that *is*, *is* Brahman, so that the Vedic seer saw nothing besides Brahman.

The intuitions of the Vedic seer should help us in estimating Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Matter does not become real, because it is said to come from 'real Brahman', for the 'real' does not *produce*. In its *being*, which constitutes its Infinity, all being is fulfilled, and no second is produced either in delight or for necessity. Under the illuminations of this most basic truth, the seer sees matter not as *matter*, but as Brahman. The phenomenon is not projected, it simply is not there. The insight of Māyā-vāda is not that 'māyā is', but that 'māyā is not'. All duality is existentially illogical when everything is Brahman. It has only a practical value. If any transcendental value and dignity for matter and individuals is intended to be bestowed, it could better be done by treating them not as 'matter' and 'individuals' but as Brahman, neither by the theory of their 'real origination' or 'projection', neither by their 'descent' nor 'ascent'. They are Brahman by identity. Is it accidental that we find Sri Aurobindo speaking: 'All finites are in their spiritual essence the Infinite and, if we look deep enough into them, manifest to intuition, the Identical and Infinite'?<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate if reason overpowers our deepest intuitions!



The finite is identical with the Infinite, nay, is the Infinite ! This is the supreme surrender of all theories of evolution, creation, projection and transformation. It is the vindication of the Fullness of Being, the 'logic of the Infinite' (as Sri Aurobindo calls, but not as Sri Aurobindo means.) How near and how true we are to the intuitions of the great Gauḍapāda who said in such memorable terms :

*"Na nirodho nacotpattiḥ, na baddho na ca sādhaḥaḥ  
Na mumukṣunra vai mukta, ityeṣā paramārthatā"*

From the point of view of Spiritual realisation too, bestowing concreteness to forms and modes of *Saccidānanda* is not the end. If integral unity is the cue for, and essence of, Reality, it is the whole of being which is our concern, but not the whole with parts intact. If at the back of evolution is involution of the Super Mind, it is an attempt to 'gather itself up' into its own core, and integration is not complete if distincts still prevail and maintain themselves. The distincts or parts transcend themselves to be the whole, and the whole is not there as the 'whole' in any term of its parts. It is the discovery of the Self which is the core of all existence—within whose being potentialities and actualities are not distinct. There are no potentialities to be actualised, and no actualities once potential. To mistake the dimensions of the Self in terms of potentiality, actuality, concrete reals in space and time, development in space and time, is not to grasp the being of the Infinite in its Fullness and Freedom, but to be satisfied with an abstraction from reality. It is a mistake between the real Infinite and a process that is infinite.

The issues we have noted are only a few, which naturally arise out of a fundamental commitment to the postulate of *Saccidānanda* conceived as the Fullness of Being to explain 'evolution', as we find in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Had anything less than *Saccidānanda* formed the postulate, as we find it in various shades in the philosophies of Western thinkers who speak of evolution, the matter is understandable. They do not run the risk of postulating a primordial fullness of being, in their philosophies. As an alternative we have the Indian spiritual and philosophical tradition of the classical systems of Vedānta which, without mixing issues, treat evolution on a clear distinction of the noumenal and the phenomenal, substance and attribute, independent and dependent, and yet think of 'integration' on a logical basis.

'Evolution is purely a pheomenal concept, well suited empirically to understand the growth and progress of the finite, but not of the

Infinite. 'Involution' and 'evolution', 'descent' and 'ascent', when applied to the Transcendent and the Infinite can only be metaphors but not existential poises. They are not true. In the realm of the Absolute Being, all 'movements' and 'directions' are fictions.

## REFERENCES

1. *The Life Divine*, p. 76.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 103. The underlining is mine.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 674.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 416.



K. Seshadri

## ASPIRATION AND THE ASCENDING UNITY

Aspiration is the individual or personal manifestation of the cosmic impulse of evolution in a superior, sublime dimension. The impulse is creative, described as "nisus of evolution". Evolution is not mere change ; neither is it, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, mere progress or development within the limits of a particular species. To quote Professor Haridas Chaudhari, "It is the increasing self-fulfilment of the cosmic creative urge in and through different types of self and different kinds of species." There is a driving power behind the whole process, a "super-conscious energy of being", which is at once the source of its dynamism and the basis of its orderliness, providing for a perennial manifestation of the infinite richness of Being and reflecting power as well as grace at their highest. "The upward tending force from below" acquires fuller and clearer expression through the ascending levels of manifestation, revealing fresh qualities, powers and values at each, and articulates itself as human aspiration when the emergent consciousness receives intimations of the hidden excellences of an infinite, immortal order. It is itself the response to an "upward drawing force from above". Mystics identify it as grace, and attribute their heaven-ward aspiration to its descent and inflow. Nammālvār's Tiruvoymoli sums up the power and play of Divine Grace, and shows how it not only kindled his aspiration for the Supreme but nurtured the Ālvār's transcendental love through the stages of *para-bhakti*, *para-jñāna* and *parama-bhakti*, moulding and shaping it, so as to secure for him the final fulfilment of his highest aspiration. Sri Aurobindo sings in his *Sāvitrī* :

A Seer within who knows the ordered plan  
Concealed behind our momentary steps,  
Inspires our ascent to view-less heights.

Aspiration, it is said, takes its birth in a divine discontent. It seeks to transmute the disharmony of the discontent into the joy of growing out of it. Self-transcendence is a necessary feature of evolution. Aspiration expresses it. Though Matter is a "form of veiled Life" and Life a "form of veiled consciousness", it is in Man that the urge to "grow into a higher pattern by exceeding the limits of the lower" becomes fully awake and self-conscious, revealing the individual as a self-aware participant in a cosmic process, aspiring "to exceed himself" with the power of his will and the light of his vision. "Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own", says Sri Aurobindo in the *Life Divine*, "the evolutionary oestrus is there in his parts of life and mind, the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him." "In him", Sri Aurobindo proceeds, "the substitution of a conscious for a sub-conscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour immanent is a sure sign of Nature's will for a higher way to fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status "

Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, "is progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her", as well as "the overt realisation of that which she secretly is." Manifestation of the Divine in man appears to be "the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth." This reflects the *Life Divine* to which he eagerly looks forward. The Divine is implicit in Man, and awaits unfoldment in all its grandeur and glory. "What I aspired to be and *was not*" is a fragment of Browning's poetry to which I would suggest an Aurobindonian amendment, — "What I aspired to be and *was "in the seed of grandeur"*. The promise of the seed is the antidote to the discontent and disharmony in the mind and heart of man. It is the promise of the temporal to emerge in the Eternal, the *Satcidānanda*. The Upaniṣads and all the systems of Vedānta confirm the promise. The experiences of the mystics all over the world reinforce it. Science, too, vouches for its fulfilment. Sri Aurobindo wrote in one of his poems :

" The electron on which forms and worlds are built  
Leaped into being, a particle of God.  
A spark from the eternal energy spilt,  
It is the Infinite's blind minute abode."

Again, in another poem :

" Earth was a cradle for the arriving God  
And Man but a half-dark, half-luminous sign  
Of the transition of the veiled Divine



From Matter's sleep and the tormented load  
Of ignorant life and death to the Spirit's light."

In the poem on "The Unseen Infinite" Sri Aurobindo wrote :

"In the inconscient dreadful dumb Abyss  
Are heard the heart-beats of the Infinite."

Ascent is intrinsic to aspiration. The very idea of aspiration carries with it the conception of heights to be scaled. The true aspirant is not a mere dreamer. The flight of consciousness to the supra-mental regions and beyond, envisaged in a genuine aspiration, is almost invariably followed by the experience of an actual ascent through levels of consciousness to the super-mind. The dynamic force of a sincere, whole-hearted up-soaring seeks an immediate fulfilment in direct experience. The aspiration and the ascent find a poetic recordation, briefly in "Thought the paraclete" and more elaborately with the whole course of the graded movement marked out in fuller detail in *Savitri*, which presents its metaphysical meaning as a magnificent epic poem attuned to a popular traditional theme.

"A progressive evolution of the visible and invisible instruments of the spirit is the whole law of the earth nature", says Sri Aurobindo. Spirit having concealed itself in Matter through an antecedent involution, "Matter is not an absolute inconscience but an obscured consciousness limited by its own movement." Matter provides a medium for the moulding and perfection of the instruments of the spirit, and that would in a way sum up the significance of earthly life. It is because of our inability to sense consciousness beyond a certain limited range that Matter appears inconscient and inanimate. The truth is that at the heart of every cell and particle of matter "lives hidden and works unknown all the omniscience of the Eternal and all the omnipotence of the Infinite."

Matter is not the only force or substance. Life and Mind and even what is beyond Mind are also forces that are substances, according to Sri Aurobindo. But they are forces and substances of a different kind and degree. It is significant that Sri Aurobindo identifies forces as substances and equates them in essence. This is an ontological feature, which accords well with his dynamic conception of reality. Dynamism is but one side of the coin, the other being integration. Matter is not a contradiction of spirit in any sense. If spirit is "the original force-substance", Matter too is nothing but "a power and degree of the Spirit". It is not only a stupendous but contiguous "hierarchy of the grades of consciousness", that he sees between "the darkest Matter" and "the most luminous spirit". Matter, life, mind,



super-mind or gnosis and transcending these "the quadruple power" of the Supreme as "Being-Consciousness-Force-Bliss",—these mark the evolutionary levels between Inconscience and Super-conscience. As stages or grades in a process, they reveal the *dynamism* of Reality. As progressive manifestation of a principle of unity, the whole gamut of evolution is an expression of an increasingly comprehensive *integration*.

Sri Aurobindo's vision was integral. He saw Being as integral, and Becoming as integral to Being, and developed a system of integral yoga, which signified the ascent of the *whole* man to the summit of the Divine and his becoming *one* with the Divine. He equated the highest knowledge with *Becoming*, and declared that to *Know* was to *become*. It is the man, whose mind and will are unlit by the spark of knowledge, that remains a stranger to becoming. To become one with God is to participate in infinite consciousness and share its force and will as well. As he explains in his exposition of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, *viñāna* is "the very working of the *Infinite*". It is Divine knowledge one with Divine will and hence it reflects the spontaneous delight of self-fulfilment. It is the sheer delight of "undeliberate sport". The deeper significance of knowledge lies in its dynamism, its power to change, to *become*. It is by *gnosis* that we change our human nature into divine. Nothing in the world is abandoned, nothing renounced in such a philosophy of Becoming. It is not the world that is to be renounced, teaches Sri Aurobindo in the context of the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*. It is *desire* as the principle of one's action that may be renounced, not the world. When desire is renounced, the ego is eliminated. It is the lower that is renounced, so that the higher may take its place. When the petty satisfactions of the desire-filled ego yield place to *Ānanda* as the ruling principle of one's life, renunciation is seen reconciled with enjoyment. This is the significance of "Tena tyaktena Bhunjithā".

Matter is "the outermost sheath and crating", Sri Aurobindo points out, echoing the teaching of the *Upaniṣad*. When, therefore, the ascent to the summit of aspiration is accomplished, the *summit* will be seen reflected in the *centre* of one's own being. When the whole hierarchy of the grades of consciousness is scaled, the bliss of the achieved state is experienced at the heart of being as *Sat-cid-ānanda*. The delight of existence is, however, manifest in the very scaling of the grades and provides a fore-taste, as it were, of the supreme bliss at every grade. There is a hidden core of such delight even in efforts that apparently miss the mark, even in disappointments and in the pain of unsatisfied desires. The sense of disappointment, the lack of satisfaction would persist so long as our desires remain directed towards objects, and the objects appear *external* lending little signi-



fiance to the reality of ascent in evolution, cosmic and personal. While the urge for the ascent is in the dynamism of the aspiration, it is increasing integration, deepening and widening comprehension of the process as a whole, that secures the delight of it.

The successive dominance of Matter, Life and Mind is established, it has been said, not by abandoning or renouncing the antecedent principle but by transforming it. The transformation at each stage is rendered possible through the higher level of refinement and perfection of the evolving instruments of the spirit attained successively from level to level. The emergence of each subsequent principle is an integral process, in which the earlier is shaped so as to serve as a fit instrument or vehicle for a fuller revelation and superior manifestation of the later. This, according to Sri Aurobindo, contains the secret of human destiny, which is described as "the fulfilment of God in Man". "God found in Nature, Nature fulfilled in God"—(Savitri). "An evolution in the Inconscience is the beginning, an evolution in the Ignorance is the middle, but the end is the liberation of the spirit into its true consciousness", is Sri Aurobindo's another way of putting it. Evolution, being continuous, reflects at any given moment "a past with its fundamental results still in evidence", a present in which the results are in the process of becoming as they get refashioned, and a future with its potentialities of "unevolved powers and forms of being".

The isolations and conflicts, the disharmonies and mal-adjustments of separative existence, which are sources of suffering and pain get resolved or reconciled through a progressive realisation of unity in and through the emergence. Obeying an inherent law of unity in difference, Life starts with an accent on rigid divisions, and ascends through material, vital and mental expressions. It is the persistent call for the unity that makes for progressive ascent. It is a movement towards an ever-deepening harmony, which seeks ultimately to comprehend the whole of Being. Difference provides urge for the ascent, feeding its dynamism. Unity signifies the promise of consummation, securing its integration.

"In a deep oneness of all things that are,  
The Universe of the Unknown arose."

The soul in man is not condemned to any kind of isolation as a separate, spiritual being, unconnected with the rest of the terrestrial family, but is integral to it, having "grown out of it by a taking up of it all and an exceeding of its sense by a new power and meaning of the Spirit", reiterates Sri Aurobindo. Separative pride, so much evident

in the human species, has neither physical warrant nor spiritual justification.

The "physical history" of man has a simultaneous, companion-growth in his "inner history". Innumerable are the lives that he has lived in the past. "The Tantra assigns", says Aurobindo, "eighty millions of plant and animal lives as the sum of the preparation for a human birth." While the number may not be regarded as precise, the suggestion of truth that it conveys is overwhelming in its claim. Man does epitomise in his being both the animal and "the obscurer sub-animal being".

Man is not just a superior animal with a greater range of physical mind but obviously a soul or spirit rising upto a consciousness, "not limited by its physical means and formulas". Spirit, says Sri Aurobindo, is both the *alpha* and the *omega* and the whole secret of existence from the beginning. Here is Sri Aurobindo's own summing up of Evolution as progressive self-revelation in one of his early poems :

*The Infinitesimal Infinite*

Out of a still Immensity all came !  
These million universes were to it  
The poor light-bubbles of a trivial game,  
A fragile glimmer in the Infinite.

It could not find its soul in all that Vast,  
It drew itself into a little speck  
Infinitesimal, ignobly cast,  
Out of earth's mud and slime strangely awake,

A tiny plasm on a little globe  
In the Small system of a dwarf-like Sun,  
A little life wearing the flesh for robe,  
A little mind winged through wide space to run !

It lived, it knew, it saw its self-sublime,  
Deathless, out-measuring space, out lasting Time.

The picture of the ascending unity is that of a Spirit involved in material existence. scaling several gradations through life to organised mind and beyond mind to the evolution of its own complete self-conscience. If an "obscure, omnipresent life in Matter" activises a "secret, sleeping mind, and discovers in that sleep of mind "an involved, all-knowing Spirit", it is the ascent towards a fundamental



unity in spirit, which is the purpose of the whole process. The unity, as at present glimpsed in and by the evolving powers of the human mind is more precisely *mystical* than metaphysical. It is unity as intuited and aspired for and waiting to be realised in the deepening consciousness of the evolving individual. The consequences of this recognition as the purport of evolution are far-reaching both for the metaphysician and for the Yogin absorbed in his *sādhana*. On the eschatological side, to mention but one direction of the flow of the consequences, the concept of the ascending unity carries with it a concomitant of "an ascending rebirth". The ascending rebirth contains the promise of "a greater flowering of the spirit in the human life, of which we have as yet only the first intimations". It is the promise of "a progress to some great act and high display of the Divinity". "The imperfection of Man", in Sri Aurobindo's own words, "is not the last word of Nature, but his perfection too is not the last peak of the spirit."

Kireet Joshi

CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION  
AND THE DESTINY  
OF MAN

Man, it has been asserted, is in search of himself. He has arrived at a critical point of his development where nothing short of a radical transformation of himself is demanded. Man has a destiny beyond himself. These and similar affirmations are so pertinent to the way in which we live that they are bound to stir our deepest layers of thought and emotion. For if these affirmations are justified, we are immediately called to prepare ourselves to pursue the destiny which they indicate or imply.

We must therefore critically examine, even though briefly, these affirmations and arrive at a conclusion to which only an impartial and sincere search for the Truth might lead us. It may at once be observed that any suggestion of a goal or a destiny implies a view that nature is an intelligent force and that the evolutionary movement is teleological.

As against both these implications, we have the materialist's argument, and as against the latter one, a serious metaphysical objection can be raised. Materialism has recently lost the sharpness of its edge; but, in any case, the presence of consciousness in man constitutes an untenable paradox of an unconscious principle having intelligence in its bosom or giving rise to intelligence as a product of its complex functioning. Moreover, as we begin to scrutinise the mass of phenomena which are supraphysical, materialism either collapses or else it can be maintained only by explaining away these phenomena as illusions. But it must be pointed out that they can be declared as illusions not by any independent consideration or argument, but solely by assuming what needs to be proved, viz., that matter is the sole reality. Materialism thus can be maintained only if one does not mind committing the fallacy of *petitio principii*.



But if consciousness is granted with all its idealist and absolutist implications, even a more serious objection against teleological evolution arises. For if there is an Absolute which is perfect within itself, it cannot have any need to create, or even if it creates, it cannot have any particular goal to achieve or realise in creation. It must be admitted that basically this argument is perfectly sound and therefore acceptable. It cannot be affirmed that the Absolute *must* create. But, then, it does not follow either that it *cannot* create. The mark of the Absolute is not an incapacity, but supremacy and independence of its power. It can therefore justifiably be reasoned that there is nothing to prevent the Absolute from creating. The absolutist view implies, not that the Absolute *cannot* create, but that it *need not* create. And once we have attained this precision, it is quite easy to see that while the Absolute is not obliged to create, it is not obliged either to refrain from creation. Similarly, while it is quite logical to suppose that the creation need not have any goal, it is equally, or perhaps more, logical to suppose that it need not be a mere drama without a denouement. In fact, once one grants intelligence as the prime principle of evolution, teleology seems quite convincing.

Indeed, it must be stressed that teleology can be reconciled with the Absolute only if we do not take the end or goal as something extraneous to the Absolute. The goal, to be consistent with the Absolute, must be something already present or realised in the Absolute in its essence or in its totality. It is only if we consider our world movement as only a part of the totality of the Absolute, and the realisation of the goal as a play of a gradual manifestation of the perfection in the world, that we can sensibly speak of the Absolute as having a goal or end to be achieved.

There can, then, be a divine teleology and it is not irrational to accept it. This is the conclusion at which we arrive in the domain of the pure reason. But even empirically we are forced to arrive at the same conclusion. If we examine the facts, we find in the world, as modern science asserts, an evolutionary principle. It is true that the significance of this evolution is still not fully understood, but it could very well be a gradual manifestation of the Absolute divine consciousness on the earth. It is true that science itself has only hazarded evolution as an explanation of the facts it has observed; but even though there are some difficulties with regard to such phenomena as mutation, etc., the facts in favour of evolution are so striking that it is impossible to revert to the theory of the special creation of the species. Besides, the phenomenon of mutation and the difficulty of missing links could be quite adequately explained if we try to understand evolution from within rather than from without. Evolution conceived



as merely a development of more and more complex forms with the superficial machinery of natural selection and the survival of the fittest seems to be only its external account, and is unable to explain why, for instance, there was the need to evolve life-forms, when their predecessors such as mountains, etc. had evidently a greater survival value. Surely there is something much more behind the external development of forms. If, indeed, we suppose a Supreme Consciousness working behind the developing forms, then the sudden mutation could be easily explained. For consciousness does not proceed piecemeal. Its movement is global and "holistic"; in a given form which is too thick, it may find the vehicle too difficult to penetrate, but a mere crack in that form would manifest something radically different. The so-called missing links then would never have existed at all. At certain period of stress there would be radical points of the cracking of the outer forms so as to permit a radical outflow of consciousness, and thus the difference from the predecessor would be so great that we may reckon the phenomenon as a mutation.

In fact, when we come to consider man, we find that the difference between a barbarian and, say, a scientist is not fundamentally in the physical form, but in the consciousness. And even if there might be a farther evolution of the physical form, it could be legitimately supposed that it will succeed rather than precede a change of consciousness. In fact it is noteworthy that, of all the species, man is distinguished by the consciousness of his imperfections and the will for self-transcendence. It is also noteworthy that his evolution depends, apparently at least, on his conscious choice. It is as if nature, having created a conscious instrument, is revealing through it her inner method and evolve farther only by a conscious choice of her instrument.

Man then marks a stage where evolution becomes conscious of itself, justifying the expression "conscious evolution." And we can justifiably speak of man as having a destiny beyond himself. But we may now ask if man has really arrived at a critical point of his development where he must surpass himself. To answer this question we really need to examine what exactly criticality means in the evolutionary process, and to ascertain if man has reached the point of criticality.

It has indeed been argued that man has hardly made any progress; or if he has, he has in a circle. History shows that the modern man has not surpassed the ancients in any field of activity except in the building up of a huge collective organisation which, after all, may be viewed as simply monstrous, and certainly not as a mark



of real progress. Yet we cannot truly say that man has made no progress, even though we must grant that the modern man has not surpassed the loftiness of the ancients, for once a certain height is reached by some, the evolutionary principle seems to seek its generalization on a larger scale, and there follows a period of a downward movement to lift up the lower into the higher. The downward movement is therefore not a fall or a degradation, but a mark of spiral progress.

Moreover, it is needless to labour the point that man has become more complex and subtle and that this fact is reflected in the complex and subtle organisation of his collective life. And however monstrous it might seem, its hugeness forces man to look within himself to break his limitations. Complexity and subtlety, when they reach their high peak, constitute the point of criticality, and call for a new ascent, a new departure.

Man stands to-day, it will then seem, at such a point of criticality where a great evolutionary choice confronts him. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being: but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. At the same time Science has put at



his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal. The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. Man has harmonised life in the past by organised ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them. Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life."

This, then, is in the store for man; in this direction lies his destiny. Indeed the manhood of man is to transcend and exceed himself and to grow into the Superman, a being having a complete possession of a supreme and comprehensive knowledge and power.



K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

THE EVOLUTIONARY  
DIALECTIC IN SRI AURO-  
BINDO'S DRAMAS

In the inspired peroration of the address for the defence in the Alipur Bomb Case, C. R. Das described Sri Aurobindo as "the poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity". And Das added that Sri Aurobindo was standing trial, not simply before a British Indian court of justice, but rather before the High Court of History. The words electrically charged the moment with apocalyptic drama, and jury, judge and all felt suddenly lifted up to a timeless plane. The verdict of "Not Guilty" was duly returned by the Jury, and the Judge acquitted Sri Aurobindo and ordered his release. Sri Aurobindo thus came out of jail in May 1909, a free man but also a changed man. It had ever been so with him. A crisis, a conflict, a dialectic had always meant a change, a lurch forward, and a call to transformation. The first prosecution in 1907 had catapulted him to national eminence. The Surat explosive split had been promptly followed by the Nirvanic experience at Baroda. The arrest and lodgement in the Alipur jail had facilitated the experience of omnipresent Vāsudeva. And now the acquittal and release made Sri Aurobindo mount a spiritual dimension to his politics, and preach, not the popular religion of nationalism, but the universal religion of Sanatana Dharma. And presently the *adesh*, the inner command, became irresistible, and he went, first to Chandernagore in February 1910, and then to Pondicherry in April, to be free at last to engineer his Yogic action in the seclusion and security of his new-found "Cave of Tapasya". And so, during the latter half of his life, Sri Aurobindo became the Columbus of the Supramental realm, the architect of the Life Divine, and the Yogin-singer of the futuristic epic, *Savitri*. He progressively enacted in himself the evolutionary dialectic he had inferred in the cosmic play. It was a drama of confrontation, conflict, a push forward, a decisive change. This is insinuated and even



underlined in several of his poems, including *Ilion* and *Savitri*; and it is more or less explicit in his formal dramas.

Unlike his poetry, his works on philosophy, Yoga, social and political thought, or his commentaries on scripture, Sri Aurobindo's dramas are little known, although he has left behind five full-length plays and several dramatic fragments. Their cast is Elizabethan, their tone romantic, and their medium blank verse. But what is of particular significance is the interpretative vision behind them. The dramatic conflict or struggle is but the means for the evolution or emergence of a new ethic or consciousness, and the beginning of a new dispensation in human affairs. Thus the plays too are of a piece with the rest of the Canon, but here evolution is as it were shown as happening under the apparent clash of events and circumstances, some chosen characters being the instruments of the destined evolutionary advance.

A hint of the Aurobindonian evolutionary dialectic may be seen albeit in mere seed-form, in the juvenile Platonic exercise 'The Harmony of Virtue', where it is argued by Keshav (clearly an autobiographical projection) that evolution needn't mean "elimination", and the pursuit of "virtue" could only mean "the perfect evolution by the human being of the inborn qualities and powers native to his personality". On his taking up the Baroda job, Sri Aurobindo wrestled anew with the problem of human progress—of conflict, and change, and transformation—and wondered whether it could be dramatically presented. He was steeped in the drama of Europe and in Sanskrit drama as well. In Greek tragedy, "conflict" was usually occasioned by human pride and was followed by nemesis or divine retribution. In Shakespearian drama, "complication" or "conflict" was caused by human folly or tragic obsession, and was followed by "resolution" or by disaster. Of course, if a whole trilogy like the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus were taken into consideration, one might infer a shift in consciousness, the tardy conversion by Pallas Athene of the Furies into the Eumenides, of passion and crime and revenge into reason and purgation and reconciliation. In the plays of Shakespeare's last period, too, there is discernible a similar shift, crime being countered, not by more crime, but by pardon and the forging of concord. But in Sri Aurobindo's plays, the evolutionary dialectic is rather more clearly focussed in the characterisation and the action, in conformity to his own developing philosophy of man's and the world's change and transformation.

Of Sri Aurobindo's five full-length plays, only *Perseus the Deliverer* saw publication in his own life-time, first serially in the *Bande Mataram*



in 1907 and subsequently in 1942 in *Collected Poems and Plays*. Of the rest, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Rodogune* seem to have preceded *Perseus*, and *Eric* and *Vasavadutta* to have followed it, being actually composed in the early years at Pondicherry. The unfinished plays—*The Maid in the Mill*, *The House of Brut*, *Prince of Edur*—also belong to the Baroda period. For one thing, Sri Aurobindo was usually content to borrow his plot from narrative and dramatic sources, Western as well as Indian. For another, he had a dramatic theory of his own, obscure at first perhaps, but acquiring clearer formulation during the Pondicherry period. "In all very great drama", he wrote in *The Future Poetry*, "the true movement and result is really psychological and the outward action, even when it is considerable, and the consummating event, even though loud and violent, are only either its symbol or else its condition of culmination....drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul..." Behind the physical world, there is the occult world-stair comprising the plateaus of light above and the abysses of dark below, and there is the journey and the struggle and the progress of the pilgrim-soul through these regions, steadily making for the sun-lit summits. Sri Aurobindo evidently thought that serious drama should project this struggle, this dialectic, this spiral of progress in terms effective and intelligible to humanity.

Already in an early dramatic fragment there is the argument between King and Priest, the latter swearing by Baal, the former pleading for a humaner ethic, the "more gentle and less bloody" cult of Mithra, Baal himself consenting to the change:

Baal and Mithra, these are one, but Baal  
Changes and grows more mild and merciful,  
A friend to men.

The first complete play, *The Viziers of Bassora*, is based on the *Arabian Nights*, and is largely governed by the spirit of comedy. But the deeper intention is by no means wholly ignored. There is the Morality pattern set by the Good and the Bad Viziers respectively, and they are both exceeded by the Caliph Haroun al Rasheed, who is masked Providence in the play, signifying Power and Authority no doubt, but (what is even more to the point) humanity and generosity as well. The Divine has many facets, and emits many emanations, but the Father's Face is more pleasing than the "stern and dreadful judge", the All-Merciful more auspicious than the All-Wrathful. It is suggested that, while Power is necessary, restraint is wise; also that true Love carries with it its own insurance of ultimate well-being.



*Rodogune* the next play derives remotely from Appian and Corneille, and is conceived as a tragedy. *Rodogune* is a captive princess, and she is fatally trapped again in the meshes of the blood-feud involving the brothers, Antiochus and Timocles, and their vindictive and hapless mother Cleopatra. While the cast of the play is Elizabethan, the tone is Greek: the long arm of fatality seizes hero and heroine, and although love stands its ground, it is also overtaken by death. Antiochus would, if he could, battle with fatality and grow towards perfection submitting to the hammer of the gods. His instinct is right, but he is thwarted by the "subtle Satan", Phayllus, Timocles' evil counsellor. Goodness is checkmated for the nonce, even though evil doesn't triumph; and the evolutionary march is turned back, though the setback may be only temporary.

Written during the political period, both *Perseus* and the unfinished *Prince of Edur* were meant to underline the theme of "deliverance" from an oppressive yoke. On the other hand, *Perseus* carries forward the argument of the early fragment dramatising the Baal-Mithra conflict. In *Perseus*, the issue is between Poseidon and Pallas Athene; and they fight it out through their champions, the ravenous sea-monster and the semi-divine Perseus respectively. At the human level, the champions are Polydaon, the priest of Poseidon and Andromeda, the Syrian princess who sets free the chained prisoner in defiance of the priest and his god. Andromeda's is an act of pure compassion, and it means a breakthrough in religion and ethics. It is left to Perseus, however, to underline the implications of Polydaon's fall and Poseidon's sullen withdrawal. The destruction of the sea-monster is but one step forward, and while the dark forces have been forced into retreat, they have not been destroyed altogether:

But the blind nether forces still have power  
And the ascent is slow and long is Time.  
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:  
The day shall come when men feel close and one.  
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,  
Since little by little earth must open to heaven  
Till her dim soul awakes to light.

This formal statement of the evolutionary action was a later addition to the play, but the idea is implicit in the working out of the play's clash of character and circumstance and the emergent change in the ruling ethic. From Baal to Mithra, from Poseidon to Pallas, from the reign of the dark irrational to the supremacy of reason—such is the direction of change.

The next play, *Eric*, written in the first years at Pondicherry, re-enacts more vividly still the evolutionary dialectic of *Perseus*. The



divinities—Odin, Thor, Freya—do not appear in the foreground, as Poseidon and Pallas do in *Perseus*. Eric has won the kingdom of Norway by force of arms, but peace still eludes him. His principal rival's sister, Aslaug, visits his court disguised as a dancing-girl to seek an opportunity to kill him, but feels her arm paralysed having fallen in love with him. Eric loves her too, sees through her predicament, and realises that, not Power alone, but Grace also is needed to build a kingdom on sure foundations. The new insight finds eloquent expression in his words to Aslaug :

Some day surely  
The world too shall be saved from death by Love ..  
Freya within her niche commands this room  
And incense burns to her. Nor Thor for thee,  
But Freya.

In the last of the plays, *Vasavadutta*, the issue is, not so much between war and peace, but cold calculation and the promptings of the heart, in other words between policy and statecraft on one side and the imperatives of Love on the other. Chunda Mahasegn of Avunthie has Vuthsa Udayan of Cowsambie kidnapped, and makes Princess Vasavadutta his jailor. She should win his heart, and make him her father's vassal ! But as predicted by her mother, love sweeps Vasavadutta off her feet, and all Mahasegn's calculations go wrong. And Vuthsa too, relying only on the movements of his heart, does better on the whole than his minister Yougundharayan with his "policy". The heart is a surer guide than the mind, and Love is sovereign Power that can transcend policy, force or fraud :

The deepest things are those thought seizes not ;  
Our spirits live their hidden meaning out...

Apart from these dramas, there is also the "dramatic element" in the unfinished epic *Ilion* and the symbolistic-futuristic epic, *Savitri*. In *Ilion*, behind the death-grapple between the Trojans and the Greeks, there is the rivalry between Apollo and Pallas, but they know that it is Zeus who is behind everything. Mystic Apollo must needs withdraw first, sealing the fate of Troy ; Pallas will then inaugurate the reign of reason for a few centuries ; but ultimately Apollo will return, but now signifying the enthronement of sovereign intuition. In *Savitri*, the conflict is sharper and more pointed : Savitri is pitted against Death, and the incredible dialectic covers the occult spaces of Eternal Night, Double Twilight and Everlasting Day. It all ends with Death being eaten up by Light, and the Dark God dying to be reborn as the luminous One :

Transfigured was the formidable shape...

Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.

And so the evolutionary dialectic is seen to be the one continuous life-line in Sri Aurobindo's writing, from the Platonic dialogue composed in his eighteenth year, through the many experiments in narrative and dramatic poetry, to *Savitri* the mature poetic testament of his last years.



P. K. Sundaram

SRI AUROBINDO'S  
CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION  
WITH REFERENCE TO THE  
*GĪTĀ*

I have tried here to present some ideas on the *Gītā* with special reference to Sri Aurobindo and his concept of evolution. The consummation of all human endeavour, if not of human history itself is the advent of the gnostic being or in the language of the *Gītā*, *Sthitadhī*.<sup>1</sup> The gnostic or the supramental beings, as a race, will not be of a uniform invariant type, made to order, in a single fixed pattern; for, the law of the supermind, says Aurobindo, is unity fulfilled in diversity. Yet, common to all the gnostic beings, the triple status of the supermind would reproduce itself as a principle in the new manifestation. All the lower degrees of knowledge would have been gathered up in a higher, more comprehensive synthesis. These beings would ascend beyond a super-mind formulation and reach from the highest height of perfection hitherto achieved to the summits of unitarian self-realisation in a body which is the last and supreme state of the epiphany of creation.

The gnosis is the highest dynamis of spiritual existence, most effective principle of the spirit. The gnostic being is the perfected spiritual man. His whole way of being, thinking, living and acting would be governed by the power of a vast universal spirituality; the entire life of this being will move in perfect rhythm and consonance with the supreme self. He would feel the presence of the divine in every centre of his consciousness, in every pulsation of his life-force, in every atom of his body.

The workings of nature are to him so many becomings of the great *Puruṣa* or the "World-Mother". His movements and decisions are entirely free, born out of a complete joy of the spirit in entire identity with the whole of reality, with a spontaneous sympathy for the entire creation.



All the selves will be his own self; in his comprehension, all the facts of the world will be held together in a smooth harmony as in a perfect work of art. He will be in the world and of the world and at the same time live in transcendence to it. He will be an individual, yet not bound by that individuality; he will act in the world, yet freely without any compulsion of external forces. He is not isolated, but a point in the universal. Rather, in him, the universal is individualised. A complete individual is the cosmic individual. He has no ego. The three keys to our life, viz., the individual, the cosmic and the transcendental infinity would have formed a united fulfilment in this evolved perfected being. Since knowledge determines the will, the actions of the perfected being are self-determined. The variety of actions now are not conditioned by the compulsion of causes outside the individual, but by the free choice in the light of a full and complete wisdom. The acts themselves would depend on the delight of self-expression, on the Divine Will working through it.

An evolution of this gnostic consciousness brings in its wake a total transformation of our world-consciousness and world-action along with the very nature of the world-theatre. The interpersonal relationship of two gnostic beings will be the reflection of the oneness of their own selves. The life of the gnostic is essentially inner; a withdrawal into one's own private chambers of one's being is a necessary preliminary and one has to separate oneself from the world to build the fortresses and fastnesses there in thought and will against all comers, assaults from ignorance. The withdrawal and repose in the inner is only to cure and correct the antinomies of the inner and the outer. "The gnostic being," says Sri Aurobindo, "will have an inmost existence in which he is alone with God, in communion with its heights and its luminous abysses of secrecy".

When he rises from this mysterious depth, he not merely thinks of others as one with him; he not merely intellectually forms concepts of identities and tries to build in imagination what he cannot experience; he in fact *senses the divine presence* everywhere as he would a flower or its fragrance. Aurobindo speaks; "This extended state of being will not only be in a conceptive idea and vision, but an extension of oneness in heart, in sense, in a concrete physical consciousness." The gnostic being can penetrate the outer shells of existence and see through the vital and the mental planes also.<sup>2</sup> It is thus that he can lift other minds struggling in the material shell and the divinising process of the world is facilitated.



The supramental gnostic individual is a spiritual person; yet he does not have a fixed predetermined personal stamp about him to mark out his persisting identity, because he is the expression of the universal and the transcendent. This does not mean that he has no personality at all or he is a congeries of multiple personalities, quite an amorphous and unpredictable flux. In the presence of a gnostic person, we feel the light of consciousness, a sea of energy, but we cannot fix it in one mode, in one description. He does not have the need of a carved expressive mask or *persona*. He is as free as air, as wide as the skies. The standards of good and evil, constructed by the imperative necessities of lower nature, are inane and inappropriate in the case of the enlightened spiritual persons; all is now self-flow of spiritual self-nature, *Svadharmā* of *Svabhāva*. In Aurobindo's words "An entire freedom of the spirit, an entire self-existent order self-creating, self-effectuating, self-secure in its own natural and inevitable movement, is the character of this dynamis of the gnostic supernature." (*Life Divine*, p. 886)

The gnostic *simply* is, in spite of his dynamism; "To be", says Aurobindo, "is the object of manifestation; not to know; knowledge is only the instrumentation of an operative consciousness of being. This would be the gnostic life on earth." (*Life Divine*: p. 895). Life and action of the supramental being will ultimately rest on what he is. The question: who is a *Sthita-dhī*, asked by Arjuna of Krishna, is thus answered, precisely in the only way in which it could have been answered by any spiritual philosophy, as the very term '*Sthita-prajñā*' or '*Sthita-dhī*' amply testifies even etymologically.

To this state of perfect enlightenment, there could possibly be several roads. But renunciation of all actions is certainly not one of them, if by renunciation one means the abandonment of actions as a means to freedom in the too literal sense of the term. That idea is too insipid to be treated with any seriousness. The *Gītā* textually warns us against such a view in more places than one.<sup>9</sup> Happily again, here there are no two points of view. Inaction and Inertia as methods to obtain spiritual values have never been encouraged in any philosophy in India worth its name. The way to actionlessness, paradoxically enough, is not inaction. "Let there not be at any time clinging to inaction on your part."<sup>4</sup> Infinitely better than this crude method of *Sannyāsa*, is *Sangatyāga* or *phalatyāga*.

But does *Gītā* countenance a *Karma-Sannyāsa* in the sense of a renunciation resulting from knowledge, where the ordinary meanings of terms like action and inaction seem to be transvalued? Can there be *Karma* in *Akarma* and conversely, *akarma* in *karma*? Sri Aurobindo holds



that knowledge, works and devotion are all there prescribed in the *Gītā* with no absolute preference of any one of them over others. All the three meet in one who is the *Puruṣottama*. Arguing against those who would insist that *Gītā* is a gospel of works, Aurobindo declares that *Gītā* is a gospel of works, but only of such works which culminate in knowledge,<sup>5</sup> that culminate in spiritual realisation and quietude, and of works such as are motivated by devotion or a conscious surrender of one's whole self into the Supreme. But they are not works which are ordinarily meant by the word 'work', be it egoistic or altruistic, personal or social, utilitarian or humanitarian. It is not even the disinterested performance of one's duties that is called 'work' in the *Gītā*.<sup>6</sup> The *Gītā* is too much antique to permit the introduction of such occidental notions as social service etc., into its teachings. The truth is that *Gītā* preaches, not human action but *divine* action, by which Aurobindo means the act done by the illumined soul in obedience to the Divine Will; act done *impersonally* by the God-possessed men. This very clearly indicates that this "*impersonal action*" is (1) not an action at all by the human will however chastened it might be and therefore (2) such a divine action presupposes the abandonment of the sense of agency and authorship. When *Kartṛtva* is absent, *Karma* has no place. But if God is the actor through the soul which is eligible for such a privilege, it is not ordinary action at all. The religion of the *Gītā* is not just practical, ethical, social, pragmatic, altruistic, humanitarian. The ideal man of the *Gītā* will be all these; but not merely these as though these were ends in themselves or self-sufficient goals. They become the natural expressions when there is knowledge and understanding. God and God-state are the twin arch-stones of the *Gītā*. Everything else is subordinate. Living in God or spirit is primary. Aurobindo writes: "An inner situation may arise, as with the Buddha, in which all duties have to be abandoned, trampled on, flung aside in order to follow the call of the Divine within. I cannot think that the *Gītā* would solve such an inner situation by sending Buddha back to his wife and father. ...or would direct a Rama-krishna to become a Pandit in a vernacular school and disinterestedly teach little boys their lessons."<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo declares that abandonment of all Dharmas in "*Sarva dharmān partityajya*"<sup>8</sup> is to take refuge in the Supreme alone. The call of God is imperative and cannot be weighed against any other considerations. Here is *Karma-sannyāsa* or if you will *dharma-sannyāsa*, but fully informed by the knowledge of the truth of the Divine. *Jñāna* is the *lakṣaṇa* of *Sannyāsa*. Participation in Brahmic consciousness is basic.



The *right to action* and the *phalatyāga* are not then the *mahāvākya* of the *Gītā* but only an *avāntara-vākya*, if we continue the idiom of the Vedānta, a preliminary word governing the first state of the spiritual practisant. What is more, this is even repudiated at a later stage, when man is declared to be no doer at all. It is the Prakṛti that does the movements. What the man has to learn is *this truth* only that not he, but the Prakṛti acts. In other words, the idea that we are *kartas* is an illusion. "All pragmatic egoism" Aurobindo says "whether of the claim to fruits or of the right to action, is there at an end."

Here at least is an illusion, the most fundamental illusion (before which the question whether the world is an illusion or no pales away into irrelevance) which can be quelled only by a spiritual insight, capable of discriminating the actionless self from the vibrant Prakṛti. Lord Krishna in the *Gītā* is the Puruṣottama, says Aurobindo, who is beyond the self that acts not, beyond the Prakṛti that acts, foundation of the one, master of the other, of whom everything is a manifestation. Thus Aurobindo distinguishes three great steps in the *Gītā* leading to *brahma-nirvāṇa*. (1) Desireless action (2) renunciation of the sense of agency (3) knowledge of the great Lord by whom all works are directed, in a perfect transcendence through nature, and to whom, therefore, as the *Carama-śloka* proclaims, the whole being of man is surrendered. The last one is the natural result or attendant function of the second. Hence, knowledge, *Jñāna*, is the special instrumental cause of freedom through its operation in surrender.

It behoves us to say a few words about the discrimination and isolation of the soul from Prakṛti. Act we should perhaps even after the ascent of the self into the divine or descent of the divine into the self. For such a spiritual poise of no-action in action and *vice versa*, the first impulse is to reject nature, and withdraw into oneself. This withdrawal is necessary for the expansion of spirituality to the entire nature. To see equally on the entire creation in a vision of large charity (as the expressions like "*Sarvabhūta hite ratāḥ*" in the *Gītā* would seem to indicate) a thorough preparation is *sine qua non*. Pure spiritualised consciousness, before it is dynamically exerted in the service of the world, is the first object in the evolution of the spiritual man. But, according to Aurobindo, it will lead to spiritual liberation but not to transformation. More and more conscious participation in the action of universal nature is a marked character, the logical consequence of the evolutionary principle and process. The supramental change cannot take place unless the supramental force begins to act directly; and this it does not do if the nature is not ready. The inferior nature will be unable to bear, to respond, to receive or assimilate the force. In other words, nature itself must be trained before it could receive the descent of light.



When the soul is ready by virtue of knowledge and its attendant results, the illumination "descends"; descends very quickly in the very body that exists at the time.

For such a transformation, there must then be direct and unveiled intervention from above. But the Lord being the *Kṣetragña*, such intervention can be interpreted either as grace or the blossoming of the gnosis from within. All transformations indeed wear the appearance of a miracle; but a miracle with a method.

The process of self-realisation is, in the ultimate analysis, not productive of anything new if the perspective is from the Divine Consciousness to which all must be known in an eternal now. Its involvement in inconscient and the consequent involution is not an accident but must have been fully foreseen by the superconscient divine. If this fore-knowledge of the Divine is granted, there could be nothing new anywhere, except of course to the mind cast in inconscient matter. The Lord says in the *Gītā* that he has killed all Kauravas even before the war actually started. He does not expect man to be anything more than a pretext, *nimitta-mātra*. If this were true, then the transformation of man into any superior order in the process of evolution in time must have been foreseen by the Divine consciousness. Evolution might be the dynamic expression of the Divine but the Divine itself however much it contains the dynamic potency, cannot change and evolve. Evolution is for man, not for God. Even the opposites of permanence and change, staticity and dynamis belong to the same Reality, the *Puruṣottama*, who is higher than the *kṣara*, and the *akṣara* and includes them both in a comprehensive integral harmony and synthesis. God then must be the unturning axle, the still point of the universe, *bhūta-bhartr*. He has the lower and the higher *Prakṛtis* as phases or facets of his being. But this being itself is neither the facets or phases, it is a whole, with the harmonies constituting its structure. Aurobindo's comments on the *Gītā* passage "*naca matsthānibhūtāni*" are quite illumining in this regard. Reality cannot evolve either as a whole, or in parts. If it were the *prakṛti* that evolves then the Sāṅkhyan dualism will be the result. If *prakṛti* is identical with the Lord or the *Puruṣa*, then He will also evolve. There is no reference in the *Gītā* at least to show that God evolves. He is said to be *anavastheṣu avasthitam*. And He knows the end of whatever evolution there is. Thus there could be no surprises or miracles or new in evolution. We can only say that somehow we are what we are, and this predicament *does* allow growth, change and progress from ignorance, limitation and finitude.



Why the Divine should involve itself at all in any temporal process should remain a mystery, inscrutable to the ordinary modes of mental understanding. But even to the most cursory and elementary reflection, it is occasionally at least poignantly plain that man is not all; that human existence is a torn edge of which there must have been an original integral whole. If left at that, perhaps, life would have been nothing more than an unredeemed despair, a purposeless voyage, an unsolved riddle.

The *Gītā*, in particular, speaks of the descent of the divine into humanity, not for the sake of merely upholding or preserving the Dharma (that would be an otiose phenomenon, according to Aurobindo, since it could be normally accomplished by divine omnipotence). The Avatāra comes as the manifestation of the divine nature in the human milieu, the apocalypse of its Buddhahood, Krishnahood, etc. It is true that the Divine is lodged in the heart of every man. But then, this operation from within is effectively counteracted by the lower order of physical nature, *Prakṛti* which deludes: (*mohinīm prakṛtim āśritāḥ*). In this game of hide and seek, God has a hand and his Yogamāyā is not a little responsible for the concealment. (*nāhaṃ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyā samāvṛtaḥ*) To break this stalemate asunder, God incarnates. Sri Aurobindo writes in his *Life Divine*: "A strict obedience to the wise and intuitive leading of a guide is also normal and necessary for all but a few specially gifted seekers." This may mean the necessity of the inclusion of a teacher too in the scheme of things, as the *Gītā* verse *tadviddhi etc.*, will amply testify, much more an Avatāra.

Thus, through and through the *Gītā* seems to proclaim the gospel of inner transformation of man by a descent or blossoming of the supreme light of truth into it by one or more methods based essentially on divine gnosis so that enlightened man could lift the world with his divine action. This is expressed in the last verse of the *Gītā* :

*yatra yoges'varaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ |*  
*tatra s'rīr vijayo bhūtiḥ dhruvā nītir matir mama ||*

"Where there is Krishna, the great yogin and executive man like Arjuna there is wealth of life, successful control of elements and plenitude of joy."

## REFERENCES

1. The entire *Gītā* is the teaching concerning this gnostic being and the preparation therefor.

2. Cp. *Gītā*, II, 69 ; VI, 30, 32; XIII, 27, 28.
3. *Gītā*, III, 4.
4. *Gītā*, II, 47
5. *Ibid.*, IV, 33
6. *Essays on the Gītā*, p. 48
7. *Essays on the Gītā*, p. 42.
8. Aurobindo takes this as the *mahāvākya* of the *Gītā*.



*N. Jayashanmukam*

EVOLUTION : VERTICAL  
AND HORIZONTAL

I

INTRODUCTION

In a broad sense, Sri Aurobindo may be regarded as a follower of Vedāntic tradition like Śaṅkara, putting aside the vital differences that exist between them on this point. The important premises of Sri Aurobindo, like those of Śaṅkara, are derived evidently from the Upaniṣads. Though they agree in drawing upon the Upaniṣads as their common source, little do they agree in their philosophical conclusions. Of all their teachings, those concerning the problem of evolution are very important because all other teachings derive their significance and meaning only from them. For Śaṅkara the concept of evolution serves a negative purpose, while for Sri Aurobindo its purpose is positive. Śaṅkara establishes the truth of human life by denying the truth of evolution, and Sri Aurobindo unfolds the significance of human life by affirming the significance of evolution. Hence a comparative study of their teachings concerning the question of evolution will prove to be a fruitful attempt.

II

EVOLUTION ACCORDING TO ADVAITA

There are three aspects of evolution : (1) cosmic ; (2) individual ; and (3) logical. The cosmic refers to evolution as a universal process ; the individual, to evolution as a process unfolding the truth of human life ; and the logical, to evolution as a theory forming an integral part of a larger system of thought.

(1) In Advaita evolution refers to the evolution of *māyā*, the unconscious material power. It is indistinguishable from Brahman



and functions as its creative power. Prior to evolution it resides in Brahman in an extremely subtle form holding the souls limited by the adjunct of *avidyā* in an equally subtle form. The souls are in subtle condition because they are without bodies. In evolution the disembodied souls are endowed with appropriate bodies and this results in the manifestation of *māyā* or the world. Thus the process of embodiment of the souls and that of manifestation of the world are co-extensive and simultaneous.

Evolution is inconceivable apart from three important things : (1) a material factor which refers to the substance that undergoes change, or material cause ; (2) an impelling factor which directs the process towards its natural end, or efficient cause ; and (3) a teleological factor which gives meaningful direction and purposive character to the evolutionary process, or teleological cause. Advaita tells us that Brahman associated with *māyā* is all the three causes. Brahman is the material cause because it is the substratum of all the evolving souls ; it is the efficient cause because at its will only *māyā* begins to evolve ; and it is the teleological cause because its will is neither mechanical nor blind, but purposive. The purpose of evolution is to provide such conditions as are necessary for the souls to put an end to their limiting adjunct of *avidyā*.

Evolution has also a pattern and the manifestation of the world is according to this pattern. According to Advaita, the pattern is as follows : evolution begins with *buddhi*, out of *buddhi* comes *manas*, and out of *manas* come indriyas, *prāṇas*, *tanmātras* and *bhūtas*. We may conveniently bring all these three terms under three broad principles : Mind, Life, and Matter ; *buddhi* and *manas* under the first, indriyas and *prāṇas* under the second, and the rest under the third. Rightly speaking, they not only constitute the evolutionary pattern but also regulate the evolutionary process.

(2) As long as the soul is bound by the adjunct of *avidyā*, it is subject to endless births and deaths. Advaita tells us that in the process of rebirth the soul is born not always in a particular type of body. Gradually, a lower type of body is replaced by the higher. In other words, rebirth is not merely a birth into a particular type of body over and over again but also a birth into a higher type of body. The organic body, when compared to the inorganic, is of a higher type ; the human body, when compared to the organic, is of a superior kind. When the soul is born into a human body, which is supposed to be the best, there is a possibility for the soul to get rid of *avidyā* once and for all. But it may have to be born several times into that body, before it can actually realise that possibility. With the advent of true knowledge, the soul realises this



possibility. It realises that *avidyā* is responsible not only for the ignorance of its true nature but also for the artificial or unreal division between itself and Brahman. Upon this the soul kicks off its bodily adjunct which is the gross form of *avidyā*, and remains identical with Brahman.

(3) A consistent account of evolution depends largely upon the question how Brahman and its creative power of *māyā* stand to each other. According to Advaita *māyā* is indistinguishable as well as inseparable from Brahman. It is said that *māyā* is to Brahman what the power of fire is to the fire. Hence evolution implies transformation of Brahman itself. Brahman, we are told, is transformed into the world as milk is transformed into curd by its very nature.<sup>1</sup> But we cannot treat the relation of identity between *māyā* and Brahman as an unqualified truth. For Advaita points out that their identity is so *only* from phenomenal point of view. Transcendentally, Brahman alone exists; since Brahman is one without a second, it is related to nothing. Consequently, *māyā* as well as its relationship with Brahman turns out to be apparent, *vivarta*. It follows therefore that evolution is not a real transformation but an apparent modification of Brahman. Evolution is real as long as the confusion between the lower and the higher reality continues; once we are rid of that confusion evolution ceases to be real.

We may therefore refer to two kinds of evolution in Advaita: vertical and horizontal. (1) The evolution is said to be vertical when it refers to the manifestation of the phenomenal world, and also when the soul changes its body in a hierarchical order and finally dispenses with the need for embodiment. (2) The evolution is said to be horizontal when it refers to the process of a soul being repeatedly born in a particular type of body, before it can enter into a higher type of body or put an end to the need for repeated births and deaths.

### III

#### EVOLUTION ACCORDING TO SRI AUROBINDO

As in the previous section here also we shall expound the evolutionary view of Sri Aurobindo under three heads: the cosmic aspect of evolution, the individual, and the logical.

(1) Brahman through its creative power, Supermind or Divine *Māyā* or Real-Idea, brings the multiplicity into phenomenal existence out of its unextended unity and unatomic existence. In doing so the Spirit concentrates exclusively on each level of its manifestation, and



in consequence, it undergoes gradual self-concealment. When the process of exclusive concentration and self-concealment reaches its extreme point, the Spirit is completely lost in its own multiplicity, in the sea of unconscious material atoms. The *Rg-veda* describes it as the inconscient ocean. Following this Sri Aurobindo calls it the Inconscient. In the inconscient the Spirit represents itself as a multiplicity of individual or psychic souls to support the play of self-differentiation. The psychic souls are self-imprisoned in their own darkness in consequence of exclusive concentration on the act of self-manifestation.

Self-concealment in matter is followed by the self-discovery of the Spirit in the same medium. In other words, involution is followed by evolution. As evolution is an inverse action of involution, it brings out all that is involved in the inconscient. The Spirit will be a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutionary element and factor. What was original and primal in involution is in evolution, the last and supreme emergence.

In involution as well as well as evolution Brahman is all the three causes rolled into one — the material, the efficient, and the teleological. It is the material cause because the world is a self-becoming of its own substance; it is the efficient cause because its manifestation is self-impelled and self-directed ; and it is the teleological cause because its self-differentiation is for the delight of self-representation in phenomenal forms. Figuratively speaking, Brahman is the play, the player and the play ground.

According to Sri Aurobindo there is a pattern in involution as well as evolution. Involution begins with a descent of Spirit into Supermind, and this is followed by subsequent descents into Mind, Life, and Matter. So, conversely, the first to evolve out of the the inconscient is Matter, out of Matter evolves Life and out of Life, mind. Finally out of Mind emerges the supramental Spirit. We are told that Supermind is the original creative power and the rest are the derivative powers brought out for the phenomenal manifestation of the supramental Spirit. Mind creates the idea of phenomenal individuality. Life creates a phenomenal form for that idea, and Matter creates a gross substance for that form.

(2) The psychic soul in the inconscient is involved in utter unconsciousness. With the appearance of Matter, Life, Mind, and Supermind, one after another, out of the inconscient, the psychic soul is gradually delivered out of the darkness of the inconscient. There are two important factors, says Sri Aurobindo, in the evolution of the psychic soul—a physical evolution and a spiritual evolution.<sup>2</sup> The



first refers to the evolution of the physical body in which the psychic soul is housed, and the other to the evolution of the psychic soul-personality. Sri Aurobindo draws a distinction between psychic soul and psychic soul-personality. The former is the unchanging element and the latter the dynamic or evolving element in the soul. To the question whether the physical evolution and the spiritual evolution are simultaneous or one precedes the other, Sri Aurobindo points out that it is not simultaneous, but one preceding the other. Until the emergence of human being physical evolution preceded the spiritual. Evolution of consciousness was accomplished through the evolution of the physical body.<sup>3</sup> But hereafter, he says, it will be the other way about. The evolution of consciousness will be the chief factor and a corresponding evolution of the physical body will only be a consequence.<sup>4</sup> When man evolves himself into a superman all his present limitations fall away from him. He is not only divine in his consciousness but a divine consciousness housed in a divine body.

Referring to the dynamics of transformation, both spiritual and physical, Sri Aurobindo says that there are three important processes : heightening, widening, and integralising.<sup>5</sup> Heightening refers to an ascent from a lower grade of existence to a higher grade; widening to an utmost development of a possibility which comes into existence as a result of that ascent; integralising to a taking of the lower into the higher and transforming it into the values of the latter. We are told that rebirth is an effective machinery through which the widening process extends itself in full measure. In other words, rebirth is indispensable to the widening process. As a matter of fact, the widening process not only prepares for the heightening process to come into operation but also renders the integralising process exhaustive in its action and consequence. We may therefore say that rebirth not only prepares for an ascent into the higher level of existence but also enables the integralising process to bring about a complete transformation of the lower term. Sri Aurobindo makes a pointed reference to the fact that rebirth would be indispensable even after the descent of Supermind in man, for without it the possibilities of supramental life cannot be fully worked out.<sup>6</sup> Here it ceases to be a mechanical device. On the contrary, it is a deliberate and consciously chosen instrument of progress of the supramental Spirit.

(3) The question how far phenomenal manifestation is consistent with the nature of Brahman depends upon the conception of the nature of Brahman itself. Brahman is the only reality absolutely and illimitably free. If so, then Brahman is not only free to determine itself infinitely but also free from all restraining effect of its own creations. Hence the indeterminability of Brahman does not mean a

denial of freedom of self-determination. What it denies is the limitation by that freedom. Unless it is possessed of this freedom, its other freedom, freedom for infinite self-determination, is inconceivable, for without that it would be either a fixed eternal determinate or bound to a sum of possibilities of determination. In the light of such a comprehensive view of Brahman, the various aspects of phenomenal manifestation are not only justifiable but also significant.

Here too, as in the previous section, we may speak of two kinds of evolution—vertical and horizontal. (1) Vertical evolution refers to the descent of the Spirit into, and the ascent of the same Spirit out of, the inconscient. (2) Horizontal evolution stands for the evolution of the soul within a particular ascending order through the machinery of rebirth.

#### IV

#### COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

In view of the limited space at our disposal, we shall content ourselves with one remark about Advaita. Speaking about the order of evolution of the Sāṅkhya, Sri Aurobindo points out that it is contrary to the order of evolution in the material world: "This order of evolution seems contrary to that which we perceive as the order of the material evolution."<sup>7</sup> He adds that in order to be consistent with what obtains in the material world, the reverse order has to be taken, i. e., we have to begin with tanmātras and bhūtas or Matter. In support of his view Sri Aurobindo quotes<sup>8</sup> the *Gītā* version of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: "Supreme beyond their objects are the senses, supreme over the senses the mind, supreme over the mind the intelligent will, that which is supreme over the intellegent will, is He (the conscious Self or the Puruṣa)." As the evolutionary view of Advaita is ultimately traceable to that of the Sāṅkhya, what Sri Aurobindo has said about the Sāṅkhya is applicable to the evolutionary order of Advaita also. So whatever may be our regard for Advaita, we have to admit that unless the order is reversed it would not be meaningful to talk of the modification of *māyā* as evolutionary, if we mean by the term "evolution" a process which begins with Matter and moves on successively to Life and Mind. It may be asked that if the modification of *māyā* cannot be regarded as evolutionary, does it not correspond to the involution outlined by Sri Aurobindo? Superficially, there seems to be a certain justification in this question, for in involution the order is the same as presented by Advaita—Mind comes first, Life and Matter follow one after another. But we have to note that to a discerning eye there is actually little justification in looking upon the



changes of *māyā* as involutory. This is so for two important reasons. In the first place, in involution the higher principle identifies itself with the lower in such a way that it is imprisoned in the latter. But in Advaita, as we know, there is no question of the higher involving itself and thereby getting lost in the lower. This is something quite unfamiliar to the thinking of Advaita. Secondly, involution is a kind of preliminary movement making its contrary movement, evolution, possible. So, even if we are prepared to grant that the transformation of *māyā*, as outlined in Advaita, is to be construed as a kind of involution, it is really very difficult to stick on to that position. Because there is no place at all in Advaita for a contrary movement with Matter as the first principle.

If the development of *māyā* is to be construed as neither evolutionary nor involutory, for the reasons we have just now stated, we are obliged to find out how the Advaita conception of evolution with Mind as its first principle came into existence. It appears that it is due to an error originally committed by the Sāṅkhya and later bequeathed to Advaita. As there is a perfect parallelism between the individual and the universal (for the universal is the individual magnified or writ large), one of the methods employed in metaphysics for acquiring knowledge about the universal is to obtain first a knowledge of the individual and then universalise it. Neither Sāṅkhya nor Advaita Vedānta nor Sri Aurobindo is an exception to this practice. However, we have to bear in our mind, when we talk about this method, that in the measure our knowledge of the individual is perfect and free from limitations, our knowledge of the universal too is complete and true. Hence there is a valid reason to believe that the Sāṅkhya theory of evolution must have been formulated through this method. Radhakrishnan confirms the truth of our observation: "The whole scheme of the Sāṅkhya evolution seems to be based on the psychological experience of the individual."<sup>9</sup> In point of psychological importance, the order of the instruments of the soul is from the mind to the body through the vital. The mind is nearer to the consciousness of the soul than the vital and the body, and so the mind comes first; the vital is nearer to the consciousness of the mind than the body, and hence the vital is next to the mind and prior to the body. Hence the order from the mind to the body through the vital is based upon the criterion of psychological proximity or priority. By universalising this knowledge we may come to the conclusion that the order of cosmic evolution is from Mind to Matter. We may recall that the validity of our knowledge of the universal depends upon the validity of our knowledge of the individual. By universalising the truth of psychological proximity we can never arrive at a true knowledge of the order of cosmic evolu-

tion. If we try to do so, we are proceeding from a gross confusion between *psychological proximity* and *evolutionary history* of the instruments of the individual soul. A true knowledge of the order of cosmic evolution can be arrived at only by universalising the evolutionary history of the instruments of the individual soul. Radhakrishnan too seems to be aware of this confusion when he discusses the Sāṅkhya theory of evolution: "The order of psychological presentation need not be the order of real evolution."<sup>10</sup> Therefore we may conclude that the order of evolution as outlined in Advaita is due to a perpetuation of the error committed by the Sāṅkhya from which the former has borrowed the theory of evolution with, of course, certain reservations.

## V

OBJECTIONS<sup>11</sup> AND REFUTATIONS

(1) *First Objection*: Regarding the manifestation of the world, what Śaṅkara advocates is only *vivartavāda* and hence there is no point in comparing Śaṅkara and Sri Aurobindo whose theory of manifestation is a kind of *pariṇāmavāda*. In raising this objection the critic is questioning the very legitimacy of making a comparison between Śaṅkara and Sri Aurobindo on the problem of manifestation. However, it is not as formidable as it appears to be. A good number of Advaita scholars believe that, for Śaṅkara, *pariṇāmavāda* is of dialectical value only, and so it is not part of Advaita at all. But a careful study of the writings of Śaṅkara shows that for him *pariṇāmavāda* is important not merely for its dialectical value. If it is true that the concepts of *sattātṛaya*—the three orders of reality—and *Īśvara* are exclusively those of Advaita and hence part of the latter—which fact no Advaita scholar can deny—, then *pariṇāmavāda* also must be regarded as a part of Advaita. In other words, *Īśvara* is having a status of reality, *vyāvahārika satta*, and, through the creative power of *māyā* transforms Himself into the world as milk is transformed into curd by its very nature.<sup>12</sup> And the implication is that *pariṇāma* has been accorded a definite status of reality, *vyāvahārika satta*, and hence is a part of Advaita system. If it is true that *pariṇāma* is affirmed only as a methodological device, then there is no meaning in assigning to it a status of reality. This view is subscribed to by scholars like S. Radhakrishnan<sup>13</sup> and D. M. Datta.<sup>14</sup>

(2) *Second objection*: It is wrong to say that Advaita has borrowed its *pariṇāma* theory from the Sāṅkhya. The purpose of this objection is to show that the error attributed to the Sāṅkhya does not apply to Advaita. Before we examine this criticism, we have to note that the critic does not dispute that *pariṇāmavāda* is a part of Advaita, what he



disputes is that it is not borrowed from the Sāṅkhya. The question whether or not Advaita has borrowed it from the Sāṅkhya cannot be conclusively settled, because it is highly controversial. However, there is one thing about which there can be no doubt—there is a close parallelism between the *pariṇāmavāda* of the Sāṅkhya and that of Advaita. Therefore we can assert that in some respects what is said about the Sāṅkhya can be said about Advaita also.

(3) *Third objection*: As Śaṅkara deals with diverse accounts of the order of creation as found in the different scriptures, he seems to be indifferent to the order of creation as such. Hence it is wrong to say that the order of evolution in Advaita corresponds to that of the Sāṅkhya. By denying any specific order of evolution in Advaita, the critic is trying to dismiss our criticism, regarding the order of evolution, as totally irrelevant. Though Śaṅkara does not attach special importance to any one account, we may confidently assert, without doing violence to the basic attitude of Advaita, that he is in favour of an order of evolution similar to that of the Sāṅkhya. There are three things which force this conclusion upon us: (1) the Sāṅkhya and Advaita agree with each other regarding the conception that the process of embodiment of the soul and that of the manifestation of the world are parallel to each other. (2) There is a perfect correspondence between Sāṅkhya and Advaita in respect of their conception of the individual self. To quote Radhakrishnan: "This account (referring to Advaita) of the psychological organism is identical with that of the Sāṅkhya, except in the matter of the five vital forces."<sup>15</sup> Since for the Sāṅkhya the structural order of the individual self is identical with the order in which it is embodied, Advaita also must hold a similar view. (3) Since their conception of the individual self is identical, especially in regard to its process of embodiment, we have to necessarily conclude that their conception of the order of evolution of the world must be parallel to each other. Our conclusion is confirmed by a well-known Advaita thinker himself. Speaking about the order of evolution in Advaita, he says: "The order of evolution is much the same as in the Sāṅkhya."<sup>16</sup>

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7. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* American Edn., p. 88.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 88. (vide *The Gītā*, 3-42)
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11. The critics who raised these objections at the seminar are Advaita scholars.
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*T. G. Kalghatgi*

## SRI AUROBINDO AND THE SUPERMEN

1. The East and the West—the twain have met in the cultural synthesis as presented in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. 'Sri Aurobindo,' as Romain Rolland said, 'is the greatest synthesis upto this day of the genius of Europe and the genius of Asia.' With the richness of life's experience and abundance of spiritual energy harnessed for the development of man and the universe, Sri Aurobindo has carved a unique place in the philosophical world of today. His philosophy is a milestone in the Renaissance of Indian thought. A decadent society of the present day needs prophets like Sri Aurobindo to lift it from the tragic stagnation of the spirit and from the degeneration of values in society.

2. In Sri Aurobindo we find the Supermind expressing itself into the realm of life for the betterment of mankind. It is difficult to write a biography of the prophet. He said, 'It is impossible to write my biography. Moreover there is no meaning in writing the biographies of poets, philosophers and yogis. The reason is they do not live in their own actions visible to the people.'<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo's genius has flowered in the background of forces like his family background, his studies of classical languages, his early Western upbringing, his political experience and the dynamic spiritual force. These have contributed to the development of his philosophy of evolution. The emergence of Indian Nationalism through struggle and stress has led him towards the assertion of the evolution of matter into spirit and the divinisation of man.

3. The foundation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is the denial of the antithesis of matter and spirit. The spiritual philosophy that negates the reality of matter and the materialist denial of the reality of the spirit are equally onesided. Spirit permeates into matter and it

is spiritualised. This is evolution. Spirit descends into matter and vitalises it. This is involution. In fact without descent of the spirit into the world there cannot be any ascent of the matter into spirit. Matter seeks to rise higher into mind. Similarly by the same process of the descent of spirit into mind, mind rises into Supermind. Supermind is a link between the highest and the finite world. It is a selective principle of knowledge which retains the real truth of existence. Mind alone cannot present a coherent picture of reality. It cuts reality and distorts it. The ascending spirit continues till it reaches the Absolute Spirit. The evolution of the higher stages consists in the transformation of the lower stages into the higher. Therefore, matter is also spiritual; evolution and involution are complementary.

The ascent of the mind into the Supermind through the descent of Supermind into mind is possible by removing the veil which separates them. The veil can be removed by our intense aspiration for the light and through yoga with the help of the divine *śakti*. "The supra-mental change is a thing 'decreed and inevitable' in the evolution of the earth consciousness, for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. For this change, 'there is needed the call from below with a will to recognise' and not to deny the light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme above."<sup>2</sup> Human effort can only prepare the ground for light. When the Supermind descends, human beings are raised to a higher level. The process of evolution continues from mind to Supermind through the intermediate stages of higher mind, illumined mind, intuition and overmind. With the descent of the Supermind, nature becomes transformed into Supernature and human beings into gnostic beings. It is not quite enough for individuals to achieve their own divinisation; it is necessary for a climate to be created when larger and larger groups of people can be divinised. This does not, however, mean that the whole human race is raised to the higher level. 'There is not the least probability or possibility of the whole race rising in a block to the supermental level—but only in the capacity in the human mentality when it reaches a certain level or a certain point of stress of the evolutionary impetus, to press towards a higher plane of consciousness and its embodiment in the being.'<sup>3</sup>

4. When the Supermind emerges there is a radical change in the character of evolution. It will be through knowledge. Sri Aurobindo believes that man is not the last end of the evolutionary process. Nature has worked out man, and from man it proceeds to the divine man or the superman. Superman is the man spiritualised and divinised. He rises above the empirical limitations of humanity and manifests



the divine in our material circumstances of human living. Superman is the consummation of the man's efforts to divinity. In this stage all beings would be to him his own selves ; all ways and powers of his consciousness would be felt as the ways and powers of his own universality.<sup>4</sup> He would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by separative individuality.<sup>5</sup> And he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total will, of his individual action with the total action.<sup>6</sup> He is free from ego and it is not difficult for him to identify himself with the universe. He is of the world, but he would exceed in his consciousness and he will be the cosmic consciousness, sense and feeling, by which all objective life becomes part of his subjective existence. He realises the divine in all forms. He has no desires and nothing to strive for. His is the universal delight of existence.

5. The conception of the Superman is analogous to that of *jīvanmukta*. The *jīvanmukta* embraces two worlds — as a liberated being he belongs to the transcendental world of reality and as an embodied being he belongs to the physical world. Like the Buddha, out of compassion for the fellow beings he works for the good of the people. A *tīrthānkara*, like Māhāvīra, does the same.

But the concept of Superman is much wider than that of the *jīvanmukta*. 'There have been numerous instances of *jīvanmukti* in the past, but Supermanhood is yet to blossom forth in the course of of further evolution.'<sup>7</sup> A *jīvanmukta* attains the supreme spiritual excellence and makes no further attempt to bring down the higher light and power into the flux of evolution.' Enraptured by the ascending movement of the soul towards God, he fails to notice the descending movement of God towards self-objectification, and, as a consequence, misses the significance of the cosmic process. The Superman, on the contrary, has grasped the reality in its fullness. He has perceived the spirit in its splendour and in matter. He feels himself one with the creative impetus. 'For him, emancipation from the drive of desire does not mean a smothering of the urge of evolution.'<sup>8</sup> He sees the true meaning of evolution in the involvement of spirit in matter.

6. The concept of Superman has played an important part in the development of the philosophical thought favouring totalitarian tendency in the West. Nietzsche, Alexander and Bernard Shaw have presented such pictures of Superman in their philosophy. Plato's philosopher-king, with the guardian class, is primarily a political concept. He was anxious to set the state on right lines and to establish an ideal society. Plato does not go beyond the political



plane to spiritual realms in developing this idea. He circles round the category of mind and does not reach the footsteps of Supermind.

Nietzsche projects his unfulfilled wish for power in his concept of Superman. The Superman, for him, is an embodiment of political power. He stands far above the multitude of men. He has the power to impose his will on the mass of men. 'Not mankind, but Superman is the goal.' Mankind is an abstraction and all that exists is a vast anthill of individuals. Nietzsche spoke of the superman as rising precariously out of the mire of mass mediocrity. He hated democracy; it means worship of mediocrity and hatred of excellence. It means the impossibility of great men who cannot submit to the indignities and indecencies of an election. Nietzsche's Superman has no regard for morals. He hated the conventional morality of the Christian origin which emphasised suffering as a way to perfection. 'I teach you the Superman, man is something that should be overcome,' thus spake Zarathustra. Nietzsche was in violent opposition to the Christian emphasis on love and softer virtues of life. He went to the other extreme of denying the importance of love and sufferings in the development of human personality. He was intoxicated by the cult of power and his Superman is the deification of the demon in man. He is 'the son of division and the strong flowering of the ego'. But the Superman of Sri Aurobindo is a synthesis of different aspects, human and divine. Viewed from the side of man, Superman presents a certain divine and harmonious Absolute, of all that is essential in man. To take all that is essential in human beings and to lift him higher to light and joy is the essential function of divinity. Nietzsche's Superman is beyond good and evil. He transcends ethical considerations because moral codes are necessary at a lower stage of human race. For Bradley and Bosanquet, the highest state of man is supra-ethical. In a deeper sense he has transcended the conventional morality. Active love of God and the dynamic self-identification with the divine will are the bases of transcending the empirical life. The consequence is the effort-less flow of the love of humanity. For Sri Aurobindo man is not the highest end, but he is the highest medium of self-manifestation of the divine on earth. "There is indeed some truth in saying that man is made in the image of God, but man is such an image only in potentia, upto the present stage of development man has been only imperfect image, an unrecognizedly faint imitation of the Godhood. The Superman is man turned into a perfect image of the Divine thoroughly transfigured in every member of his being.'"

For Alexander, as for other evolutionists, man is not the highest limit of evolution. In his *Space, Time and the Deity* Alexander points out



that with the cooperation of man and nature in their efforts for higher development and the matrix of space-time, man is transcended into a higher being. Alexander calls him a finite god or an angel. He is a superman. For Sri Aurobindo also, man is not the last word of the evolutionary process. He evolves into a superman as the animal evolves into man and plant into animal. Evolution is purposive. Divine purpose works in evolution. Superman of Sri Aurobindo is not merely a hero among men but is an embodiment of divine essence. Alexander makes Supermen angels, a species different from men, as men are different from animals. But Sri Aurobindo points out that man is not merely a stage in the evolutionary process but he consciously evolves into Superman through an integral transformation of his being. Man can rise above the limitation of his empirical stage and enter into conscious cooperation with the divine power for the emergence of the Superman. The descent of the divine in man leads to the emergence of Superman, and in this stage, man expresses the self-revelation of the divine.

Bernard Shaw, in his *Man and Superman*, points out the necessity of the collective evolution of man into Superman. 'The overthrow of an aristocrat has created the necessity of the Superman. There is, today, a sense of social importance to the common man and to handover the country to the riff-raff is national suicide. Riff-raff can neither govern nor will let any one else govern ...'<sup>10</sup> Therefore, 'The need of Superman, in its most imperative aspect, is a political one.'<sup>11</sup> Superman, according to Shaw, is neither an athlete nor a 'good' man, but a person who creates new enthusiasm in society. Shaw mentions names of men like Cromwell, Napoleon and Goethe as examples of Supermen. Shaw's Supermen do not transcend the social and political values of the average man. Shaw's conception is, at the most, a creation of social satire.

There is significant similarity between Sri Aurobindo's thought and that of the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Frenchman. He was also a biologist and he made important contribution to the study of man's ancestry. He has tried to achieve the integration between science and his faith. He too, 'like Sri Aurobindo, believes that man is not the summit of evolution, he can, and has to, go farther .. in the direction of supramentalisation, as Sri Aurobindo would say, in the direction of 'hominisation' as Fr. Teilhard de Chardin would call it.' Fr. Teilhard de Chardin also believes in the essentiality of matter; his religion is firmly founded on earth. Where he differs from Sri Aurobindo is that man's future to him is not in any kind of immediate divinisation but in what he calls 'socialisation'. There is not going to be a superman; only a superhumanity.

We must rejoice that, in a single decade, the great spirit that presides over our Country's destinies, put forth three extraordinary men of world significance each representing a different *sadhana* : In Rabindranath Tagore, the *sadhana* of beauty and joy ; in Mahatma Gandhi, the *sadhana* of action ; and the *sadhana* of the spirit and the supramental consciousness in Aurobindo Ghose.

However, such comparisons between Sri Aurobindo's concept of Superman and those of Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw are not relevant. They are based on social and political considerations and they do not transcend the empirical level. The Superman on these planes may be a genius, social reformer, or political giant, but certainly not Superman transcending the empirical plane. Again, he is an individual man who has risen higher among the mass of men. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy suggests the possibility of a society of Supermen, although he does not expect the whole race rising in a block to the supramental level.

The empirical criteria determining the concepts of Superman in Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw, if extended in breadth, may lead to dangerously absurd conclusions. If physical strength were to be the criterion of Superman, then the Olympic wrestling champion would also be considered a Superman.

For Sri Aurobindo, 'Supermanhood is not man climbed to his own natural zenith, not a superior degree of human greatness, knowledge, power, intelligence, will, character, genius, dynamic force, saintliness, love, purity or perfection. Supermind is something beyond mental man and his limits.'

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P. Nagaraja Rao

## SRI AUROBINDO AND EVOLUTION

Sri Aurobindo stands out in our century as one of our great contemporary philosopher-savants and sages. He has left for us not only a varied rich intellectual heritage in his works which run into several volumes comprehending *Epic Poetry*, *Philosophical treatises*, *Commentaries on the Gītā*, *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedic hymns and letters* and also has built for his disciples a spiritual centre of learning and a training ground for *sādhana* in Pondicherry, which has become the rallying place for the spiritual aspirants of the East and the West. His philosophical system goes by the name *integral yoga*. The basis that authenticates his system is his spiritual experience. His works spell out the truths he experienced. He finds confirmation for them in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and the Gītā. He speaks like a prophet and writes like one who came with a God-given mission.

In his message on the day India attained Independence on 15th August 1947, he has enumerated his five cherished dreams. They are (1) to establish a Free and Independent India; (2) a free puissant and resurgent Asia; (3) a world union of differing nationalities; (4) the diffusion of India's spirituality all over the world; (5) finally to work out a philosophy of evolution which will enable man to rise to divine consciousness. Our concern today is to understand his last important dream which is his philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo is a radical thinker, in his own words, "a metaphysician doubled with a yogi." Even as a boy of eleven years he had spiritual experience. He had great experience of Krishna consciousness in Alipore Jail. He spoke of it in exciting terms in his celebrated Uttarpara speech. He said: "As I sat here, there came into my mind a word that I have to speak to the whole of Indian Nation. It was spoken first to myself in jail and I have come out to



speak it to my people." He practised intense *sādhana* for over decades and with the radiant collaboration with the Mother he established the spiritual centre.

The central concept of his philosophy is *evolution*. It is the key concept and all other doctrines centre round it. Biologists proclaim that man is a unique product of evolution. Julian Huxley describes man as at the cross roads of evolution and as its trustee. Man has to raise heaven high or sink back to depths of hell by his efforts. Evolution becomes self-conscious at the human level.

In the West we have several philosophers of evolution. The concept of evolution in general holds that man is not born finished and faultless but is being shaped and ground into a whole by circumstances and factors in evolution. Evolution gives rise to the concept of the indefinite progress and ushers in an era of unconquerable optimism.

The concept of evolution raises a number of questions before us. Is evolution an automatic drive of material forces to no known or knowable ends? Is it freakish in its results or does its working involve a rigorous mechanical necessity? Is there any teleology underlining the evolutionary process? Is man the final product of evolution and is his intellect the utmost crowning achievement? What is the aim and end in view for evolution?

We have several philosophies of Evolution in the west. We have Bergson's *creative evolution*, Alexander's and Lloyd Morgan's *emergent evolution*, we have Smut's *holistic evolution* and Whitehead's *ingressive evolution*. In ancient Greece we had Heraclitus and in India the Sāṅkhya and Buddhism dealing with the concept of evolution in the construction of their philosophies.

Sri Aurobindo posits on the authority of his spiritual experience the fundamental presence of Divine consciousness in all things. This Divine consciousness has a static poise and a dynamic poise. It has seeped into all the different strata of the evolutionary process. This is what is called the *involution* of the Divine in all. It is because of this involution inert Matter is able to break into Life and that in turn is succeeded by the formations of Mind. Evolution does not stop with the emergence of Mind. It is not the highest product. Man is not the final product of evolution. It is not an aimless inconsequential process. It is not an automatic drive of the material energies. It is a purposeful unfolding of the spirit. The intellect of man is not his highest development. The mind of man "is the dupe of his animal



self". The evolutionary will of the Divine consciousness is the self-veiling powers of its capacity. Evolution is not a stumbling, half-fit adventure into the unknown. It has a divinely-decreed purpose, viz., the manifestations of the Divine itself in earth consciousness and the human body leading to the fulfilment of the divine destiny of man, to divinise the whole world and establish a spiritual society on earth in which the emphasis will have shifted from the outward to the inward. Each term in the evolution is the true intention and reality of the preceding term. Matter and motion cannot explain the process. Just as matter is veil of life, and life the veil of mind, Sri Aurobindo accepts mind as the veil of the *supramental consciousness*, also called Truth-Consciousness. It awaits a descent and an unfoldment in human nature. The mind consciousness of man being a product of evolution is conditioned by ignorance. The supra-mental is the higher consciousness than the animal or the rational consciousness. It is not infra-rational or instinctive or anti-intellectualistic as in Bergson and the pragmatists. It transcends the rational and has the power to transform and divinise its base. We must all prepare for the descent of the super-mind. We must clear the ground, and consciously, absolutely and unconditionally surrender to it. There should be no trace of the ego in any of its forms. We must consciously place all our knowledge, feelings, will, possessions and all at the hands of the super-mind. Then there is the possibility of its descent. Preparing ourselves for its descent is the manifest destiny of man and evolution. The ego-bound mind of man works in the twilight of ignorance. It needs illumination. Sri Aurobindo writes, "To know, to possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilight obscure physical mentality into plenary spiritual illumination, ... to establish infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and to realise the immortal life in the body subjected to death and constant mutation—this is offered to us as the manifest destiny of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution."

Sri Aurobindo argues that he has envisaged a goal for man which does not spell the extinction of individual personality in the Absolute. He looks forward to an ideal which seeks to divinise the entire world. In the Vedānta terminology if I am to express it, it will be the *mahāvākya* of the Advaita: "Sarvam khalu idam Brahma". The ideal Advaitin would not identify the world with Brahman. He would deny its existence in Brahman. The *sāmānādhikarāyā* is secured by *bādha*, whereas Aurobindo would identify the world with the potential Brahman and seeks to divinise it. In order to affirm the one he does not deny the many. He seeks to divinise the many, for it is



positively present in the many. Sri Aurobindo does not negate the world of *samsāra*. One of the most outstanding characteristics of his system is its accordance to *manifest reality*, i.e., *samsāra*, a significant status. The absolutism of Śaṅkara does give it only impermanent axiological value, a relative ontological status. It is at best an illusory manifestation of Reality (*vivarta*). One has to negotiate to realise Brahman. There is no other way. The theistic schools of Vedānta accord no doubt some ontological status to manifest reality. But it is at best a means value when properly used. Otherwise it is a drag. It is looked upon as place for a sojourn, as in an inn, on our way. We are not to build our houses here. We must seek the Lord ere the blow falls. In short, no school of Vedānta accords axiological value to manifested Reality. This down-grading of the status of manifested Reality takes the edge off the social consciousness and an active social ethics. Its slant is towards the contemplation, i.e. *nivṛtti-mārga*. Aurobindo is opposed to this view. He wants us not to reject the gifts and values Nature has given man, i.e. body, sense, mind, the world etc., as disvalues or as a-moral but as positively capable of being divinised by the work of supermind. The present state continues because we are operating in the context of an ego stationed mind.

The human intellect is fragmentary in its functioning and is bound by several earth-bound limitations. It is at best an instrument. It cannot discover ends for us. It is, in the words of Tagore, 'all blade and no handle'. Its results are incomprehensive. There is no limit to the refinement and the sharpening of the human intellect. The intellect can catch only fragmentary representations of the Truth and not the entire truth. It is earth-bound and cannot illumine the spirit.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of ultimate Reality is Infinite which is all inclusive. It is rich like the Absolute of Hegel. Nothing is denied or lost in it. Ultimate reality cannot be comprehended by the conceptual process. We have to resort to intuition. In the parlance of theistic Vedānta, the powers of the Infinite are beyond comprehension. He puts it in a celebrated statement, "The logic of the infinite is the magic of the finite." "When we have passed beyond all knowing, we shall have knowledge." Its logic is the logic of a comprehensive inclusion and not one of negation. Its richness does not contradict its contents.

Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is neither a straight line, nor merely physical. It is a spiritual curve in which everything that went before must be taken up and integrated. When Sri Aurobindo



holds that intellect cannot give the realisation of ultimate Reality, his affirmation of intuition is not the same as that of Bergson. Bergson's intuition is not the sure luminous ineffable mystic experience of the Vedāntic jñāni. Further, Bergson does not envisage any goal for intuition as Aurobindo does. Aurobindo does not confine his principle of verifiability to the five senses or mere reason as the positivists do. To the positivist, 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' are both nonsense statements since they are not verifiable by sense experience.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of philosophy has great affinity to Vedānta. Philosophy for him is a value-science. It is not merely system building patiently using the perfect logical technique of modern analytical empiricism. Philosophy is not science become self-conscious. It does not make any pronouncements on the values of human life and destiny.

To Sri Aurobindo, philosophy is a discipline that bends all our resources to divinise our entire universe and self, by consciously, absolutely and unconditionally putting ourselves at the disposal of the super-mind. The crucifixion of ego must take place before the advent of super-mind. *Sādhana* is necessary. In the integral vision of Aurobindo, there is a wedlock of Absolutism and Humanism. In the words of Dr. Chub: "The divine and human are different to each other, only if the divine is turned into a conceptual abstraction and the human is pulled down to the infra-rational level which is the meeting point of man and animal. Sri Aurobindo makes the Divine lean to the human and raises the human to the divine." Secular humanism in the western thought, even in William James', keeps humanism chained to man's physical, vital and mental nature alone." The spiritual is ignored. Aurobindo widens the horizon. His is spiritual humanism.

Sri Aurobindo's central contention is that the present state of man's reason and intellect is a product of evolution in ignorance. It has to be divinised, we must rise higher. He does not condemn the intellect as the mere instrument of the animal in us as Dewey and others of this kind do. It can be divinised when the intellect is divinised, his creative work is no longer earth bound product. Great poetry and great works of art are the creations of the intellect anchored in the super-mind.

Sri Aurobindo is an unconquerable optimist. He believes in human progress. He argues that the advance in man's civilization and culture is the emergence of supra-mental beings called gnostic



beings. The supermind is the highest mode of the manifestation of the Divine consciousness and what makes the emergence of the supermind different from any previous emergence is that it was the power to transform and divinise the whole being to the very cells of his body.

The supermind of Aurobindo is not the same as the superman of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, in the words of Aurobindo, "hymned the olympian but presented him with the aspect of an *asura* with the convulsed visage of the Titan." The supermen have a clear joyous, radiant countenance. They are divine in their nature. The fervour and the strength of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience makes him speak in certain terms like the Hebrew prophets of old. He is optimistic to the core. His faith in man's potentialities is enormous. He is not unaware of the climate of the age, its pervasive dishonesty, corruption at all levels and the decrease in civility, the gap between the generations, the utter disregard for values like cult and chastity; in spite of all these, he holds firm like the dogmatic dialectical materialist to the inevitability of the emergence of the supermind. He writes: "The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil." ".....The descent of the supermind is an inevitable necessity in the logic of things and therefore sure. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by pulling down its present limits. But, what, how and by what degrees it will do is a thing that ought not to be said now; when the light is there, the light itself will do the work: when the supramental will stand in earth that will decide. It will establish a perfection, a harmony,....."

When the individual spiritual aspirant undertakes his intense endeavour, if he evokes his ego, the supermind "grips the thought, feeling and will of man, forging them with an organic unity round the soul centre, like them all, into the embrace of the divine. It is a life-transforming yoga, purporting to fulfil the Time Spirit by realising the ideal of human unity and divine perfection of human life."

Sri Aurobindo is a radical thinker in the sense that he builds a system from his spiritual experience, unlike the Vedāntic ācāryas. It is difficult to situate his system as a form of Vedānta. The concept of evolution is not new to Indian thought in its two forms—*prakṛti pariṇāma vada* of the Sāṅkhya and *Brahma pariṇāma vada* of some other thinkers. Aurobindo believes and envisages a growing into Perfection. We need an act of faith in Aurobindo before we accept his system. Its primary authority is his experience. He shows such a thought is not absent in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and the Gītā. His criticism of the Absolute Idealism of Śaṅkara is forcible and devasta-



ting, but he does not give us the exact passages of Śaṅkara and criticise them in detail. The criticism is largely on the whole.

When we seek to situate Sri Aurobindo in Indian thought what makes him out is the high esteem he holds for manifested Reality. His love of India and the sense of her spiritual mission and contribution are highlighted. He has thrown into relief the positive aspects of Vedānta. He sees that Indian thought is damaged by *Māyā Vāda* and *Sūnya Vāda*. He stands for an integral life and outlook that includes all. He has influenced some great thinkers of the West, e.g., Sorokin. He has made effort to put Indian spirituality in the map of the world and raise our generations drooping faith in it. He has awakened the minds of the Indians and the world to the priceless ageless three heritages, the spiritual, social and cultural. He has again and again declared in no uncertain terms that the basic truths of Indian spirituality are eternal and fundamental. They need to be recast from time to time in the idiom of the age with the spirit intact. The spirituality of Aurobindo is world affirming, for it infuses with dynamism all the fields of her expression. He valued greatly the doctrine of *svadharma*. He exhorted India to develop on her own lines and not on alien modes.

He looked towards a social order which he spelt as world-union. The world unity cannot be achieved by mere technology, rationalism, left wing politics or psycho-analysis. He felt all these will not work. The oneness has to be promoted on the psychological level in which case alone our structure would become meaningfully one. He has two classics on the psychology of social development, and the growth of humanity towards the ideal of Human Unity. In short, Aurobindo has presented us a positive spiritual ideal of the perfection of man. This he has done by resuscitating the spiritual traditions of India from the debris of its overgrowth that had covered its true face. He has linked the message of this spirituality with the findings of modern science and particularly the concept of evolution.

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SRI AUROBINDO AND  
TEILHARD DE CHARDIN :  
ON THE UNIFICATION  
OF MANKIND

The ideal of human unity, the dream or psychic prevision of several mystic writers, is increasingly being realised in our contemporary world. It is fascinating that two such most recent mystics and prophets of human destiny as Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin, who have actively contributed to human thought during the first half of this century, have an amazing convergence in their thinking on several subjects, particularly in this present context, on the unification of mankind as the inevitable future course of human evolution.

*MAN'S PLACE IN NATURE*

If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man, as he is, cannot be the last term of that evolution.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution is significantly concerned not only with the physical or cosmic evolution from matter to life and mind but also with the parallel evolution of the soul or consciousness. If evolution of consciousness is only a kind of an uncoiling process of what is coiled up in involution, humanity, according to Sri Aurobindo, is but a penultimate stage in terrestrial evolution. The involution of the spirit into matter, marking the beginning of terrestrial evolution must inevitably culminate in the ultimate evolution or emergence of the spirit out of the mental-man in the form of a spiritualised superman or a supramental being or what Sri Aurobindo calls the 'Gnostic being'.

Teilhard in this context says, "No proof exists that Man has come to the end of his potentialities, that he has reached the highest point. On the contrary, everything suggests that at the present time we are entering a peculiarly critical phase of super-humanisation",<sup>2</sup>



suggesting with Sri Aurobindo that humanity today is at the threshold of a new phase in human evolution.

In his evolutionary philosophy of the involution of the various levels of the divine consciousness at each major stage in terrestrial evolution, and in the idea of the integration of a higher principle with a lower, particularly the descent of the Self-Conscious into the mental being, accounting for the origin of man and his place in nature, Sri Aurobindo's concepts of emergent and integral evolution are admirably compatible with the conventional theory of organic evolution and will even compromise for the age-old and apparent controversy between the theories of creation and evolution—an amazing synthesis of the eastern and western philosophies of evolution, combined with his own unique mystic experiences and enlightenment.

Teilhard, with regard to this question of the involution of the divine spirit says, "By this first and fundamental contact of God with our kind, by virtue of the penetration of the Divine into our nature, a new life was born, an unexpected enlargement and 'obediential' prolongation of our natural capacities..."<sup>3</sup> thereby believing in the penetration of the Divine into man, but Teilhard's concept of the involution of the divine spirit at each major stage of the infra-human evolution of matter, seems not to be so explicit as that of Sri Aurobindo's. However, Teilhard is certain that "from the depths of Matter to the highest peak of the spirit, there is only *one evolution*",<sup>4</sup> implying cosmic evolution culminating in spiritual evolution, as Sri Aurobindo also believes. Teilhard mentions of a 'power' or 'consciousness' or a 'spiritual energy' and even a 'spark of the spirit' within atoms, electrons and elementary particles and when he says, "Matter and Spirit are not opposed as two separate things, as two natures, but as two directions of evolution within the world",<sup>5</sup> he perhaps agrees with Sri Aurobindo, though rather implicitly, with regard to the inherent nature of the spirit in matter and the parallel evolution of matter and spirit, right from the beginning of the cosmos.

### SPIRITUALISATION OF MAN

Physical or biological evolution of man has come to a standstill, and today we are almost at the zenith of our psycho-social evolution. However, man cannot transcend his *svabhāva* or *svadharma* beyond certain limitations.

Man is the most complex that has been created, the richest in content of consciousness and the curious ingeniousness of

his building. He is the head of the earthly creation, but he does not exceed it.<sup>6</sup>

If a supramental being is to appear in the terrestrial creation, it must be a new and independent manifestation, just as life and mind have manifested in Matter, so supermind must manifest there.<sup>7</sup>

Such a divine manifestation in man, according to Sri Aurobindo, did really occur once already in a body and mind adequately evolved or prepared for the reception of the divine spirit of the highest order, when man first appeared on this planet earth.

It is quite conceivable that such an evolution from below and such a descent from above co-operated in the appearance of humanity in earth-nature.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo hopes that a similar manifestation of the Supraconscious will appear again. Man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is essentially a spiritual being with spiritual aspirations to exceed his mental status and therefore, his mental evolution is only an additional aid for his spiritualisation.

Prof. Madhusudan Reddy says, "The spiritual aspiration is innate in man. Up till the advent of a developed thinking in Matter, evolution had been effected not by the self-aware aspiration, intention, will or seeking of the living being but subconsciously. But in man, the aspiration to exceed himself is deliberate and articulate."<sup>9</sup> "This spiritual man is the sign of the new evolution."<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo in this connection says, "The appearance in human being of a spiritual type resembling mental-animal humanity but already with the stamp of the spiritual aspiration on it would be the obvious method of Nature for the evolutionary production of the spiritual and supramental being."<sup>11</sup>

Teilhard also unquestionably accepts this idea of the spiritualisation of the mental being in saying that a growing number of minds, free thinkers as well as believers hope in the idea of a spiritual evolution of the universe, but perhaps he may differ from Sri Aurobindo with regard to the precise steps or stages by which such a spiritualisation may be brought about in humanity.

As for the steps towards spiritualisation, Sri Aurobindo envisages that this spiritualised or supramental stage will first be evident in a few individuals rather than in the whole humanity :



It is pertinently suggested that if such an evolutionary culmination is intended and man is to be its medium, it will be only a few especially evolved human beings who will form the new type and move towards the new life.<sup>12</sup>

It must be conceded at once that there is not the least probability or possibility of the whole human race rising *in a block* to the supramental level.<sup>13</sup>

The descent of the spirit or the Divine Self into man ennobles man, his body, mind, emotion, sensation and morals rendering his spiritualised body a fitting habitation for the Divine Self.

It is no longer the change of the body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body.<sup>14</sup>

### UNIFICATION OF MANKIND

Man's urge towards spirituality, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to reach the final manifestation of the spirit on earth, and the goal of humanity is a spiritual religion :

The goal of spirituality is the flowering of the Divine in collective humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Sri Aurobindo anticipates fervently in an 'intellectual religion of humanity' whereby the identity and unity or oneness of the spirit in all humanity is recognised towards the consummation of the ideal of human unity on earth.

A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one.<sup>16</sup>

It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge, bring about a kingdom of this Divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us, oneness with our fellowmen will become the leading principle of all life, not merely a principle of co-operation and a deeper brotherhood, a real inner sense of unity and equality and a common life.<sup>17</sup>

Teilhard also anticipates this oneness of humanity when he says, "How shall we so contrive matters that the human mass merges into a single whole, instead of ceaselessly scattering in dust?"<sup>18</sup> Both Sri

Aurobindo and Teilhard agree that such a union of humanity through external means like a catastrophe or coercion through war or enthusiasm or enslavement to a common task, is only short lived. Teilhard elaborates it saying :

Drawing closer of human units is not through coercion or enslavement to a common task, but through *unanimity* in a common spirit.<sup>19</sup>

We can progress only by uniting : this, as we have seen, is the law of life. But unification through coercion leads only to a superficial pseudo-unity.....It materialises in short, instead of spiritualising. Only unification through unanimity is biologically valid.<sup>20</sup>

Towards such a spiritual unification of mankind, Teilhard emphasises 'love for fellowmen and love for God' as chiefly instrumental when he says, "Love one another, recognising in the heart of each of you the same God who is being born....."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, his slogan, 'Faith in God and faith in the world' envisages both a vertical union with God and a horizontal union with fellowmen, as he expresses more clearly: "The higher life, the union, the long dreamt of consummation that has hitherto been sought *above*, in the direction of transcendency; should we not rather look for it *ahead*, in the prolongation of the inherent forces of evolution?"<sup>22</sup>

In such a united human society, Sri Aurobindo says, "There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellowmen is his 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.....But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth."<sup>23</sup>

It is here that both Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard seem to agree again about the Marxist relationship of the individual to the society but both differ from the Marxist materialistic approach in emphasising that a lasting unity of humanity comes from within the heart and soul of individuals and not from the exterior. It is by virtue of the recognition of the common Divine indwelling spirit in all humanity and therefore it is through spiritualised love of fellowmen and consequent unity with God that the kingdom of God spreads on earth.

Let there be revealed to us the possibility of believing at the same time and wholly in God and in the world, the one through the other.<sup>24</sup>



Such an ideal of human unity as an inevitable stage in cosmic evolution, preceding the consummation of the kingdom of God on earth will be realised, according to Teilhard, only in the fullness of time, when humanity through spiritualisation and collectivisation has reached a certain stage of maturity.

The Parousia, whereby the kingdom of God is to be consummated on earth, must out of physical and organic necessity, be only kindled between Heaven and a *mankind* which is biologically reached a certain critical evolutionary point of collective maturity.<sup>25</sup>

The kingdom of God begins within the human soul and spreads on to other souls and then to the whole humanity:

There has been the dream of psychic prevision of a fulfilment exceeding the individual transformation, a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, a reign of the spiritually perfect, a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life.<sup>26</sup>

Teilhard goes one step ahead of Sri Aurobindo, from beyond this unification of mankind, even unto the end of the human species and the end of the world itself, when the whole universe would have converged to the Universal and Omega Christ into whom the faithful lot of the humanity, as one body, would have been incorporated, in unity with God.

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T. S. Devadoss

SOCIO-POLITICAL  
EVOLUTION IN SRI  
AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

Interpreting the life of a great spiritual personality is always a difficult enterprise, and the life of Maharshi Aurobindo is peculiarly inscrutable. As Sri Aurobindo remarks : 'No one can write my life because it is not on the surface for men to see.'<sup>1</sup> While this paper does not attempt to analyse Sri Aurobindo's life, it does try to show the relationship between socio-political and spiritual concerns which needs to be analysed at every stage of Sri Aurobindo's formation, if his total vision and significance are to be rendered intelligible. These should be studied in their natural context, as forming parts of his vision of a spiritualized society. Understood in this sense, the relevance of ethical and spiritual considerations to his socio-political philosophy becomes evident.

The sage of Pondicherry, as Sri Aurobindo is known to the world, strikes us as a thinker of 'far ranging metaphysical horizons'; his thought pursues a distant visionary goal of a metaphysical system of cosmic consciousness. Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary nationalist, turned *mahā-yogi* with spiritual outlook in life, represented the spiritual tradition of India. It was C. R. Das who described Sri Aurobindo as 'the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism, and the lover of humanity.'<sup>2</sup> It was in the Alipur Jail, that spiritual illumination dawned on him. In response to an inner call, Sri Aurobindo left the field of politics and retired first to the French town of Chandernagore and ultimately settled at Pondicherry in the south for concentrated attainment and manifestation of the Supermind. There, he remained from 1910 till his *samādhi* in 1950. Sri Aurobindo, at the age of seventy-eight, departed from his body, 'leaving a distinct place for himself in Indian politics, and the world of philosophy and religion.' Throughout his life, Sri Aurobindo preached and lived the freedom of man. He represented not only the nationalist mind of India but based

his political philosophy on the true spirit of Indian culture which lays great emphasis on moral and spiritual values.

Sri Aurobindo's own philosophy lays great emphasis on reconciliation between different points of view, between theory and practice, between metaphysics and ethics in the broad sense of the realisation of a spiritual ideal. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo laid great emphasis on the spiritual basis of life. The integral idealism of Sri Aurobindo is truly a spiritual philosophy. Its material is provided by a developing pattern on spiritual experiences and realisations. Sri Aurobindo is indeed 'the consummate expression of the spirit of synthesis inherent in Indian tradition.'

Man's social, political, cultural and religious ideals or philosophies are synthesized into a whole ; and these cannot be compartmentalized. Thus, a man's social philosophy is a segment of his total world view which he cherishes or which is in the process of change. His philosophy of life is the product of the cumulative heritage of the group in which he is born and it is modified by inner evolution of the individual as well as influenced by external forces-local and world-wide. This was the case with Sri Aurobindo. In fact, Sri Aurobindo is a new type of thinker, who combines in his vision, the alacrity of the West-with the illumination of the East.

Although Sri Aurobindo is regarded as a sage, mystic and metaphysician, he was not secluded from worldly activities. In fact, the last two chapters of *The Life Divine* are splendid exercises in the field of idealistic and utopian social and political thought. In all his great works, Sri Aurobindo is concerned with metaphysical problems as well as with problems of spiritualized society and the gnostic community. Even though Sri Aurobindo formulates the ideal of the realization of a gnostic supramental consciousness, he discusses such social and sociological problems as the organization of the gnostic community and the relation of the members of the spiritualized society and the gnostic community with the members of the normal human society.

Sri Aurobindo's cosmic vision unfolds the ascent of man into the Life Divine and the descent of the Supermind into the realm of Nature. He has outlined a profoundly novel conception of the evolutionary process which goes far beyond the biological realm.

Spencer's, Llyod Morgan's, and Bergson's theories constitute the progressive landmarks in the field of evolution. Each marks an advance on its predecessor. But finally we are driven to the conclusion that no theory of evolution has succeeded in explaining the facts. We



have to fall back upon the conception of the world process as the *lila* or sport of the Divine Will. The infinite spirit is experimenting with himself. We have to view this experiment in the light of a great adventure wherein the spirit of the scientist joins hands with that of the creative artist. Of the why of this adventure we may not ask. Enough unto us is the understanding of the temporal process. If the great formula propounded by the Upaniṣadic thinkers-*Tattvamasi* and if the process of biological evolution is also an aspect of truth, then we may contend that the only philosophical concept which will be useful to us in understanding evolution is what we may conveniently call 'Open Evolution'.

Against this background, the study of the concept of evolution in Sri Aurobindo's socio-political philosophy is of supreme importance. Sri Aurobindo was an idealist who emphasized on the theory of spiritual human evolution. The means for the achievement of the evolutionary process is through his 'Integral Yoga' which aims at the welfare of not humanity as a whole but for a complete transformation of material consciousness itself- 'the creation of a new heaven and new earth'.

Sri Aurobindo starts in 'The Life Divine' with the perception and justification of the fundamental and the constant human aspiration of a divine life here upon earth, namely, to know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation.'<sup>8</sup> This constant human aspiration has been, he points out, the earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thought, and, since it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns back, it also seems to be the inevitable and ultimate preoccupation of his. Even today, the humanity is not satisfied by the victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature; it is preparing itself to return to its primeval longings, viz., 'God, Light, Freedom and Immortality'. These persistent ideals, however, appear as contrary to our ordinary material intellect and to our normal experience. But Sri Aurobindo advises us to look at them from a 'mere deliberate view of the world's working.' For, we shall, then find them to be the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences, which, though abnormal, can be attained by a revolutionary individual effort or by an evolutionary general progression.



Sri Aurobindo says that to speak of evolution of Life in Matter, and of evolution of Mind in Life is nothing but a mere narration of the phenomenon of evolution; it can become an explanation of it only when 'we accept the Vedāntic solution that Life is already involved in Matter, and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled-life, Life a form of veiled consciousness.'<sup>4</sup> And if we accept the Vedāntic solution, there will be little objection to admit further, that the mental consciousness may itself be a form and a veil of higher spiritual states beyond Mind. The human aspiration for a divine life upon earth would, then, present itself 'as simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind, and appears to be as natural, true and just as the impulse towards life, which she had planted in certain forms of Matter, or, the impulse towards Mind, which she has planted in certain forms of Life.'<sup>5</sup> This perennial aspiration of man to possess a divine life upon earth, says Sri Aurobindo, is justified by the 'deliberate reason' as well as 'intuition of mankind.' This aspiration is a 'cosmic necessity', and therefore, the will to escape from a cosmic necessity, because it is difficult to justify by immediate tangible results, and slow in regulating its operation, is nothing but a 'revolt against the secret, mightier will of the great Matter.'

But all our attempts at the perception and justification of the constant human aspiration for a divine life upon earth, can have no base unless we are able to say, with the Upaniṣads, says Sri Aurobindo that 'Matter also is Brahman', and unless also we are able to recognise a series of ascending terms viz., Life, Mind, and Supermind, and the grades that link Mind to Supermind, viz., Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Over Mind, between Matter and Brahman. For without the former, the human aspiration remains always an imanigation and an unreality; and without the latter, the identification between Brahman or Spirit and Matter remains always an artificial creation of thought. Sri Aurobindo asks us to ascend above the experience of the Static Self in order to have the experience of the Supermind, so that we get thereupon a complete knowledge of the Self as well as of the world. He calls the consciousness of the Supermind as the 'Integral Spiritual Consciousness', because it reveals to us integral self-knowledge as also integral world-knowledge.

The descent of Supermind in the Gnostic Being, would not only found all his living on an intimate sense and effective realisation of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life, but would create a harmonic unity also with the still surviving mental world, even if that world remained altogether a world of Ignorance.



In the emergence of the Gnostic Being would be the hope of a more harmonious evolutionary order in terrestrial nature.

The Gnostic Individual would be the consummation of the spiritual man. According to Sri Aurobindo, 'man is a spirit using the mind, life and body for an individual and a communal experience and self-manifestation in the universe.'<sup>6</sup> The individual is a centre of the whole universal consciousness. Man's aim is to universalise and impersonalise himself, in order to manifest the Divine. Yet, he is called upon to preserve his individuality, even when he reaches the widest universality of consciousness. It is the ego that is to be uprooted. The individual is an ontological reality, eternal as the Absolute, non-existent but existent in and through him. In short, the individual is a microcosm in macrocosm. There is one indivisible matter, life and mind in the universe. Because of the spiritual conception of the being and destiny of man, Sri Aurobindo does not stand for the submergence of the individual in the larger social aggregation.

The family, like all other social institutions is, according to Sri Aurobindo, a creation of man's vital nature. It is the competitive individualistic impulse which determines the initial character of the family. The origin of the clan and the tribe has its roots in the vital need of human nature for an associational corporate life, and the real basis is given to it 'by the inevitable physical growth of the family into clan or tribe.'<sup>7</sup> The community stands as a middle-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity and it exists no merely for itself, but for the one and the other to help them to fulfil each other.'<sup>8</sup>

The conception of society as an organism is found in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. We should note that since Sri Aurobindo is a metaphysician who laid greater emphasis on the supraterrrestrial aspect of the individual, he does not pursue the organic conception too far, but uses it only to illustrate his view that society is non-mechanical. The central political concept of Western political idealism is 'conformity to the society,' the key political concept of Sri Aurobindo's political philosophy is reciprocity and mutuality between the individual and the society.

Sri Aurobindo advocated the fundamental unity of all life. He stands for the integration of values of life and humanity with those of mystic realization and spiritual self-perfection. He presents to mankind an ideal that is neither the utmost development of life in utter disregard of the spirit nor a mystic realization of the spirit in

ascetic recoil from life, but a vital reconstruction of life, state and society in terms of integral and spiritual realisation of the spirit. For Sri Aurobindo, *sādhana* is the way of transcendence shown to humanity. For him, it is the spirit alone that saves. *Karma Yoga* is nothing but the application of *yoga* and Vedanta to life.

To Sri Aurobindo, the state represents the greatest instrument of transition from an infra-rational organic state to that of rational society. He is opposed to the attribution of any ethical and moral character to the state, the state is at best only a mechanical convenience to realise social and ethical ideals. It is in terms of this opposition to the state that one must understand his advocacy of spiritual anarchism as well as his unique conception of nationalism. But when we describe Sri Aurobindo's thought as spiritual anarchism, we must yet remember that his characterization is only provisional, Sri Aurobindo's anarchism is an autonomy of the spirit; it is an expression of the autonomy of the spirit rather than of the Intellect or the vital impulse. Ultimately, Sri Aurobindo envisages the divinisation of the individual and collective life, rather than a mere state of even spiritual anarchism. Similarly, the nationalism of Sri Aurobindo is not a mere adoration of the race but an inward religious principle, an expression of the individual worship of the Motherland as the Mother Goddess. For him, therefore, nationalism is an inward religious discipline, a spiritual *sādhana*.

In view of the acceptance of democracy in its moral and spiritual sense by Sri Aurobindo, one would expect to find sharp criticisms on his part of non-democratic philosophies of life. Sri Aurobindo is apprehensive of the tendency of modern socialism towards the elimination of a real liberty and towards imperialistic totalitarianism. He does not regard the communist ideals as the ultimate one, for the really ultimate ideal according to him would be a synthesis of individualism and communism.

Truly, Sri Aurobindo has given to the world a very comprehensive philosophical system, a new speculative synthesis, an inspiring *Weltanschauung*. Above all, he has given to the world, a comprehensive way of integral living which points out the possibility of synthetic integration of the material and spiritual values of life, and to a reconstruction of human life and society on the basis of dynamic 'truth vision'. This is the crux of his spiritual evolution.

In Maharshi Aurobindo, we can catch the voice of the conscience of India itself, in him, to note of her ancient wisdom still rings clear and true and the vitality of her spiritual culture is expressed perhaps best in this that his thoughts and reflections have the greatest relevance



to the problems of today. In him, we can see a facet of the rich multiplicity of India's spiritual heritage. Sri Aurobindo with his profound metaphysical speculations, describing the advent and adventure of a superconsciousness in the world of Nature, with his evolutionary vision of a total transformation, a final consummation of matter into spirit, of animal vitality into mystical ecstasy, stands for the metaphysical and synthetic genius of our country. *Bhāratadeśa* has always recognised her cultural identity in terms of her great philosophers and saints and Maharshi Aurobindo is undoubtedly a star of no mean magnitude in this exalted galaxy. At first, it might appear indeed that Sri Aurobindo's thoughts and reflections do not touch the exigencies of our immediate practice; it might appear as if his philosophy makes no contact with the concrete issues of today, or with the realities and powers of the political arena. But on deeper reflection, we can come to say that in a peculiar sense, an idea or concept may have a power or energy far greater than that of mere facts. For a philosophical vision has a formative and transformative virtue by which it can shape and mould the texture of the nation's life. Understood in this sense, few things can indeed be more practical than a vital philosophy. To dismiss, therefore, the profound reflections of Mahāyogi Aurobindo as idle theorizing would be merely to betray our own shortsightedness. Ultimately, Maharshi Aurobindo is a luminary of the world and not of the nation alone. His message of 'Integralism' carries across the problems and perplexities of India to the world at large. In this time of travail and crisis, when new modes of life are struggling to be born amidst the confusion, the anguish and the torment of the modern world, Sri Aurobindo—the *avātar* of this Yuga has shown us the path to perfection and peace.

To conclude in the words of Dr T. M. P. Mahadevan, 'The greatest tribute that we can pay to Sri Aurobindo is to resolve not to rest until we reach the goal which is spiritual perfection.'<sup>9</sup>

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V. Madhusudan Reddy

EVOLUTION AND HUMAN  
DESTINY IN  
SRI AUROBINDO

In the beginning all this Universe was non-Existent and Unmanifest, from which this manifest Existence was born. Itself created itself; none other created it. Therefore they say of it the well and beautifully made.

*Taittiriya Upanishad\**

The one Godhead secret in all beings, all-pervading, the inner Self of all, presiding over all action, witness, conscious knower and absolute...the One in control over the many who are passive to Nature, fashions one seed in many ways.

*Svetasvatara Upanishad<sup>1</sup>*

Who has perceived this truth occult, that the Child gives being to the Mothers by the workings of his nature? An offspring from the lap of many Waters, he comes forth from them a seer possessed of his whole law of nature. Manifested, he grows in the lap of their crookednesses and becomes high, beautiful and glorious.

*Rg Veda<sup>2</sup>*

The concept of evolution is the keynote of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga. His theory of spiritual evolution explains both the process and facts of evolution as well as brings out its inner significance and purpose.

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\*Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmananda Valli. 7.

According to Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is the basis and source of creation. Evolution therefore is the 'evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self formation till the form can reveal the indwelling spirit'. Consciousness, the Divine Reality is at the back of the material universe. The supreme spirit has concealed itself in inconscient matter and lies hidden within its veil of insensibility. Evolution, therefore, is a growing of the Self in material Nature to the conscious possession of its own spiritual being. "It begins with form—apparently a form of Force—in which a spirit is housed and hidden; it ends in a spirit which consciously directs its own force and creates or assumes its own forms for the free joy of its being in Nature. Nature holding her own self and spirit involved and suppressed within herself, an imprisoned master of existence subjected 'to her ways of birth and action,...commences the evolution: the spirit holding Nature conscious in himself, complete by his completeness, liberated by his liberation, perfected in his perfection, crowns the evolution.'"<sup>3</sup> All human births are the births of this spirit and self which puts forth a soul in Nature in its evolutionary march. For all birth, indeed, is a progressive self-finding and the sure means of self-realisation. "To grow in knowledge, in power, in delight, love and oneness, towards the infinite light, capacity and bliss of spiritual existence, to universalise ourselves till we are one with all being, and to exceed constantly our present limited self till it opens fully to the transcendence in which the universal lives and to base upon it all our becoming, that is the full evolution of what now lies darkly wrapped or works half-evolved in nature."<sup>4</sup>

The Western idea of evolution is only a statement of the formation of our being and not an explanation. It is interested only in the physical and biological data of Nature and does not account for its working. The Sankhya idea of evolution, no doubt, being the fruit of philosophical intuition, gives us the psychological elements of the total evolutionary process but ignores the details of the physical labour of Nature. It not only deals with the active outer Force of the process but also discovers 'the concealed sustaining spiritual entity', though by an obsession for analytical intellect it sees an original, unbridgeable gulf between Soul and Force. Whereas the modern science sees in the working of evolution only the force of an unresting material necessity but is blind to the miracle involved in each of its steps. It can only describe the movement of evolution but cannot account for or explain what evolution is. It does not speak of that which evolves, nor from what and by what force of necessity it evolves. It is content merely to affirm an original eternal substance which by the very nature of its own inherent energy produces a series of basic forms constituting an upward movement of organised energy and its evolutionary consequences.



But it does not and cannot explain the reality of this substance nor the essential nature of this energy. The evolutionary development of the non-material from Matter, of Life and Mind and soul, is not known to science. Is man only vitalised matter? Is soul merely a continuation or creation of mentalised life? These and allied questions are outside its ambit.

Evolution in its intrinsic sense implies the necessity of previous involution. "We are bound thus to suppose", says Sri Aurobindo, "that all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. The Spirit which manifests itself here in a body, must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot, formation and particle of matter; life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent, inactive or concealed active powers in all the operations of material energy."<sup>o</sup> This Spirit in things, this inner Being and Power is not apparent in the initial stages of the evolutionary process; it reveals itself progressively in the increasing light of its self-effectuations. Life takes control of matter and works out in it the many figures and patterns of its creative force. Similarly mind seizes on life and makes it a wonder instrument of its will and intelligence. And the soul too processing the mind lifts it through its love of beauty, goodness and truth towards the joy of some higher life and existence. Through all these ascending steps is always revealed the self-manifesting spirit in things. Physical evolution fixes its eye only on the mechanical aspect of creation. It does not offer the greater and subtler reaches of the self-disclosing Spirit in Nature. "The physical evolution is only an outward sign, the more and more complex and subtle development of a supporting structure, the growing exterior metre mould of form which is devised to sustain in matter the rising intonations of the spiritual harmony. The spiritual significance finds us as the notes rise; but not till we get to the summit of the scale can we command the integral meaning of that for which all these first formal measures were made the outward lines, the sketch or the crude notation. Life itself is only a coloured vehicle, physical birth a convenience for the greater and greater births of the Spirit."<sup>o</sup>

The spiritual process of evolution is thus more a self-creation than a creation, for it is not creation of what never was, but a bringing out of what is implicit and already present in the Being. It is a loosing forth of the involved Spirit, a letting out of its truth into the workings of Nature. The Infinite, as the Upaniṣads say, brings out of it eternally, even as a spider, the entire universe of which the last descending base is the Inconscience. Thence starts the return movement, the ascent towards the Infinite in progressive forms of self-



manifestation. Evolution is the process of endless self-manifestation of the inherent Spirit, *asya mahimanam*, an Unveiling of a manifold Light and Power which is hidden and coiled up in Matter. The yogic experience of the awakening of the *Kundalini*—the rising of the flaming Energy from the *muladhara* up the ladder of the spinal chord till at the summit it becomes one with the Consciousness and Force of the Supreme, offers a parallel to the evolutionary process. As Nature rises in the scale, the soul emerges as the liberating light—liberating it from its manifold ignorance and unites it with the Spirit. It is thus that the soul comes to realise that its births were the many forms which the eternal Spirit assumes to help it know itself as the Spirit. This liberation into the consciousness and nature of the Spirit is the goal of evolution.

The Spirit itself is an infinite, eternal, conscious being which expresses itself in a universe that bears testimony to the delight of its own infinite self-variation. Therefore all things here are forms, expressions of the Spirit: Mind is the overt working of the supreme consciousness, Life is the power of being of Spirit, Matter itself a form of *Saccidānanda*.. According to the materialistic theory of evolution the world is a development out of indeterminate Matter helped by an unaccountable Nature-Force. Creation has no purpose, no *raison d'être*, has no cause; it is only an automatic deployment, inexplicable and without any aim. Life and Mind are merely epi-phenomenal in nature,—only operations of Matter. The world is regarded by the Vedic seers as a triple creation—material, vital and mental, but ruled by a single Law, *Rta*, formulating itself differently according to the plane in which it works. There is a superconscient too known to them which accounts for the secret intelligence operative in evolution, and which constitutes the supreme Law behind it. The *Gītā* refers to this as the one who “sits in the hearts of all creatures and turns all creatures mounted on a machine by his *māyā*.”

Evolution is a dynamic law, an intensely surprising and supple, secret process of the earth-nature. To begin with there is the evolution of organised forms by the working of material forces. This is followed by a hierarchy of living forms by the working of the released life-forces. Nature then takes the next step of the evolution of mind in living bodies and consequently more and more conscious lives are organised by the functioning of developing mindforces. “But this is not the end; for there are higher powers of consciousness beyond mind which await their turn and must have their act in the great play, their part of the creative Lila.”<sup>7</sup>

Matter, which is the medium of the evolutionary process, is not an absolute inconscience. It is an obscured consciousness limited by



its own blind and dumb movement. It is this involved consciousness of Matter which contains all the secret powers of the Spirit, the omniscience and omnipotence of the Eternal and the Infinite. "The evolution of forms and powers by which Matter will become more and more conscious until passing beyond form and life and mind it becomes aware, with the supernal awareness, of the eternal and infinite Spirit in his own highest ranges, this is the meaning of earth-existence. The slow self-manifesting birth of God in Matter is the purpose of the terrestrial Lila."<sup>8</sup> As the *Upaniṣad* says of Bhrigu, the son of Varuṇa, *sa tapas taptva annam brahmeti vyajanat*. "He having practised austerity discovered that Matter was the Brahman." As Sri Aurobindo says : "Matter is at once a force and a substance. Matter is original being, Brahman, made concrete in atomic division. Matter is original substance-force, Brahman-Shakti, made active in an obscure involution of the Spirit's powers in a self-forgetful nescience. Matter-force casts matter-substance, material Shakti casts Matter Brahman into form expressive of its own most characteristic powers. When that has been done, the physical world is ready for the splendid intrusion of conscious Life into the force-driven inertia of material substance."<sup>9</sup> Matter, Life and Mind are not only forces but substances, each of different kind and degree. They are the derivatives and modifications of the original force-substance of the Spirit.

Behind the gross sheath of Matter are other sheaths of the subtle physical which make transmission between Spirit and Matter possible. This is the secret of all evolutionary manifestation. "There is a physical life-plane proper to the vital physical operation of Nature. There is a physical mind-plane proper to a mental physical operation of Nature. There is a physical supermind plane proper to the supramental physical operation of Nature. There is too a plane of physical spirit-power or infinite physical operations of Nature. It is only when we have discovered and separated these planes of Nature and of our physical being and analysed the synthesis of their contributions to the whole play that we shall discover how the evolution of vital, mental and spiritual consciousness became possible in inconscient Matter."<sup>10</sup> Beyond these are the many layers of Life, of Mind, many planes of Supermind, of Consciousness-Force, of Bliss and of Infinite Being. It is on these that the physical depends for its origination and sustenance, for it is these higher planes that promote evolution by constantly releasing their unseen energies into the physical.

Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind and Existence—Consciousness—Force—Bliss are the major grades of the evolutionary ascent from Inconscience to the Superconscience. The principle of Life is always present in all modes of material existence, helping them, organising

them as the maid of Matter and not as its master. But above the material universe there is a plane of Life, free and dominating, that seeks to pour into material Nature its forces and powers giving birth to several forms of life—plants, birds, insects, animals, etc. A new world of Life appears in the world of Matter which surpasses it in its nature. Material Nature is thus only a support and means for the manifestation of Life-forms and then Mind-forms, slowly leading to the liberation and manifestation of the indwelling supreme Spirit. Sri Aurobindo is insistent that "Involution of a superconscious Spirit in inconscient Matter is the secret of this visible and apparent world and the evolution of the Superconscious out of inconscient Nature is the keyword of the earth's riddle. Earth-life is the self-chosen habitation of a great Divinity and his aeonic will is to change it from a blind prison into his splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple."<sup>11</sup> If involution was not the truth, then there would not be any evolution but only a succession of ever new things arbitrarily willed and executed by some inexplicable external agency or cosmic chance. If all were only a play of chance then man would as well be the crown of the evolutionary process. But because the infinite Spirit is concealed in the process, the evolution of a power higher than Mind is inevitable.

It is the Superconscious that descended step by step till it gets involved in material Inconscience, and it is the Superconscious that by a gradual ascent from Matter manifests itself increasingly through emerging grades of consciousness. In the process of evolution, therefore, one concealed principle emerges after another till the Divine completely manifests itself. Life and Mind have emerged from Matter, and Nature has yet to deliver the creative consciousness of the Supreme, namely, the Supermind. The evolution of consciousness in Matter through a constantly developing self-formations, till the form can fully manifest the Divine is then the goal of Nature's evolutionary endeavour.

Evolution has two aspects,—the outward and visible process of physical evolution, and an invisible process of soul-evolution through repeated births. The former by itself would signify only a cosmic evolution. It is only rebirth that helps the individual soul in a decisive victory over material Nature by an increasing manifestation of consciousness in it. Admitting that the world is a manifestation of the eternal Absolute in Time, admitting even rebirth and the re-ascent of the Spirit in evolution it can be argued that there is no purpose in creation for all is there in the Infinite. Man himself, if he has to evolve, may move in larger circles of his own mentality and not necessarily reach either a supramental or any other higher status.



The facts of Science also show that a type 'can vary within its own specification of nature' but not go beyond it. It may even be said that the constant creation of visible types is no undeniable proof of evolution. The idea of human progress itself, and more so his birth into a new kind of being that never existed before and has yet to evolve is most probably an illusion, for all the ancient theories only envisage an escape from his embodied existence into some heaven or plane of Spirit.

This line of reasoning has a considerable cogency, but it cannot hold good. There is a secret Consciousness in or behind Matter which alone is responsible for producing the many forms of developing Consciousness and truly this urge for progressive manifestation is the secret purpose and intention in the evolution. This element of purpose in the nisus "is the translation of self-operative Truth of Being into terms of self-effective Will-Power of that Being, and, if consciousness is there, such Will-Power must also be there and the translation is normal and inevitable".<sup>12</sup> It is the truth of being that inevitably fulfils itself in the evolutionary process.

The metaphysical objection to any teleology in evolution seems to stem from the fact that the Absolute can have no purpose in creation except the joy of creation itself. But the material world is not in itself an integral totality; it is only part of a greater whole. In addition to the unregenerate non-material powers already present and involved in it, it admits a descent into it of the same powers from the higher whole to deliver their kindred movements here from the limitations of material existence. As Sri Aurobindo says: "A manifestation of the greater powers of Existence till the whole being itself is manifest in the material world in the terms of a higher, a spiritual creation, may be considered as the teleology of the evolution. This teleology does not bring in any factor that does not belong to the totality; it proposes only the realisation of the totality in the part. There can be no objection to the admission of a teleological factor in a part movement of the universal totality, if the purpose...is the perfect manifestation there of all the possibilities inherent in the total movement. All exists here, no doubt, for the delight of existence, all is a game or Lila; but a game too carries within itself an object to be accomplished and without the fulfilment of that object would have no completeness of significance...Ananda is the secret principle of all being and the support of all activity of being; but Ananda does not exclude a delight in the working out of a Truth inherent in being, immanent in the Force or Will of being, upheld in the hidden self-awareness of its Consciousness-Force which is the dynamic and



executive agent of all its activities and the knower of their significance." <sup>13</sup>

The development of a superior form of life out of a preceding less evolved form,—a successive creation with a purpose, seems therefore to be indisputable. First the creation of Matter, then the evolution of Life in Matter, followed by the evolution of Mind in vitalised Matter is the necessary succession in the evolution. The priority of lower forms of life was not unknown to ancient Indian thinkers. The Upaniṣads mention the gods declaring the many animal forms as insufficient vehicles and finally entering the human form when they saw it to be excellently made and fit for their cosmic functions. The Purāṇas too state that the animal creation preceded the human. And the Tantras speak of a soul seeking salvation through the human vehicle after taking several births in plant and animal forms.

The destiny of man has to be judged against this background of a developing evolutionary process. The change from the animal to the human character of existence involves a steady development of the physical organisation capable of a rapid progression, a reversal or turn over of the consciousness, a widening and heightening of capacity which makes the old animal faculties more plastic and subtle so as to take up a human intelligence and at the same time develops greater and higher powers proper to the new type of being. The action of evolutionary Nature in any type of being and consciousness is first to develop and perfect the type through an increasing complexity and subtilisation till it is ready for her bursting of the shell and the ripened decisive emergence that truly constitutes the new stage in evolution. If the next step in evolution is the emergence of the supramental being, the stress of spirituality in the race may be taken as a sure sign of Nature's intention to this effect. It is also the sign of the capacity of man to operate in himself or aid Nature in the transition. The very urge and aspiration persistent in him is proof of Nature's will for a higher way of fulfilment and the emergence of a superior race.

In the earlier stages of evolution Nature was keen on the change of physical organisation to allow the emergence of a corresponding consciousness. This was necessitated mainly by the insufficiency of the force of consciousness already in formation to effect a change in the body. But in man evolution can and must be effected through a transmutation of his consciousness, for from the point of view of inner life a change of consciousness is of major significance whereas the physical change has only an instrumental value. Man can therefore help Nature consciously in his own physical and spiritual change and transformation. All this is valid in relation to the surface evolution of



man, the evolution of consciousness in the physical. But in the progress of the soul from lower to higher grade through rebirth the psychic entity plays a key role. It is the psychic part of the human personality that is capable of helping evolution rapidly for it alone is the master of the instrumental personality in Nature. When this secret indwelling spirit emerges its only demand will be an irrevocable total spiritual existence. But in the earth life this can be effected only by a change of consciousness from the mental to the supramental.

Man's secret but constant urge for spirituality is certainly the covert insistence of the Consciousness-Force of the being towards the next step of its manifestation. No doubt, the spiritual urge has largely been other-worldly. But this was mainly because of urgent necessity of coming out of the fundamental material Inconscience. The other and dynamic side of the spiritual urge has also been dominating the minds of the ancients—"the aspiration to a spiritual mastery and mutation of Nature, to a spiritual perfection of the being, a divinisation of the mind, the heart and the very body: there has even been the dream or a psychic prevision of a fulfilment exceeding the individual transformation, a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, a reign of the spiritually perfect, a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life."<sup>14</sup> Man certainly cannot be the last term of evolution for evolution fundamentally is an evolution of consciousness and mind is too limited a form and instrumentation of consciousness.

In the beginning, evolutionary Nature must have presented itself as an aeonic spectacle of boundless inconscience, a cosmic abyss of meaninglessness, empty of cause or purpose, an 'immeasurable and interminable display of Matter'. After several aeons perhaps, it got a little organised and adapted itself to the development of life. But life living for itself with no end or significance, busy multiplying into numberless forms would reduce creation into an immense cosmic desert. But Nature betrays more clearly the existence of a secret Spirit when mind appears on the surface. As the plant contains in itself the obscure possibility of the animal, as the animal betrays in its movements the thinking human individual, so also the mental being promises to evolve into the fully conscious, spiritual being capable of discovering and manifesting the highest Spirit. The evolution of the spiritual man does not mean the perfection of the intellectual man. It means the emergence of a spiritual being in a living and thinking body. The spirit is something other and greater than mind, and will be the final evolutionary emergent as it is the original involutionary element. "Evolution" in the words of Sri

Aurobindo, "is an inverse action of the involution : what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence."<sup>15</sup> In case of the incomplete emergence of the soul the spiritual element in man is not distinguishable from the mental and vital formation. There can be a decisive emergence of soul in which the being can separate itself from thought and life-movements, and know itself as the spirit ensouling Matter. It is these liberations that help the individual in his spiritual evolution in Nature. It is only after this final emergence and liberation of the soul from the triple domination of body, life and mind, that the individual experiences the action in him of an inherent, intrinsic, self-existent consciousness, moves in an inner light and follows the inner guidance of the psychic entity. This amounts to a beginning of the psychic and spiritual transformation. But this is only the beginning and it is possible to go much farther. For, the spiritual being, once inwardly liberated, "can develop in mind the higher states of being that are its own natural atmosphere and bring down a supramental energy and action which are property to the Truth consciousness; the ordinary mental instrumentation, life-instrumentation, physical instrumentation even, could then be entirely transformed and become parts no longer of an ignorance however much illumined, but of a supramental creation which would be the true action of a spiritual truth-consciousness and knowledge."<sup>16</sup>

Nature's final intention is neither to promote other-worldliness, nor the cessation of the being into the pure existence of the Spirit, for then her insistence on mental evolution would have no purpose. Her intention is a comprehensive change of the being, the complete transformation of the physical, vital and mental. A pure spiritual absolutism no doubt helps in the realisation of the being's supreme self-hood, breaks the downward gravitation of the material Inconscience and makes the emergence of the spiritual possible. Until the spiritual consciousness is fully established in the being a proper push towards the extension of spirituality to all the parts of human personality is not possible. The realisation of the pure spiritual consciousness is therefore the first object in the evolution of the spiritual man. This evolutionary endeavour of Nature has proceeded on four main lines, namely, religion, occultism, spiritual thought and an inner spiritual realisation and experience. If the first three have been the approaches to the inner being, the fourth has been the decisive avenue of entry. If man has to rise beyond the manifold ignorance he must know himself fully and discover and utilise all his potentialities. This he can only do through occultism. He must also know the hidden Power, the Cosmic Self or Creator that



controls the world and be able to be in constant contact with Him. This is the field of religion. But if this knowledge has to be something more than a mere revelation it has to be corroborated with the mastery of spiritual philosophy. It is at this stage that occultism, religion and spiritual philosophy must learn to subordinate themselves to the needs of the inner spirit and allow it to develop its own truth and reality. None of these three lines of approach can by themselves accomplish the task of creating in the mental man the spiritual being. It is only through an inner realisation of the respective goals of these approaches by a transmutation of the consciousness and by a liberation of the spirit from its present triple bondage to mind, life and body that the spiritual being can emerge. Following this line the highest emergence is that of the liberated man who has realised the supreme Self within him, has become one with the Eternal, and entering into the cosmic consciousness still accepts life and action. This means a total liberation of soul, mind, heart, and action and a casting of them all into the truth and nature of the cosmic Reality. Beyond this there is only the supramental ascent or the supreme Transcendence.

It is usual that spirituality looks more beyond life than towards it. Moreover spiritual change has largely been individual and not collective. Mental intelligence is incapable of changing the principle or persistent character of human life. It is only the Supermind,—a higher instrumental dynamics than mind that can radically transform the nature of man which is presently governed by Ignorance. Not only a revelation of the Spirit, but a radical and integral transformation of Nature is therefore the goal of evolution. Nature thus struggles to manifest fully the embodied life of the Spirit. Till now the evolutionary Nature has made a few sensitive and developed souls aware of the eternal Being within them which they really are. But this is not sufficient for the creation of a new order of being in terrestrial existence. The spiritual man has evolved, but not the supramental being. This will happen only when the principle of spirituality asserts its sovereignty and permanently establishes itself on the earth nature. This can be done only by the triple transformation: first the psychic change, then the spiritual transformation followed by the crowning movement, the supramental transmutation. The psychic change brings about a total conversion of the nature of the life-mind-body complex into a soul-instrumentation. With the spiritual change there comes about descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Bliss into the whole being. But it is the supramental transformation that brings about the total and radical transmutation of even the darkest and most inconscient parts of mind, life and body.



In his self man is a unique Person, but in his manifestation of self a multiperson. He fully succeeds in being a master of himself only when the Person takes full control of his multipersonality and governs it. And this becomes possible only if he finds his central being, the soul. The rule of these different selves, in man,—the Physical, Vital, Mental and Psychic Puruṣas is at the root of the stages of the development of his personality. The first condition of the soul's complete emergence is its complete contact in the surface being with the spiritual Reality. This contact can be achieved through the thinking mind or through the heart. All this presupposes the purification of the outer nature, a change of poise and fine mutation of its very substance and energy. The Puruṣa must become not only the witness but the knower and source, and the master of both thought and action. But this mastery is not transformation, for the change thus brought about is not sufficient to be integral. For this it is necessary to get behind and beyond the mind-being, the life-being and body-being, into the inmost depths of the psychic entity and open to the superconscious heights. A highest spiritual transformation then intervenes on the psychic change. What is then realised is the vision of an infinity above, an eternal Presence within an infinity of consciousness, Light, Power and Ecstasy all over. A light, power and knowledge take complete possession of the mind and life and remould it and leave even the physical consciousness plastic and infinite. This is the middle step of the three, the second of the three transformations that unites the manifested world with what is above it. As the psychic change calls in the spiritual to complete it, so the spiritual change has to take the help of the supramental transformation to complete it. Only the supramental descent and transmutation finalises the passage of the soul through the Inconscience and Ignorance and establishes its consciousness, life and power and form of manifestation on 'a complete and completely effective self-knowledge'. It is when the evolutionary Nature is ready that the Truth-consciousness descends into her and enables her to liberate the supramental principle within her. And so will be created the supramental being as the first unveiled manifestation of the supreme Self in the material universe.

When the involved supermind in Nature emerges and joins with the descending supramental light and power, a supramental change of the whole substance of the being and, therefore, of all its characters, powers and movements takes place. For the supramental Force brings, with it a 'luminous imperative Necessity' which 'is the original and final self-determining truth-force of the self-existent Infinite'. It is this spiritual Necessity and its sovereign imperative that entirely penetrates into the earth-nature and transforms it into itself. "The



individual becomes a centre and a sign for the establishment of the supramental Consciousness-Force as an overtly operative power in the terrestrial workings of Nature,-in the same way in which thinking Mind has been established through the human evolution as an overtly operative power in Life and Matter. This would mean the appearance in the evolution of a gnostic being or Purusha and a gnostic Prakriti, a gnostic Nature."<sup>17</sup>

It means the emergence of the supramental consciousness-Force liberated and active within the terrestrial nature and an organised supramental instrumentation of the Divine in the vital and the physical. Until the body consciousness too becomes sufficiently prepared and awake to be a fit and willing instrument of the workings of the supramental force, any other change would only be partial and insecure. "On this basis", says Sri Aurobindo, "the principle of a divine life in terrestrial Nature would be manifested; even the world of ignorance and inconscience might discover its own submerged secret and begin to realise in each lower degree its divine significance."<sup>18</sup>

Thus has the struggle towards the sanctifying of the earth or the revealing of the God-ideal passed through several stages in the evolution on earth. And the ten *avatars*\* of Vishnu mark out the central steps on the onward march of Evolution from the sub-human or animal level to the overmental superman level.

"Even as of old man came behind the beast  
This high divine successor surely shall come  
Behind man's inefficient mortal place,  
Behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tars :

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\* "Avataarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself as it were, a parable of evolution...First the fish Avatar (Matsya), then the amphibious animal between land and the water (Kurma), then the land animal (Varaha), then the Man-Lion Avatar (Narasimha), bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf (Vamana), small and undeveloped and physical but containing in himself the Godhead and taking possession of existence, then rajasic sāttvic, nirguṇa Avatars (Parasurama, Rama, Buddha respectively), leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sāttvic mental and again the overmental superman (Krishna)". (*Letters of Sri Aurobindo* Second Series, pp. 493-94). Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development—"Krishna opens the possibility of Overmind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond to the supreme liberation but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively the evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the Kingdom of the Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing Asura forces." The progression is striking and unmistakable.

He shall know what mortal mind barely durst think,  
 He shall do what the heart of the mortal could not dare  
 Inheritor of the toil of human time  
 He shall take on him the burden of the gods ;  
 All heavenly light shall visit the earth's thoughts,  
 The might of heaven shall fortify earthly hearts ;  
 Earth's deeds shall touch the superhuman's height,  
 Earth's seeing widen into the infinite ."<sup>10</sup>

As evolution in material Nature is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key-powers this fullness of being of consciousness and life must be its ultimate goal and man's early or later stage of destiny.

" A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.  
 On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,  
 The superman shall reign as king of life,  
 Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven  
 And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart  
 And lift towards godhead his mortality."

Savitri

Sri Aurobindo has thus, through some mystic sympathy of his being, recaptured the thought of the ancient seers in its purity and integrity. His vision penetrates to the very cord of all the ancient scriptures which yield upto it their soul of good and hence their very source of strength.

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*A. B. Patel*

SRI AUROBINDO AND  
THE CONCEPT OF  
EVOLUTION

Sir Julian Huxley says that the birth of evolutionary biology took place in the year 1858, and that priority must be given to Charles Darwin for conceiving that evolution must have occurred, and could have occurred only through the mechanism of natural selection. Since that time it has been generally accepted that this world is not an unchanging succession of recurring phenomena. Darwin's law of evolution includes the idea of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, the principle of heredity and the absence of a purpose. The principles of evolution have since then undergone many modifications. However, the magnitude of Darwin's contribution is recognised and there is the permanent incorporation of much of his thought and many of his ideas in the framework of science. The doctrine of evolution has brought with it a new vision of the universe as it gave to the scientists and intellectuals a connecting thread which brought together, in one whole, immense diversities in the field of nature and man. It suggested a dynamic hidden force or power that determines the direction of this ever changing universe. The scientific concept of evolution, which is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the outward and visible machinery and with the process itself, has for that very reason its inherent limitations; it merely shows how evolution operates to produce physical, physiological and biological changes and to evolve life and mind within matter.

Sir Julian Huxley firmly believes that "If Man's role is to do the best he can to manage the evolutionary process on this planet and to guide its future course in a desirable direction, fuller realisation of genetic possibilities becomes the major motivation for man's efforts, and eugenics is revealed as one of the basic human sciences." So, even in envisaging the future course of the evolution of man it would appear that scientists hardly see beyond the outward mechanical process.



The theory of evolution has, without doubt, significantly influenced almost all our thinking about human life. It has largely determined both the direction and the growth of scientific inquiry ; it has made a powerful impact upon social development, mainly of a materialistic nature ; and it has also encouraged investigations into the history of human species and deliberations about man's future. Science has attempted to rationally define the destiny of man on the basis of its knowledge and has rationally pursued it with the aid of scientific methods. The concept of evolution has placed before man the idea of greater fulfilment as its ultimate or dominant aim and has emphasised the need for a science of human possibilities to help and to guide the course of psycho-social evolution. One notices, however, that there is amongst scientists and philosophers a considerable divergence of views about the principle and the scope of this evolutionary force, and about the way in which it operates within our living world.

As a result of the process of evolution man evolved out of the animal world and appeared on this evolving planet, earth, millions of years ago. He was then closer to animal, living mostly as a physical and physiological needs. Gradually he evolved further and began to live mostly as a vital being, concerned with his desires, cravings, sensations, passions, etc. He evolved further and began to live more as a mental being with his thoughts, ideas, opinions and ideals. Each one of these beings—physical, vital and mental—has its own unit of consciousness, all interconnected and interacting ; but to our outer mind and sense they are all confused together. Though these three are always present in every individual, one of them is dominant in each person at any given time, according to the level of his evolutionary progress. Even to-day there is in the world a small minority of people whose mental powers are sufficiently developed to have established control over their vital and physical tendencies. There are many in the world however, in whom the vital tendencies dominate, and others in whom the physical tendencies still persist. There are of course intermediate stages or planes between each of these three beings of man. But in all these planes or stages or states of consciousness there is an inner urge within man to aspire and to endeavour to exceed himself and to rise to a higher level in the scale of life.

During man's progressive evolution towards successively higher grades, Divine Consciousness has, at appropriate times, descended into human forms to awaken man to higher values of life, to lead him upwards his higher destiny and to open the way for humanity to a higher consciousness. The Indian tradition calls such a manifestation



of Divine Consciousness an "Avatar". The meaning of such manifestation is that the Divine directly intervenes to introduce light in the obscurity which prevails in the world. Sri Aurobindo says in a letter to a disciple: "Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of Evolution. First, the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land-animal, then the Man-Lion Avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical, but containing in himself the godhead and taking possession of existence, then the rajasic, sattvic, nirgun Avatars leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sattvic mental man, and again the overmental superman."

About 2,000 men, women and children drawn from all parts of India and other countries of the world and living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and thousands of others outside the Ashram believe that in Sri Aurobindo Divine Consciousness has descended in human form to give humanity a special message and a new vision of the most significant world transformation and of its luminous future. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, came to Pondicherry for the first time on the 29th March, 1914, and after meeting Sri Aurobindo for the first time She noted in Her diary: "It matters not if there are hundreds of being plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on Earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon Earth." On another occasion She said: "Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations under one form or another, one name or another."

Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution is that the creation has a purpose and man moves towards a goal. It is the unfolding of consciousness. To put it briefly, he says that man is growing and will have to grow in consciousness until he reaches the complete and perfect consciousness in his individual as well as in his social life. The growth of consciousness is a true and central aim of earthly evolution. Though outward forms have materially evolved and though life has evolved in matter and mind in life, in reality it is the consciousness, which was dormant in matter, that has evolved. Thus Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution is different from that of the scientists. The scientific view of evolution has encouraged materialistic notions of life, while that of Sri Aurobindo positively the spiritual nature and basis of all life, and his principles of evolution point to a spiritual as well as physical progression. His theory of spiritual evolution is not



identical with the scientific theory of form-evolution nor with that of physical life-evolution.

There is little doubt that science is gradually moving towards the frontiers of what we call spirituality, and though there are scientists such as Einstein, who acknowledge the spiritual aspect or basis of evolution, science fails to reveal the luminous future for the individual and for the collective life of man, as has been envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. In its search for truth science should not hesitate to investigate the universe of man's inner being and the superconscious forces operating in the universe. In recent years, one notices that scientists with unorthodox attitudes and with open minds are probing into parapsychological phenomena, yoga and meditation, and there are signs that the materialistic basis of science may be modified and that most of the principles at present supporting it may eventually be rejected.

It is interesting to note at this stage what Sri Aurobindo has written about scientific ideas of evolution : "The theory of evolution has been the key-note of the thought of the nineteenth century. It has not only affected all its science and its thought attitude, but powerfully influenced its moral temperament, its politics and its society. Without it there could not have been the materialistic notion of life and the universe which has been the general characteristic of the age that is now passing..... nor such important corollary effects of this great change as the failure of the religious spirit and the breaking up of religious beliefs....." "The materialistic view of the world is now rapidly collapsing and with it the materialistic statement of the evolution theory must disappear."

Sri Aurobindo affirms that that only can evolve which was involved. Something cannot come out of nothing. There is involution of consciousness in matter and there is a gradual unfoldment of that consciousness into varied forms of matter and also into life in matter and into mind in life. It is this consciousness in different grades and at different levels which evolves, and as a complementary part of the process the forms which are essential for its operation take shape. Thus Life evolved out of Matter, Mind out of Life, because they are already involved there : Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Mind.

Sri Aurobindo also affirms that present man is not the summit of evolution. He is a transitional being and is bound to grow further and consciously transcend himself, and so to rise to a higher level of consciousness and to become a higher being than what he is today. Up to now, evolution was a spontaneous and apparently unconscious

process determined by the working of Nature ; it was moving slowly and inadvertently as things in nature normally move. But man has now reached a stage when he can consciously evolve and so compress centuries into years. But this change will not happen as a result of economic, political, social, moral or religious processes and arrangements, nor will it arise from scientific discoveries, however great and useful these may be; and though all these may help man's growth and be essential for individual and collective life, it will be the result of an awakening within man by conscious effort of his latent or unborn higher powers and by bringing his psychic being into active participation. Man will have to learn to live outwardly from his inner promptings and at the same time to stimulate his inner growth.

In his concept of Evolution Sri Aurobindo has envisaged many-sided changes in the earth life. He foresees that the ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact, whatever may be the uncertainties and dangers which face the world today. This is in conformity with the experience of ancient and modern saints, sages, seers and spiritual beings that the deepest self in all beings and things is the Divinity within waiting to be manifested, that the One has manifested as the Many ; that there is essential unity in this apparent diversity and that the Many are now moving towards the realisation of Oneness.

Past evolution indicates that nature and its processes have created larger and more complex human aggregates from family to clan or tribe, to city, and other larger groups of varied kinds and finally to national units. Sri Aurobindo envisages that the nation, the largest natural unit which humanity has been able to create and maintain for its collective living, is not its last and ultimate unit but that greater and ever greater aggregates will be formed until all nations will be englobed in the united totality. He says that a world government is inevitable and that it may take the form of a world union of free and independant nations, with unity in diversity as the major principle of life and freedom as its corner-stone, in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another will have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all will have an equal status.

In his book *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has examined the social and cultural development of the human race and has envisaged the advent of a spiritual age evolving out of the present rational age. He says, "If the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together.



There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to recreate themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at the least constituents of a group of body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive at, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made. Such a simultaneity has never yet happened, although the appearance of it has sometimes been created by the ardour of a moment." However, as we will presently see a New Force or Consciousness or Light—whatever we may call the new element—has already manifested in the world and the possibilities for the fulfilment of those two conditions have increased, and humanity may witness for the first time the advent of a spiritual age and the establishment of a spiritual society which will regulate life and build institutions with ideals and values of life governed by truth.

On this Earth new forms, new principles of existence and new states of consciousness have constantly evolved. From our mental plane dominated as it is by reason and intellect, it is not easy to contemplate the type of consciousness that will come into being, even as it was difficult for the ape to envisage the advent of its successor, Man. But certain rudimentary or fragmentary signs of the coming of a higher consciousness are visible in our present mental consciousness. A faculty known as intuition, which is different from reason, is known even to scientists and mathematicians, for it is to this faculty that some of their discoveries and inventions are due. There is another analogous inner experience called "inspiration" which is responsible for works of beauty and reality by poets and artists. Mystics and sages see the truth through a luminous perception called "Revelation." All these functionings of consciousness happen frequently among normal human beings and yet they belong to a higher order of consciousness beyond reason and logical intelligence.

Mind is not the last principle for the governance of life on earth. It is an instrument of ignorance and learns by trial and error; it argues and comes to conclusions on a partial view and so its conclusions are not necessarily right. It is by its very nature unable to take an integral view of things, events, problems or circumstances.

The most important message of Sri Aurobindo is about the evolutionary process on the earth, and the growth of consciousness, which, both process and growth, man is now in a position to accelerate. Sri



Aurobindo's greatest life work, which is his supremely unique and difficult endeavour in collaboration with the Mother, was for expediting the descent of the supramental consciousness, which he had considered inevitable. He had said that supramentalisation of consciousness is the goal towards which Nature is aiming at and for which man is striving: it is the next step the earth and man are destined to take in their evolutionary ascent. One of the dreams of Sri Aurobindo was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and so to begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed man since he began to think and to dream of individual perfection and of a perfect society. This dream of Sri Aurobindo about the next step in evolution has been fulfilled by the descent of supramental consciousness on the 29th February 1956 as has been declared by the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She gave a message on the 24th April 1956, which reads: "The manifestation of supramental upon earth is no more a promise, but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it."

Sri Aurobindo once wrote to a disciple: "I suppose a matter of fact observer, if there had been one at the time of the unrelieved reign of inanimate matter in the earth's beginning, would have criticised any promise of the emergence of Life in a world of dead earth and rock and mineral as an absurdity and a chimera; so too, afterwards he would have repeated his mistake and regarded the emergence of thought and reason in an animal world as an absurdity and a chimera. It is the same now with the appearance of Supermind and the stumbling mentality of this world of human consciousness and its reasoning ignorance."

As the supramental consciousness has contacted the earth's atmosphere and has begun its realising power, the evolution of a spiritual society becomes easier than ever before. It will mean, in due course, the emergence of Spirit in Mind, even as Mind emerged in Life and Life emerged in matter. It prepares the ground for the evolution of a spiritual man and ultimately of a supramental being. This will present to the world a major transformation, compared with which all what is now being done and all that is happening in this world will seem small and insignificant. The supramental being will not be "Man climbed to his natural zenith, not a superior degree of human greatness, knowledge, power, intelligence, will, character, genius, dynamic force, saintliness, love, purity or perfection. Supermind is something beyond mental man and his limits." On the 29th



February, 1956, were laid the foundations for an evolution of a supramental race which will be as much higher than the present humanity, as the present humanity is higher than the animal world. In short, the world will move towards the manifestation of Spirit in Matter, the establishment of Divine Life on earth and the evolution of a new race, though in terms of earth time it may take several centuries for its full manifestation. It is possible, however, that in future man's evolution will be considerably accelerated, with short periods of even more rapid change. Sri Aurobindo offers the world an exceedingly bright future, and if man will not only accept, but consciously cooperate to acquire, the inflow of the New Consciousness, his progress towards his higher destiny will be unbelievably rapid.

*T. N. Ganapathy*

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION  
OF SRI AUROBINDO'S  
DOCTRINE OF  
EVOLUTION

The problem of evolution — how the one can become the many and how the many can remain the many without infringing the oneness of the one — is a veritable Serbonian bog into which whole armies of philosophers have sunk. This is so because a precise determination of the nature of the development of the universe around us — the why and how of it — is not possible, and any doctrine of evolution is a 'romance of human thought'. All theories of evolution are at best only hypotheses and in the history of philosophy we have many of them. Some of these are 'mechanical', some 'teleological' some 'dialectical', some 'emergent', while some are 'creative'. Sri Aurobindo's is an integral hypothesis of evolution, a progressive unfolding and growth of the spirit or consciousness which is concealed in every form of creation. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "Evolution..... must have at any given moment a past with its fundamental results still in evidence, a present in which the results it is labouring over are in process of becoming, a future in which still unevolved powers and forms of being must appear till there is the full and perfect manifestation." <sup>1</sup> "Not to abandon the lower to itself, but to transfigure it in the light of the higher" <sup>2</sup> is Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral evolution.

Being and Becoming are the two fundamentals in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Reality is neither mere being or unity nor mere becoming or creativity. "We have therefore two fundamental facts of pure existence and of world-existence, a fact of Being, a fact of Becoming. To deny one or the other is easy; to recognise the facts of consciousness and find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom".<sup>3</sup> Reality in its essence is a creative unity.

The creative will operates in two ways. First, there is an upward tending force from below and there is an upward drawing force from



above. The impetus in evolution is twofold, the hnis from below and the pressure from above ; the first is the process of ascent and the second is the process of descent. At each step of the ascent there is an ascent to a higher principle and a lifting up and transformation of all the lower grades. This is integration which implies a descent of the higher principle into all the lower ones leading to a transformation and uplift of the lower ones. It is a process where, as Hegel would put it, ' what is and what is not slip into each other '. Thus to Sri Aurobindo there is not merely an ascent or a descent but an ascent through descent. The mode of progression, therefore, is ascent — descent — integration. Philosophers of evolution before Sri Aurobindo have taken into account only one aspect of the world process — i.e., the aspect of ascent. But to Sri Aurobindo there can be no ascent without descent. The descending process is called involution and the ascending process is called evolution. Evolution is conditioned by involution and is indeed unthinkable without it. To think of evolution without involution would be to think like the light dove in Kant which cleaving through the air in her free flight imagined that its flight would be still easier in empty space. This is one of the striking contributions of Sri Aurobindo to the concept of evolution. It is integralism in which the highest form of reality is capable of existing simultaneously in different poises in its descent.

In his exposition of the process of evolution Sri Aurobindo speaks of two hemispheres — the higher and the lower. The higher half is constituted of *Sat* (existence), *Cit* (Consciousness-force), *Ānanda* (Bliss), Mahas (Supermind) and the lower half of mind, life and matter. *Sat-cit-ānanda* constitutes the triune principle of the Absolute Reality. The Absolute Being moves into Becoming in order to manifest its full plenitude. Thus we have the evolution of forms—Matter, the existence (*Sat*) aspect of the Being, Life, the energy (*Cit*) aspect of the Being, and Psyche or soul the bliss (*Ānanda*) aspect of the Being. Since the Being is pure consciousness, there is also an evolution of consciousness. In matter the consciousness is asleep. In life it expresses itself in sensation, perception, feeling, etc. In mind the consciousness becomes intellectual. Since the Absolute is also ' all-knowledge ' its evolute Matter represents indeterminate Nescience ; mind represents the level of ignorance and Supermind represents absolute knowledge. Hence, according to Sri Aurobindo, so far as the process of evolution is concerned, there is not merely the evolution of forms but also the evolution of consciousness and knowledge. The forms have gone on developing and the instrumentations of knowledge have been added to these forms to enable the organism to become more and more conscious. This evolution of forms and levels of consciousness is possible because of the involution of the Absolute

*Sat-cit-ānanda*. "Evolution," according to Sri Aurobindo, "is nothing other than a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit".<sup>4</sup>

Evolution first takes place in matter. Matter is the outward manifestation of the element of 'Sat', in *Sat-cit-ānanda*. "Matter is *Sat-cit-ānanda* represented to His own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action and delight of existence".<sup>5</sup> Matter is the fundamental element of our earth. It is ignorance incarnate and is subject to mechanical laws. In matter consciousness is embedded or fossilised. Matter is essentially consciousness fallen asleep. The self-involution of supreme consciousness has reached its acme in a total self-denial in the form of matter. That is, *Sat-cit-ānanda*, in becoming matter, has revealed the full glory of its being in conditions which are the very opposite of its supreme nature.

This account of matter steers clear of two extreme forms of spiritualism and materialism. According to spiritualism matter is non-existent; it is not real. This spiritualistic negation of matter is called by Sri Aurobindo 'the refusal of the ascetic'. According to materialism matter is ontologically prior. But to Sri Aurobindo, though matter is the starting point of the present order of evolution, it is not ontologically prior for it is the self-involution of the Absolute. In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of evolution matter is given chronological priority but not logical or ontological primacy. Matter is a phenomenal manifestation of an ontological principle, *Sat-cit-ānanda* and as such it implicitly contains within itself such other powers of *Sat-cit-ānanda* as life and mind. Matter evolves into life because there is a descent of *Sat-cit-ānanda* in matter. To Sri Aurobindo the task of evolution is to spiritualize matter, not to escape from it.

Further, in Sri Aurobindo, matter is not a stumbling block of evolution as held by Bergson. In his 'Creative Evolution', Bergson describes matter as moving in the opposite direction. Matter is a movement inverse to that of life. The inverse movement is the disintegration of the one basic reality or flow. Bergson likens this disintegrating movement to the unrolling of a coil or to the unwinding of a spring. The inverse movement is called matter. Bergson's account of matter is not satisfactory and self-consistent. We cannot understand why the ascending movement should have been interrupted at all. Why should it be inverted? Why should the *elan vital* get solidified into matter? To these questions Bergson has no answer. Further, Bergson's creative evolution presupposes an antecedent



material medium for the development of life. Here there is a vicious circle, when he makes matter the presupposition of life and life the creative source of matter. To Sri Aurobindo matter is not a reverse movement, but a power of the self-limitation of the infinite. "This power of the self-limitation for a particular working ..... is precisely one of the powers we should expect to exist among the manifold energies of the Infinite."<sup>6</sup>

As matter is the lower form of the manifestation of the element of *Sat* (Existence), life is the lower form of the manifestation of the element of *cit* in *Sat-cit-ānanda*. According to Sri Aurobindo, life had been from the very beginning involved and implicitly operative in matter. Evolution brought it forth into manifestation in vital phenomena. It is not an epiphenomenon of matter. In it we have the first vibrations of the evolving consciousness. While matter grows by addition, life grows by assimilation. While matter is an eternal somnambulist, life, though still in a state of sleep, is always on the point of waking but never waking.<sup>7</sup>

The third evolute is Mind. It has become in man the intellectual consciousness. It is characterised by mediacy, doubt, uncertainty and inadequacy. Mind always feels duality. It cuts up and breaks asunder the forms of things from the indivisible whole in which alone they can really exist. It depicts, delimits or differentiates the reality. The function of mind is to measure, limit, cut out "forms of things from the individual whole and contain them as if each were a separate integer."<sup>8</sup> Yet it has a constant urge to go beyond the parts and reach the whole. It proceeds to synthesise the divided units with a view to arriving at the unity of the whole it broke asunder when it analysed it into atomic units. But unfortunately its attempts end in failure. It is constitutionally incapable of grasping the whole.

"Our reason cannot sound life's mighty sea and only counts its waves and scans its foam."—*Savitri*. Reason can deal successfully with the settled and the finite. The root realities escape its grasp. This view of Sri Aurobindo reminds us of Bradley's conception of thought. Thought, according to Bradley, breaks the original unity of experience into the 'that' and the 'what', the subject and the object. Having created this dualism it tries to transcend and reach the original unity. But it cannot. What it reaches is a mere aggregate, not the real unity. If thought tries to transcend the dualism between the 'that' and 'what' it aims at suicide. If the distinction between the subject and the object is transcended, there is no room left for thought. As Sri Aurobindo would put it, in its attempts to go beyond the parts and reach the whole the mind "falls from its own firm ground into the

ocean of the intangible, into the abyss of the infinite, where it can neither perceive, conceive, sense, nor deal with its subject for creation, and enjoyment.”<sup>9</sup> Mental knowledge cannot comprehend anything without analysing or dissecting it into its elements. It is mainly intended to be practical, useful, or efficient. The same view is echoed in Bergson’s account of intellectual knowledge. To Bergson intellect or thought is a mere pragmatic function, a tool of practical life fashioned in the course of evolution. Perception and thought are practical in nature. They are meant for supplying plans for possible action and not for yielding any knowledge of reality as it is. Our perception indicates the possible action of our body on others. “The bodies we perceive.....are.....cut out of the stuff of nature by our perception and the scissors follow.....the marking of lines along which action might be taken.”<sup>10</sup> Possible action signifies hesitation or choice. According to Sri Aurobindo and Bergson, the mind or intellect is a superficial aspect of consciousness.

Man contains explicitly the first three manifestations of reality — matter, life and mind. Man has also an inner and abiding psychic entity called the soul around which his body, life and mind are organised into an individual entity or ego. Sri Aurobindo argues that this soul or psyche is the lower form of manifestation of the element of ‘*ānanda*’ in *Sat-cit-ānanda*. Evolution is not only cosmic but individual as well. The true soul is the psychic being or Caitya Puruṣa which is the central core of our being. This Puruṣa is nothing else than the Supreme spirit dwelling within us.

The evolution of the world has so far reached the four stages — Matter, Life, Psyche, Mind. But evolution does not stop with this. Bernard Shaw and the rest may think that man as he is (intellectual) is incapable of further progress. The greatest contribution of Sri Aurobindo is that he showed that the evolution of consciousness from matter to life and from life to mind cannot stop with mind. “Mind is a passage, not a culmination.”<sup>11</sup> It must ultimately result in some other greater emergence and greater power of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo calls it Supermind. He insists that the time has come when evolution must take a leap into the next higher stage — Supermind.

“...the latest trend is highly significant of a freer future. As the outposts of scientific knowledge come more and more to be set on the borders that divide the material from the immaterial so also the highest achievements of practical science are those which tend to simplify and reduce to the vanishing point the machinery by which the greatest effects are produced. Wireless telegraphy is Nature’s exterior sign and



pretext for a new orientation. The sensible physical means for the intermediate transmission of the physical force is removed; it is only preserved at the points of impulsion and reception. Eventually even these must disappear; for when the laws and forces of the supraphysical are studied with the right starting-point, the means will infallibly be found for Mind directly to seize on the physical energy and speed it accurately upon its errand. There, once we bring ourselves to recognize it, lie the gates that open upon the enormous vistas of the future."<sup>12</sup> Just as there is an order of ascent from matter to life, from life to mind, there is an order of ascent from mind to Supermind. The ascent is as follows: Mind - Higher mind - Illumined mind - Intuition - Overmind - Supermind.

Let us jump these stages of ascent, and discuss the Supermind which is Sri Aurobindo's *bija akshara*, key word. It is the higher instrument of consciousness, the intermediate link between *Sat-cit-ānanda* and the universe, the connecting link between Being and Becoming. It is a level for the transition from Timeless and Spaceless to that which is in time and space. Whereas matter, life and mind are stages of ignorance, supermind is a stage in knowledge. Incidentally to Sri Aurobindo ignorance is not a blunder and a fall as is commonly supposed but a purposeful descent; 'not a curse, but a divine opportunity.'<sup>13</sup> Ignorance is "a limited separative awareness..... striving to become an integral consciousness."<sup>14</sup> When the Supermind emerges there is a radical change in the character of evolution; for henceforth it will be through knowledge and not through ignorance. In other words, when the descent of the Supermind takes place Nature is transformed into supernature, and human beings into gnostic beings. "Apparent Nature is secret God."<sup>15</sup> The apparent self-contradictions of thought are held together and harmonized in the higher rationality of Supermind. It is a 'mutuality founded in unity'. At the stage of Supermind the apprehending consciousness which consists in the awareness 'I am' is transformed into the comprehending consciousness which consists in the awareness of 'All is'. The human 'I' is replaced by the divine 'I'.

The concept of Supermind is an original contribution of Sri Aurobindo. It should not be confused with the *Īśvara* of the Vedāntin. *Īśvara* is the Absolute seen through *māyā*. But Sri Aurobindo's Supermind is the Absolute itself. It is divine knowledge, truth consciousness. Nor is it the Demiurge (or creator) of Plato. For the Demiurge is creating according to an archetype or pattern. Plato meets with certain difficulties as to the relation between Demiurge and the archetype. Is the archetype created or not created? If it is created, it would be an imperfect pattern, and God, had He created

the world with this imperfect pattern as model, would be no authentic God, or would be phantom God. If the archetype is not created and Plato holds that it cannot be created, then it would be co-eternal with God. Sri Aurobindo has posited the Supermind as the link between *Sat-cit-ānanda* and the finite to be free from the difficulties mentioned above. The Supermind is attainable.

The greatness and importance of Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution does not lie in its newness but in its transformation of previously existing material. In Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of evolution we find the seven planes, the *sapta padani* of the Vedas, namely the planes of Sat, Cit, Ānanda, Vijñāna (the plane of truth-consciousness) and the planes of mind, life and matter. Vedic seers also speak of the seven worlds of matter (*bhu*), life (*bhuvah*), mind (*svah*) supermind (*manah*), pure delight (*jana*), pure consciousness-force (*tapas*) and pure being (*satya*). Further the material self, the vital self and the mental self are the representations of the true self in the physical, vital and mental parts of an embodied existence, which the Taittiriya Upaniṣad refers to as the 'annamaya kosa', 'the pranamaya kosa,' and 'the manomaya kosa'—the physical, vital and mental sheaths. The Taittiriya Upaniṣad speaks also of the Vijñanamaya kośa (*gnostic sheath*) and the anandamaya kosa (*bliss sheath*) corresponding to which there are the supramental self and the spiritual self. Sri Aurobindo thinks that the earlier Vedānta represented by the older Upaniṣads reflected more faithfully the views of the Vedic Rishis and preserved their 'integral' view of life. He is inclined to believe that only the later Vedānta has become ascetic in character, and developed a different set of values which are antipragmatic. Sri Aurobindo probably feels that he has restored the original Vedānta to its rightful place by his doctrine of evolution and also by pointing out the positive and the negative sides of the later Vedānta, just as Croce's book has shown 'what is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Hegel'. Again the doctrine that creation has proceeded from above downwards, *ūrdhvamūlam*, culminating in earth, which is an ancient one has been beautifully adapted by Sri Aurobindo in his doctrine of Integral evolution. To the question of the 'why' of evolution, Sri Aurobindo's answer is bliss. It is for the sheer joy of the thing the infinite creates and sustains the world. Evolution is the self-diversification of the one in a multiplicity of individual centres through which It enjoys the play of rising back to Itself. This view reminds us of the doctrine of one of the Kashmiri schools of Saivism which maintains that this world came into existence as a result of '*Citi Sankoca*' 'the limitation of the original Infinite consciousness.' One of Sri Aurobindo's basic propositions in his theory of evolution is that everything 'that emerges must preexist in the cause'.<sup>16</sup> It is



the old Indian theory of Sāṅkhyā - vāda. Thus Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution is not merely a philosophy of Integralism but also an integration of ancient philosophy.

In Sri Aurobindo we find a synthetic fusion and amazing fulfilment of the different theories of evolution. His evolution admits both mechanism and emergence, determinism and freedom. Till the evolution of mind his theory is mechanical (*Inconscient*). To him, the process of evolution is free because it is self-determined. Here it differs from Bergson's doctrine of open evolution. To Bergson, evolution is truly creative like the work of a great artist. An impulse to creation, an undefined want is there before creation. But until the want is satisfied we cannot know the nature of that which will satisfy it. Until the *elan vital* has brought an organism into existence no one could have predicted the shape of things to come, just as one cannot predict what exactly will come out of the brush of an inspired painter before he has completed his picture. This is a kind of open evolution where nothing is pre-determined. It is indeterminism. But in the case of Sri Aurobindo at every level there is self-determinism. To him the omnipresent reality, at each point of its self-existence, spontaneously self-determines its manifestation and puts forth an exclusive concentration to support it.

Further, Sri Aurobindo, unlike Bergson, believes in teleology. To him the Real idea, Supermind, contains everything potentially. But Sri Aurobindo's evolution is not an asymptotic approximation to an infinite ideal. It is not a theory of *progressus ad infinitum* which implies 'a far off divine event to which the whole creation moves.'

Yet evolution is not an event in time. It is not successive. The Real does not descend at a particular date. The Real passes into matter, but the process is outside time. His evolution is not a simple biological process as with most of the theories of evolution. Thus Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution steers clear of the two famous Russellian criticisms of the theories of evolution in general that they attach undue importance to the process of time and to biological discoveries.<sup>17</sup> Russell's criticism that the theory of evolution is a hasty generalization from a specialized group of facts discovered by biology is inapplicable to Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution for it is not biological only.

In Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is the fundamental fact of existence and evolution. The evolution of consciousness is not unilinear. It is not a progression in a straight line, not a constant

ascent or gradient upwards, but it is like the upward unfolding of a flower, petal by petal, revealing new aspects. As in Croce, it is greater and greater inclusion.

The greatest contribution of Sri Aurobindo is to point out that man is not the summit of evolution and evolution does not stop with him. The greatest fact about man is that he is more than a man. "The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has.....worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom.....she wills to work the superman, the God."<sup>18</sup> "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood."<sup>19</sup>

To sum up Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution. First there is the tendency to grow at the terrestrial level from matter to mind through life. Second, there is a tendency 'to know' from the level of mind to supermind. And third, there is the transcendental level of perfection in *Sat-cit-ānanda*. Thus in Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution we find how the 'will to grow' leads to 'the will to know' which takes us to 'the will to perfection and freedom'.

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*K. Sundaresan*

THEORY OF EVOLUTION:  
SRI AUROBINDO AND  
TEILHARD DE CHARDIN  
OR  
"A MEETING OF THE  
EAST AND WEST"

The questions 'what', 'why', and 'whither' of evolution have been engaging the attention of great thinkers for a long time both in the Orient and in the Occident. But the problem remains unsolved, perhaps can never be solved. The prevailing general opinion that all theories of evolution are incomplete in the sense that the Eastern theories are not as cosmic as they are spiritual and that the Western theories are not as spiritual as they are cosmic poses a great problem to all and suggests that unless the two—the East and West—meet together and supplement each other, there cannot be a possible solution to the problem. The view that the East is East and West is West stands to be refuted and hence scholars of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy seem to justify his theory of evolution as a true reconciliation between the East and West. According to them, a meeting "not of a mere handshaking type but a real synthesis" of the East and West takes place in Sri Aurobindo's theory, for it satisfies all the necessary requirements of a complete theory of evolution, which the other theories individually do not.

This paper is an attempt, not to show how the East and West actually meet in his philosophy in the above sense, but to show how both the eastern and western thinkers have started thinking on the same line thus providing a midway through which the problem has to be approached. Again, this paper has taken for its aim, besides Sri Aurobindo's theory, a scientifically (in the sense of physical sciences) oriented theory of the West by the French palaeontologist and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The aim of this paper is just to act as a signpost to show as to how these thinkers have started thinking on the same line; it concentrates, but for some stray references here and there to the other works, only on the remarkable



works of these two great thinkers, viz. *Life Divine* and *The Phenomenon of Man* respectively. And as the aim of this paper is just to show how the East and West have started thinking on the same line, the differences between these two thinkers have not been taken into consideration in view of the short span of time and space.

Seldom is it remembered and accepted that a satisfactory theory of evolution requires a reconciliation and an affirmation of both the reality of Matter and Spirit, for whenever we talk of evolution, we begin with matter as the starting point and Spirit as the culmination of it. The quarrel between the materialist and the spiritualist is due to their failure to recognise this and due to their confinement with the 'without' and the 'within' of things respectively. Standing on different planes, they fight without meeting each other. Each only sees half the problem. They have forgotten that "coextensive with their without, there is a within to things",<sup>1</sup> and vice versa, and there is a mutual relation between them. As they respectively deny either the reality of Spirit or that of Matter, neither the materialist nor the spiritualist, according to both Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard, can talk of an evolution. The spiritualist tries to build a theory without any foundation just as the materialist without any content. In other-words, the Matter of the materialist is like the "form without content" and the Spirit of the spiritualist like the "content without form."

Therefore, it becomes necessary to create a spiritual square field, to effect a reconciliation between Matter and Spirit, between the material world and the spiritual world, between the materialist and the spiritualist. Is such a reconciliation possible?

"Evolution is the rise and expansion of consciousness."<sup>2</sup> When science has discovered that the fundamental nature of the universe is Force or Energy and that things in the universe are nothing but forms "born out of meeting and mutual adaptation between unshaped forces," or that when Einstein has taught us that Matter and Energy are convertible, that  $E=mc^2$ , that matter is condensed Energy, certainly we have reached a stage in our knowledge of the external universe. The Force that creates the world of forms must be a Conscious-Force, otherwise the evolution of consciousness cannot be accounted for. The evolution of consciousness is a stumbling block in our enquiry. Therefore, if at all we are to admit energy as the fundamental nature of the universe, we must also have to admit consciousness as concealed and as slowly evolving out of it (Vedāntic solution).

What Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard mean by consciousness is, "a self-aware force of existence", i.e., neither is it a mere mechanical and



unintelligent force as the scientists and the Sāṅkhyas think, nor a mere vital force or the *elan vital* of which Bergson speaks, which cannot be aware of itself, but a conscious self-aware force. "A conscious-Force, everywhere inherent in Existence, acting even when concealed, is a creator of the worlds, the occult secret of Nature."<sup>3</sup>

This conscious-Force is present everywhere. Consciousness is not restricted to the higher forms of life only. It is present, below the mental level, in the vital and material existences as a sub-conscious Energy and above the mental level as Superconscious Energy. Consciousness is invisible in the material sphere, appears at the vegetable level and dominates at the human level. This Energy or Force is nothing but the *Cit-śakti* of Indian philosophy. Sri Aurobindo calls it the Mother or the Divine *śakti*.

"Consciousness is a Force, inversely force is consciousness and all the forces are conscious."<sup>4</sup> Consciousness is a Force; they are inseparable and convertible. "Force is inherent in Existence". Therefore, it is *Cit* here. *Cit* is the essence of Existence. Therefore, all is *Sat* here. Consciousness is both *Sat* and *Cit*, but it is also Bliss or *Ānanda*, for to be conscious is joy. Hence, Consciousness is *Saccidānanda*—Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. And according to Teilhard the Consciousness from which all emerges and into which everything disappears is Christ Himself.

Once absolute Reality or Spirit has been admitted as the source and all that is in the universe as a manifestation of that Reality, then Spirit becomes the soul and reality of Matter, and Matter, the form and body of the Spirit. That is why, in ancient writings it has been said "Matter is also Brahman" and that the physical universe is described as the external body of the Divine Being. But it is very difficult to trace out the presence of Spirit or Consciousness in Matter, a point which we have to admit with Teilhard that "every movement is veiled in immobility when sufficiently slowed down".<sup>5</sup> Apart from this, we have also to admit a series of ascending forms between Matter and Spirit, otherwise the two must appear as irreconcilable opponents. Hence, we have different stages of evolution between Matter and Spirit.

All is not explained, if we simply say all things are spirit or consciousness. To know the reality of the universe we must also know the process by which the Reality manifests itself in the universe. The process of manifestation of the Absolute is known as "involution," i.e., the consciousness aspect of Brahman conceals itself in the universe and slowly evolves out of it. In the Upaniṣads crea-



tion is described as an act of self-expression of Brahman from its involved conditions. Sri Aurobindo calls it, "a self-involution of Brahman from its involved conditions," "a self-involution of consciousness in form and a self-evolution out of form".<sup>6</sup>

It is because of this 'involution', evolution has not become a transformation, for transformism is only an old Darwinian hypothesis. It is because of this, Matter is not unconscious but inconscient or consciousness veiled itself in it. "The Inconscient is the Superconscient's sleep"<sup>7</sup> It is because of this, evolution becomes possible, becomes meaningful. "Ascent without descent, evolution without involution is unthinkable."<sup>8</sup> Evolution means making more and more manifest the unmanifest consciousness that dwells in every being. It is, for Sri Aurobindo, a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit or Consciousness in material conditions. It is a creation, a self creation and a bringing out of what was implicit in Being. Therefore, there is nothing surprising if we find that everything seems to have come out ready-made. "In the beginning is prepared the close."<sup>9</sup> It is because of this involutionary process, the notion "ex nihilo nihil fit" becomes justified. "Everything in some extremely attenuated extension of itself, has existed from the very first".<sup>10</sup> And lastly, it is because of this involution, evolution becomes "a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow".<sup>11</sup> "We must accept this Vedāntic solution, otherwise evolution becomes a mere word which states the phenomenon without explaining it.

Spirit or Consciousness is the source from which everything emerges and into which everything disappears. Matter is also that into which everything has involved and out of which everything evolves. Therefore Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard speak of the movement of the universe as between the two involutions: "Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downwards to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of the Spirit."

The very fact that things have a within and a without implies that in their evolution also there is a double process—an evolution within and a development without. Both Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard accept this, but the former calls it the cosmic or physical evolution and a soul or spiritual evolution whereas the latter calls it an evolution within and a development without.

Evolution is both continuous and emergent. A continuous evolution without emergence is a contradiction in terms. There is conti-

nuity in evolution, for it is the same Consciousness that evolves throughout the process. Therefore, the different stages of evolution between Matter and Spirit are not entirely different from one another. They are related by one Conscious-Force which is present everywhere in different organisations. If these principles are entirely different from one another, we cannot talk of the evolution of the one from the other. But at the same time there is the emergence of the new capacities which were once in unmanifest condition. "Emergence" means "the arrival of higher, spiritual and supramental grades of beings, consciousness and powers in successive order. These principles are novel principles and their emergence cannot be predicted or calculated by our mind.....In the process of evolution their emergence is unpredictable and miraculous."<sup>13</sup> Evolution is emergent in the sense that it does not conform to the fixed path determined by our mental logic. One principle is different from the other, not in its potentiality, but in the manifestation of this potentiality.

This kind of evolutionary process is teleological. The principle of teleology plays a vital role in almost all theories of evolution, except in that of Bergson in the West and Advaita in the East. Evolution has not yet stopped. It is still going on. The significance of this evolution is to bring about what is contained or involved in it. It has for its goal the realisation of the Spirit. "A manifestation of greater powers of existence till the whole being itself is manifest in the material world in terms of a higher, a spiritual evolution may be considered as the teleology of evolution."<sup>14</sup> It is also teleological in another sense. Evolution starts from the level of inconscient Matter, moves to the level of life or the biosphere by the very fact of its inner urge, and from this emerges the noosphere or the thinking layer where mind and consciousness play a vital role and then finally reaches the sphere of God or what is known as Christosphere.

Evolution has so far crossed three stages—Matter, Life, and Mind and as result we have lithosphere, biosphere and noosphere or the thinking layer of which man is the highest representative. But with the advent of man, has evolution stopped? Or if we are still moving, is it not merely in a circle? This is the question which almost all evolutionary thinkers meet with.

Consciousness is evident only in man. In him, it acquires the capacity to "reflect" upon itself or what Teilhard calls as "the doubling back" of consciousness in man. "Reflection is the power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself..... no longer merely to know oneself; no longer merely to



know, but to know that one knows."<sup>15</sup> Man exists and he knows that he exists. It is this self-knowledge, this reflective attitude, this self-understanding of himself that distinguishes him from other animals. By giving a new turn to evolution, a new development of consciousness by a perfect self-discovery, man proves his superiority over the animals.

Today, man occupies the topmost rung of the ladder of evolution. Standing there, he controls all other creatures and to a great extent the external Nature. From a mere creature, he has to become the earthly God. He has the power to modify and to a certain extent to determine the direction of his own evolution. He knows that he has evolved and continues to evolve. He is also in the process of learning how he may promote his own evolution in the direction of his choice. Evolution requires man's conscious co-operation. For today, he is "in a position to destroy not only all human life, but all other forms of life on this planet."<sup>16</sup> It is left to him whether to continue his evolution or to stop it.

Certainly man is not the goal of evolution. Both Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard are of the view that unlike other creatures man is unfinished, imperfect, a bridge to be crossed and must be surpassed or completed. Once the Absolute Reality is accepted as the source of all our existence and the purpose of evolution is to make more and more explicit this implicit Reality, it seems futile to stop it. Man is also conscious of this and therefore he will not intend to stop it. He tries to go beyond or at least tries to prepare the way, if not more to reach a higher existence, towards supermanhood. In addition to this, if it be true that Nature has worked out man from the laboratory of animals, she may also intend to work out superman from that of man itself.

Due to the consciousness of the fact that he carries the world's future in himself and a limitless future awaits him, the first thing that strikes man is to seek fulfilment in isolation or "progress by isolation". The history of animate evolution stands as the proof. The "struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest" point to the evolution of one group after another, one on the top of the other, through the success and domination of a privileged group. But this egocentric ideal is false and against Nature. The gates of the future are open to every one. The entry into the superhuman is not thrown open to a few of the privileged group.

Evolution means rise of consciousness, and rise of consciousness means union effected. At present mankind is undergoing a twofold crisis. The human mind has reached a stage in which it has

achieved an enormous development in certain directions and stands arrested in others. Peoples and civilisation have reached a stage of interdependence. They can no longer develop in isolation. On the other hand, mankind is being pressurised by the unused powers which the modern man has unleashed. At this stage, what we need is unanimity or "superarrangement", the gradual combination of individuals, peoples and races.

The fact that man has started thinking in terms of mankind is the first stage in the idea of progress. No one can escape the haunting influence of this idea of mankind. Human beings have come into contact with each other through their psychological and social institutions. Therefore, the greatness and importance of the collective life should determine the nature and scope of our ideals, for "no evolutionary future awaits man except in association with all other men."<sup>17</sup> Man has achieved mastery over his environment but henceforth he must achieve the world union and world harmony.

A global unification and a human awareness is necessary for any future evolution of man. But how to associate ourselves with all others? How to bring about a global unification of mankind? Both Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard hold that the existing human mental consciousness cannot do this. By its very nature, mind tends to know everything not in its unity or totality but by the principle of division. It is a labourer of acute but limited intelligence. It cannot bring about a real unification of the world. Therefore, we have to go beyond our mental consciousness and mental reason. A new mode of thought, a new psychic expansion, a new intuition and a new spiritual awakening is what we lack. Teilhard believes that science and religion can bring about this unity. Sri Aurobindo goes a step further. True, science has become a twin sister of mankind. It tries to make man the master of circumstance and so lightens the fetters of causality. But reason and science can help man by standardising and by fixing everything into an artificially arranged unity. They cannot help him to go beyond himself and unite with others. A real unity of mankind is not possible by science.

The generation to come will have the heritage we leave them, and in course of time, "what is now the shining genius of an eminent few might become a common possession of many."<sup>18</sup> Man is a self-conscious individual. From this self-conscious stage, he has to rise to a more fully conscious stage, or if at all he believes, to a God-conscious stage. Mental development and the development of consciousness are more important. As Alexis Carrel writes, "Mental deterioration is more dangerous for civilisation than the infectious diseases to which



hygienists and physicians have so far exclusively devoted their attention." 19

Therefore, it is only by rising to a new higher state of consciousness, a real unification of the world is possible. That new consciousness will not be an elevated ordinary human mentality but a new higher spiritual consciousness. And this new spiritual consciousness can be reached only by a spiritual endeavour or spirituality. By spirituality we mean not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of the mind, not religiosity but an awakening to the inner reality of our being, an inner aspiration to know, to feel and to be that reality. But why should we know our inner being? Man seeks to know the world in order to be master of it. He seeks to know himself in order to be master of himself. As per the truth that "coextensive with their without there is a within to things", we have behind our surface mind a subliminal mind, behind our surface life, a subliminal or Divine life, behind our *sthūla-śarīra*, a *sūkṣma-śarīra* and behind our surface desire soul, a subliminal psychic entity. This psychic entity is the corpuscular form of the infinite Reality. Again, there is a commonality, individuality and essentiality of things. By finding out the essentiality or the inner reality of man we can find out the commonality and individuality of mankind. And finding out the commonality, individuality and essentiality of mankind, we may possibly hope for a better evolution of it as a whole, for what is possible for the individual is possible for the group also.

How to find out this inner Reality and be one with it? Nature has utilised four means for that—Occultism, Religion, Spiritual Thought and an Inner spiritual realisation and experience. Occultism enables man to know himself and discover and utilise his potentialities. Religion enables him to know all the hidden power or powers that control the world. The purpose of religion is to link the human with the Divine. In order that the human frame will be able to admit the workings of the Divine in it, a sublimation of its thought, life and flesh is necessary and this must be the work of spiritual philosophy or spiritual thought. But all knowledge and endeavour can bear fruits only if it is turned into experience and this is the work of spiritual realisation and experience.

If this is accomplished, then humanity will not be an ordinary humanity but a spiritual one with an entirely new mode of thought and knowledge. At this stage, man will not be an ordinary human being but a superman. By superman Sri Aurobindo means a Divine working in the human frame. Unity, mutuality and harmony will be the new basis of this new supramental consciousness. A "conscious

unanimism" of all will be the new foundation. At this stage, it is a mistake to confuse individuality with personality. What we mean by individual is not the individualisation of mental, vital, physical being separate from all others, not the individual soul isolated from the rest of the world, incapable of unity and mutuality, but a working of the conscious power of the Eternal. Not the individual but the Person is our true being. Personality and Impersonality are not irreconcilable entities. The Person is the Being supporting the Impersonal. And what we mean by a personality of a Person is the expression of this Impersonal in Nature and action. The true person is not the isolated individual entity, his individuality is universal, for he individualises the universal and the Transcendental.

To sum up, the present day man is satiated but not satisfied by his achievements and analysis of the external Nature. So, he turns towards such things as God, Freedom, and Immortality. These things may appear to him as mere suggestions or opinions, or a sort of consolation to forget his present feelings of sufferings and torture. But in fact, these constitute a divine aspiration, a divine urge, for it is the divine seated in him that compels him to turn to such things. "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood", the ascent to the Divine life is the work of works and this is what Sir Aurobindo and Teilhard strive to emphasise in their "magnum opuses". The quintessence of their teachings may be stated using Julian Huxley's words: "We mankind contain the possibilities of the earth's immense future, and can realise more and more of them on condition we increase our knowledge and love."<sup>20</sup>

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*R. S. Misra*

## THE HUMAN ASPIRATION AND EVOLUTION

Sri Aurobindo shows immense concern for man and his destiny. His philosophy starts with the analysis of human situation. He is not merely interested in showing what man is but also what he is to be. The most significant fact about man, according to him, is that he is a being who is full of immeasurable possibilities. He is a mortal creature who aspires for immortality; he lives in untruth, darkness and bondage and yet he is motivated by an irresistible desire to attain absolute truth, unfailing Light and everlasting freedom. The great religions and philosophies of the world bear witness to this ancient and perennial human aspiration. Sri Aurobindo shows a deep appreciation of this most remarkable phenomenon of human existence and it constitutes the starting point of his philosophy. As Ācārya Śaṅkara's philosophy starts with the analysis of illusion, so Sri Aurobindo's philosophy starts with the analysis of human aspiration.

### I

Sri Aurobindo makes serious and sustained effort to show that man's aspiration for God, Truth, Light, Freedom, Bliss, Immortality and Divine Life is perfectly legitimate. It is not merely his illusion, an idle speculation, a figment of his imagination or a happy dream. It is also not the result of his trying to make an escape from the hard realities of life. It is rooted in man's ontological structure. It arises out of the depth of his existence and is sustained and nourished by it. So in order to have a correct understanding and appreciation of man, and of his possibilities and aspirations, it is necessary to have a clear grasp of his ontological structure. We are to know man not only in his surface existence but also in the depth of his existence. Man is not a one-dimensional creature. He is a multi-dimensional being.



This understanding of man's existence is not possible if it is viewed in isolation. His multi-dimensional existence can be understood fully, according to Sri Aurobindo, only if it is viewed in the light of, and in relation to, the supreme Reality or the Absolute. It can be explained fully and in entirety only in terms of the Absolute or Brahman. Any attempt to explain man in terms of his body-mind organism or in terms of the great institutions created by him or in terms of history and time-process can give us only a fragmentary and partial view of his existence. It fails to give us an all-comprehensive and integral view of man as a whole.

Man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is essentially spirit or *Ātman*. The spirit is unborn, eternal, unchanging, immortal, conscious and ever-blissful in nature. It is a portion of *Saccidānanda* or Brahman. This represents the original state of man, his existence as spirit or *Ātman*. In its original state, the spirit enjoys complete unity with Brahman. It has full awareness of its real nature, of its immortal and blissful existence and is completely unaware of finitude, time and death. But the spirit does not enjoy this original state of absolute freedom and bliss for ever. It gets united with a body and is involved in the time-process. Now there occurs a radical change in its situation. It is no more aware of its immortal and divine nature. It identifies itself with the body and conceives itself as subject to finitude, time and death. In this state the spirit finds itself estranged from Brahman which constitutes the real centre and source of its existence.

But though the timeless spirit gets involved in the time-process, yet it does not become temporal. It does not lose its real nature. Man in the present stage of his existence suffers from ignorance, error, evil, etc., and his body-mind organism suffers from all sorts of limitations. It is ultimately subject to time and death. But in his innermost being, in his Spirit or the depth of his existence, he remains free from all the limitations and evils that characterise his surface existence. Even when it is involved in time and history, the spirit of man remains untouched by evil, suffering and death. This constitutes a supreme mystery of human existence. On the one hand, man is a portion of Brahman and, on the other hand, he is a part of nature. He represents in himself the unity of Infinite and finite, Being and non-being, time and Eternity. His existence is, thus, involved in ambiguity and contradiction. He has, thus, to remain in a state of tension.

Ordinarily, man is not fully aware of his existential situation, of the ambiguous character of his existence. But once he is awakened

and is in a position to realise the true character of his existence, he tries to free himself from the state of tension, from the ambiguities and contradictions of his life. But sometimes he tries to solve the discords and contradictions of his life by denying the reality of one or the other aspect of his existence. He either denies the reality of Spirit or of body. But both these approaches are, according to Sri Aurobindo, partial and one-sided. They fail to have a correct grasp and appreciation of man's total existence. A true philosophy, according to him, must steer clear of the two extremes of materialism ignoring spirit and spiritualism and ignoring matter or what he significantly characterises as the *Materialist Denial* and the *Refusal of the Ascetic*. "The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept matter of which it is made as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions."<sup>1</sup>

## II

Thus, though the Spirit constitutes the fundamental reality of man, the very basis of his ontological structure, yet body also is given a great importance by Sri Aurobindo. He follows the great Upaniṣadic tradition in regarding Spirit, *Ātman*, of man as the essential reality and the body as the vehicle or mansion of spirit. He also accepts the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth. Rebirth, according to Sri Aurobindo, "is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution; it is the only possible effective condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation in the material universe".<sup>2</sup> The Spirit's involvement in historical process cannot be adequately explained on the assumption of a single birth of man. "Birth then is a necessity of the manifestation of the *Puruṣa* on the physical plane; but his birth, whether the human or any other, cannot be in this world-order an isolated accident or a sudden excursion of a soul into physicality without any preparing past to it or any fulfilling hereafter".<sup>3</sup> So one is constrained to accept the doctrine of rebirth in order to comprehend the full meaning of human existence and the spiritual evolution of soul or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo, thus, gives strong support to the ancient Indian theory of rebirth and rejects the Semetic view which believes in a single birth of man in the world and also in the creation of soul. With him, the concept of rebirth is not a mere dogma which has to be blindly accepted. It is forced on us by the very logic of spirit's sojourn in the world and in historical process. In



Sri Aurobindo, rebirth is not only a means which provides opportunity to the souls or spirits to free themselves from *avidyā* and *karma* and attain liberation, as the ancient Indian views generally held, but it is also a great device for the higher spiritual evolution of spirits and the perfection of man. The perfection of man is possible only through the process of evolution. Unlike the traditional Indian view, Sri Aurobindo does not regard liberation (*mokṣa*) as the supreme goal of man's life. *Mokṣa* according to him is not an end in itself. It has to serve as means for the attainment of a still higher end which consists in the divinisation of man's life on this earth and also in the divinisation of nature. In the course of evolution man is to be transformed into a superman or gnostic being and nature has to manifest more and more the reign of spirit. It is only then that the ancient human aspiration to attain absolute truth, light, Freedom, Immortality and Divine Life can be fully realised.

Sri Aurobindo believes not only in the evolution of man but also in the evolution of the world or cosmos. This evolution of man and the world to the higher planes of spirit is possible only because the supreme Being, *Brahman*, has already made a descent into the world. *Brahman* evolves the world out of Itself or manifests Itself in the form of the world through the process of self-concentration or self-limitation of its consciousness-force. Mind, Life and Matter which constitute the three planes of the world are nothing but the self-limited forms of *Brahman*. This involvement or presence of *Brahman* in matter shows that matter cannot always remain in its original state of inconscience. It has to move itself forward and evolve the higher forms of life and mind out of itself in order to reveal more and more the supreme Reality hidden within it. It has ultimately to evolve itself and rise to the status of spirit. It means that matter has to undergo radical transformation in order to reveal fully and in an unfettered manner the Spirit or *Brahman* which constitutes its ultimate reality. Sri Aurobindo contends that because there has already taken place a descent or involution of *Brahman* in matter, so the latter can rise to the status of *Brahman* in the course of evolution. This double process of descent or involution and ascent or evolution explains, according to Sri Aurobindo, the mystery of creation. The process of evolution signifies the return of Spirit or *Brahman* to Itself. The fullest revelation of *Brahman* is possible only after the descent of supermind and the transformation of man into gnostic being.

### III

According to Sri Aurobindo, it is the evolution of consciousness that is the real aim of nature or of the Spirit hidden in it. The cosmic

evolution is ultimately meant to evolve organisms which reveal more and more the living Spirit already latent in them. Sri Aurobindo observes, "In the inner reality of things a change of consciousness was always the major fact, the evolution has always had a spiritual significance and the physical change was only instrumental; but this relation was concealed by the first abnormal balance of the two factors, the body of the external Inconscience outweighing and obscuring in importance the spiritual element, the conscious being. But once the balance has been righted, it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body."<sup>4</sup> This will become more and more evident when the evolution proceeds in its individual and cosmic aspects from the stage of mind to the higher levels of consciousness and existence, namely, the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind and ultimately to Supermind and *Saccidānanda*. The evolution from mind to supermind and the descent of the supermind and the transformation of man into gnostic being or superman takes place through the triple transformation, the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "There must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, purity into the whole being, even lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of the subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental consciousness into our entire being and nature."<sup>5</sup> This ascent of man and the world to the plane of the supermind and its descent into them effects a radical transformation in their nature. Man is transformed into a superman or gnostic being and nature is overtly and directly governed by the spirit. Now the evolution of the world will proceed through knowledge and not through ignorance. In the course of evolution through knowledge, a race of gnostic beings will, according to Sri Aurobindo, emerge into the world. The gnostic being is free from all the discords and contradictions that characterise the life of man. His spirit no more remains hidden behind the veil of ignorance and darkness. It manifests itself fully in and through the gnostic personality. It enjoys supreme knowledge, power and bliss. The gnostic being has a direct and living experience of unity with the whole of creation. The quest of life for growth, power, conquest, possession, satisfaction, creation, joy, love, beauty, etc., is realised to the fullest extent in the gnostic personality. The relation between the Spirit and body also undergoes a radical change in the



gnostic personality. The body is no more governed by the laws of nature. It "will be turned by the power of spiritual consciousness into a true and fit and perfectly responsive instrument of the spirit". It will enjoy absolute freedom, freedom from all the limitations of nature and even from death. Thus Sri Aurobindo believes not only in the liberation of soul or spirit but also in the liberation of man's psychophysical organism. If man is to enjoy complete freedom or liberation, then not only his spirit but his body as well should cease to be governed by the laws of nature and manifest freely the life, joy and power of spirit. Sri Aurobindo thus envisages the possibility for man to enjoy a completely divinised life in the world, the world which is no more governed by the principles of inconscience and ignorance, but is ruled by the spirit. The state of existence is symbolised by him as the kingdom of God. Man's perennial aspiration for perfection, immortality and the enjoyment of divine life is fully realised in the concept of Kingdom of God on earth.

#### IV

Sri Aurobindo's idea of the Kingdom of God bears a close resemblance to the Christian concept of the Divine kingdom. He seems to have been greatly impressed and to some extent influenced by the symbol of Kingdom of God as it has been entertained in the Judaic-Christian tradition. But Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the concept of Kingdom of God differs in a radical way from the Christian interpretation. According to the Christian view, though the presence of God is experienced by the people possessed of devotion and faith, yet His Kingdom cannot finally come into existence in the temporal order. It is possible only when time comes to an end. History is heading towards its fulfilment but this fulfilment will be possible only when the temporal order comes to an end and the Kingdom of God comes into existence. Thus in one sense the Kingdom of God is an everpresent reality that is experienced by the truly religious or spiritual man within his own being and in another sense it is future possibility that cannot be realised in time. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, the Divine kingdom is realised and established in the temporal order itself. It will be made possible by the supramental transformation of man and the world and the emergence of gnostic beings. In this respect Sri Aurobindo's view of the Kingdom of God goes ahead of the Christian concept of the Divine kingdom. Cosmic evolution will not come to an end after the supramental transformation. It will henceforth proceed, as has been pointed out above, not through ignorance but through knowledge. To Sri Aurobindo, the Divine kingdom is not something static, as the Christian view seems to suggest. It is a

dynamic reality. The process of divinisation of man and the world will not come to an end after the supramental transformation. Its pace will be, on the other hand, greatly accelerated.

## V

A pertinent question may be raised here. Is there any logical ground for Sri Aurobindo's belief in the supramental transformation of man and the world and the emergence of gnostic beings? In developing the concept of superman or gnostic being, Sri Aurobindo plays the role of a prophet and not of a philosopher. In my view, there is a distinct logic operating in Sri Aurobindo's idea of divinisation of man and the world. This idea can be logically deduced from his concepts of involution and evolution. Once we grant these two concepts we can clearly appreciate his idea of the supramental transformation or divinisation of man and the world. If Brahman has involved itself in the world, has made a descent into it and if the world in the course of evolution is revealing more and more the consciousness, power and delight of Brahman, then we can put no limit to the revelation of Brahman in and through the world. And again if the world has evolved from the stage of matter to that of man and if the real teleology of evolution is the revelation of consciousness, then there is no reason why the evolutionary process should stop at the stage of man and not proceed upwards to the status of spirit or Brahman. Thus Sri Aurobindo's belief and his supreme confidence in the emergence of gnostic beings can be fully understood and appreciated in the light of his concepts of involution and evolution. But so far as these two concepts themselves are concerned, they are to be taken as the presuppositions of his philosophy. Every philosophy has to start with certain presuppositions. Sri Aurobindo starts with supreme faith in the reality of Brahman and in His involution into the world and the consequent evolution of the world to its original status. If these premises are accepted, the conclusion logically and inevitably follows.

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S. Rajagopala Sastri

SRI AUROBINDO'S  
EVOLUTION AND  
INDIAN THOUGHT

The object of this paper is confined to a discussion of two problems, viz., the special significance of evolution in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and secondly to find out how far these principles are in agreement with or at variance with Indian thought. We have to note that in spite of the theory of evolution being elaborated by Sri Aurobindo, his philosophy is essentially founded in the Vedas, especially in the *Ṛg-veda*, the major *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. All these foundational scriptures have been interpreted by the several *ācāryas* in diverse ways with the result that different schools of thought, often antagonistic to each other have sprung up, each emphasising or exaggerating its own reading. Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the *Ṛg-veda* itself according to some is very original. He regards the Vedas as concealing the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it only to the initiated. The *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā* also have been interpreted by him from a broad perspective consistent with the viewpoint adopted by him. Every chapter in his *Life Divine* is begun with an appropriate motto from these scriptures. While it is not suggested that one should tie oneself to only traditional interpretation, it is nevertheless a legitimate question how far do the traditional interpreters, the several *ācāryas* who have commented on these texts, speak in the same strain as Aurobindo and what exactly are the differences between these two types of views.

We may at the outset give a short account of his evolution theory and note some of its salient points which would help us in answering these questions. The pivot of his whole philosophy is the principle of evolution. Unlike the modern European concept of evolution, his theory implies and includes also *involution*. It is not the material

world alone that comes under evolution but also a larger universal totality of which the material world is only one province. The world of matter is relatively unconscious though this unconsciousness is of various grades. We next have as more advanced the world of life and vitality. Life manifests itself in a countless number of organisms ranging from the crude primitive and blind urge to live somehow to the advanced grade of mutual adaptation. The third broad factor is the emergence of mind, the intellect which is strictly individual and correlated to the present. The supermind is the apex and between the mind and supermind there is a chasm. The development of the human mind requires, Sri Aurobindo says, an intermediary between itself and the supermind and this is designated as *overmind*. This evolution from one end to the other has not been accomplished so far and we have only come to the stage of mind, and may be, a few souls have gone beyond this. All the time, like the rays of the sun, the *Saccidānanda* is coming down through the super and overmind to the human mind and from mind down to life and matter. Without this no evolution or upward march from the inconscient matter is possible. There is a hard core of resistance to change or progress in matter and this has to be overcome. This is made possible by the involution of the Divine into this inconscient matter which gradually wears out its resistance and makes it pliable for further upward ascent. The whole process of evolution is not mechanical and automatic but deeply *spiritual* and *teleological*. It is a mighty pulsation of the *divine all-existence*. Matter is that on which life stands, out of which it evolves like a mighty tree with innumerable branches coming out of its encasing seed. Mind, life and body depend upon this physical principle of matter. All evolution in a sense, Sri Aurobindo states, is a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest, be it matter, life or mind so that it might be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest from matter into life, into mind and into the spirit. The usual antithesis between matter and mind is rejected by Aurobindo. One is not the negation of the other. Aurobindo is very severe with people who reject the spirit but uphold matter and also with those who reject matter and uphold the spirit. The materialist's denial and the ascetic's denial as he puts it are both wrong, for matter and spirit are as real as one another. Matter is that which merely has lost its consciousness or retains it in a very minute form just as a man might forget himself in extreme absorption.

Overmind-consciousness is a plane beyond the individual mind, beyond even the universal mind in ignorance. It carries in itself a first direct cognition of cosmic truth. While the mind gropes for truth, the overmind is a power of cosmic consciousness, a principle of global knowledge. The ascent to the supermind and descent from it is



possible only through this overmind. The dividing and individualising tendency of the mind gives place to a wide cosmic perception and feeling of a boundless universal self and movement. From this overmind the march is to the supermind which is instrumentation of the *Saccidānanda*, the Infinite consciousness, higher than the mental being. It is a self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal and a power of self-determination inherent in the self-awareness. The supermind is the consciousness-creation of the world. *Saccidānanda* is the Being whose essential nature is force or will and who is pure bliss. Eternal bliss of existence, eternal bliss of consciousness, is the divine infinite consciousness spoken of as Brahman in the *Upaniṣads*. The supermind or Truth-consciousness which exists, acts and proceeds is the fundamental truth and unity of things, is the intermediary between the overmind and *Saccidānanda*.

The distinction between evolution which is called in Indian thought, *pariṇāma* and creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) is not very great, for on a deeper understanding both come to the same thing; for nothing which is not already innately present in the cause can effectualise itself and in the same way creation also can only be another kind of manifestation that is guided and controlled by the Absolute. We thus see that ultimately there is not much difference between the two and the distinction between them is merely academic. Nevertheless Sri Aurobindo prefers the term evolution to creation and in his *Divine Life* he discusses the creation principle as a possible theory which comes very near to the principle of evolution. His main points may be stated as follows. Even if it is supposed that matter, life and mind are creations, there is no great harm because each of these created things is a form of the manifested divine Ātman and hence each is divine in itself by the spiritual presence within it, whatever may be its characteristic in nature. In each form of manifestation, the divine takes the delight of existence and there is no need of change or progress within it. There is a teeming multitude of forms with numberless variations which render evolution unnecessary. One may even suggest that no teleological purpose is necessary in creation, for the manifestation is for the sheer delight of creation by *Saccidānanda*. Even admitting that creation is a manifestation of the supra-conscious and that matter which is inconscience has been laid down as a basis for the reascent of the spirit, still a spiritual evolution of the individual being is not an inevitable consequence. If each thing created is a form of the manifest divinity, each is divine in itself by the spiritual presence within it. The factors created are relatively permanent and unchanging though there may be some minor variations. Each type of life while it lasts has its own pattern and remains faithful with some minor variations to that pattern. It is limited by its own nature. Hence

matter, life and mind continue to be the same created principles with an almost infinite number of types or modifications.

Aurobindo himself argues that if a consciousness force of the infinite has manifested life after manifesting matter, and mind after manifesting life, it does not follow that it will proceed to manifest supermind as the next terrestrial creation because mind and supermind belong to quite different hemispheres. Man has reached as the summit of creation the utmost consciousness and knowledge of which it is capable and he cannot proceed further. If he tries to go further he will only revolve in large cycles of his own mentality. Hence after mind there is a gulf between it and the supramind. No evolution is possible to bridge this gap. There is no proof yet that matter developed into life or life-energy into mind-energy.

Aurobindo recognised that there is no sufficient proof that any vegetable species developed into an animal existence or that an organisation of any inanimate matter developed into a living organism of many types so constructed. But he does not exceed the earthly creation because he cannot go beyond the limits of his *svabhāva* or *svadharma*. Nevertheless Aurobindo meets all these objections and concludes that an integral philosophy which includes the cosmos and the spirit completely is possible only on the basis of evolution and involution. It is only on evolution inherent in the very structure of consciousness that one can explain satisfactorily how mind evolves into the supermind and how the supermind is involved in the mind. It is thus clear that there is not such a complete dichotomy between creation and evolution and that the dividing line between the two is only mathematical without any breadth.

Indian Philosophy, as has been said very often, is individualistic and is mainly concerned with the liberation of the individual. No system of thought has expressed strongly on the idea of cosmic liberation—the liberation of all human beings and much less with what Sri Aurobindo says of the divinisation of the whole cosmos. The concept of *Sarvamukhi* cannot be equated with his cosmic divinisation. Indian thought emphasises only individual salvation. The *jīva* who fell from his original state of divinity has to attain it back. Barring this, Indian darśanas do not seem very much interested in *a priori* speculations about the ascent of matter to life and mind, nor about the descent of *Saccidānanda* to the the supramental, etc. At least *śruti* has nothing to say on these topics. Secondly, matter is just what its name implies. It is not taken for granted that matter is consciousness which has forgotten itself. Matter is important in so far as it provides a physical environment for the *jīva* to try to make



himself more and more perfect, but the really important fact is spirit and not matter. Just as a worn-out dress is cast off, the world of matter also is cast aside when one attains the final state of emancipation. The *nivṛttimārga* illustrates this point though in an exaggerated way. The reality of the world is not on a par with that of Brahman. The reality of the shadow is dependent on the reality of the object casting the shadow.

It is not true that there are no systems of thought in Indian Philosophy based on some kind of evolution. The *Sāṅkhya-darśana* traces the evolution of the world of nature from *Prakṛti* or *Pradhāna* whose evolutes are twenty four in number. They include *Mahat* or *Buddhi*, *Ahaṅkāra*, the five *Tanmatras* or subtle elements, the five *Mahābhūtas* or the gross elements, the five sensory and five motor organs including *manas*. But this is merely the evolution of nature including the human body and is not on the line of Aurobindo's evolution.

Aurobindo's system comes close to the *Ābhāsavāda* or manifestation of the Anuttara of the Trika system of Kashmir. But even here there are broad and fundamental differences. The Absolute here is not only pure consciousness but also self-consciousness (*Prakāśa* and *Vimarśa*). The *Vimarśa* aspect we may denominate as *śakti*. This is the subject-object element while Anuttara is merely the "I" element. Cosmic evolution commences from here onwards. From this *Śakti tattva*, there follow respectively *Sadāśiva tattva* in which the "This" or objective element is something like a picture of an artist which is merely in the stage of idea. Next to that is the "*Īśvara tattva*" when the subject just recognises the object and the universe begins to blossom. *Sadvidyā tattva*, the fifth is one where subject and object are equally balanced. These five constitute the universal aspect of Cit. From now on we have the *Māyā tattva* which veils the real nature of the Supreme Reality. There are altogether thirty six Tattvas. The point is that the Absolute limits itself and this constitutes the objective world. Hence everything is diffused with divinity though it may be next to nothing. At the time of *pralaya* or destruction, the ultimate withdraws all these into itself.

It can easily be seen that this is just an explanation of how the universe, psychical and physical has come into existence and it is neither a divinisation of the cosmos nor evolution and involution proceeding from opposite sources. We may note one important feature here in these two systems. There is no effort of matter to evolve from the lowest to its highest degree of structure or function nor do we have the hypothesis of Divinity coming down from its highest pinnacle

to the several lower strata with the intention of making possible the evolutionary process. Except the human beings or *jīvas*, there is no attempt on the part of the subhuman vital or material principles to struggle to a higher domain, to become more refined and develop to the higher. Aurobindo visualises a time when the whole cosmos including mind, over mind, etc. will disappear and the *Saccidānanda* alone will exist. But the Hindu systems confine themselves to the *jīvas* or souls which do not develop into anything else but merely realise their true nature and attain liberation. There is not here any deliberate attempt to synthesise and harmonise the several alleged inconsistencies and create a system free from flaws. The Trika system is just an attempt to explain how man who is bound and rendered impure by the three malas can hope to rid himself of these and attain the pure state of *Śiva tattva*. Another point also may be noted. The mind is regarded as the principle of individuation and Aurobindo struggles hard to explain how the supermind which perceives cosmic truths gradually comes to individuation and dividing principle. The treatment of the five Tattvas by Kashmir Śaivism explains this aspect of the question correctly.

Aurobindo, as we have seen before, bases his whole system on Brahman as postulated in the Upaniṣads. Brahman is *nirguṇa*, *nirviśeṣa*, indeterminable, eternal, ineffable by words. It is pure existence, consciousness and bliss. But at the same time he teaches that Brahman is also cosmic activity, cosmic consciousness and cosmic existence. These are stated to be the poises of *Saccidānanda*. While being transcendental silence, it is at the same time cosmic universality and also unique individuality. In other words, it is Spirit, *Īśvara* and *Puruṣa*. There seems to be a fundamental logical lacuna here. Śaṅkara to be logical taught the existence of *Nirguṇa-Brahman*: but since from this no creation is possible, he introduced the principle of *māyā* at the control of Brahman which projects *Īśvara* who however is not different from *Nirguṇa-Brahman*. The Trika philosophy of Vasubandhu taught the existence of the Anuttara which is consciousness and also self-consciousness. The latter is styled as *Śakti Tattva* which creates the cosmos. But Aurobindo postulates an all-comprehensive Brahman, *Saccidānanda* who is *Nirviśeṣa*, *Viśeṣa* and at the same time individual finitude. To put it in the European phraseology, Brahman is abstract, pure consciousness, bliss and existence and at the same time a concrete universal and also finitised individual. It is one thing to frame a flawless system which reconciles or removes all the alleged contradictions in the several theories and it is another to intuit the nature of God, man and the cosmos on the basis of *śruti* and the usual canons of interpretation. According to Aurobindo, the three Ācāryas, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva attach exaggerated



to each of these three poises without understanding that Brahman is all these. Śaṅkara emphasises the pure transcendental existence of Brahman which is indeterminate, without attributes, eternal and Absolute. Rāmānuja's Brahman is Personal and with divine attributes and he comprehends souls and matter within the unity of the Lord which he regards as related to the Supreme as attributes to a substance. He is against the phenomenality of the world. Madhva holds that God, soul and the world are fundamentally different from one another and these exist from all eternity. But Aurobindo's Vedānta is usually styled as Integral Advaitism (Pūrṇādvaita) according to which Reality or Brahman comprises all eternal poises of existence. He holds that although indeterminable to mind because of its absoluteness and infinity, this Supreme and Eternal Infinite determines itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being. This Supreme Brahman is at the same time the omnipresent Reality taking all relatives in its embrace. He specifically says: The Upaniṣads affirm that all this is Brahman — Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman. *Vāyu* is addressed as manifest Brahman and pointing to man and beast and bird and insect, each separately is identified as the *One*. But Śaṅkara affirms that the Absolute is only pure undifferentiated consciousness; Īśvara, Qualified Brahman creates, sustains and resolves this universe. But Aurobindo does not agree with this view and holds Being and Becoming are both true in their own right. Śaṅkara affirms the ultimate reality of Being only. In Śaṅkara's Advaita, Aurobindo says one feels the presence of a conflict of an intuition intensely aware of an absolute transcendent and inmost reality and a strong intellectual reality regarding the world with a keen and vigorous rational intelligence. Aurobindo states Śaṅkara's problem as follows: Reason has to affirm the reality of the phenomenal existence. It is real because it is a temporal phenomenon of the Eternal Existence — Brahman. But the world is not itself that Reality and when one passes beyond the phenomenon to the Real, it still exists but is no longer valid to our consciousness. Hence it is unreal. Śaṅkara takes up this contradiction and resolves it by postulating *māyā*. Īśvara by his *māyā* constructs this world as a temporal phenomenon. This solution with the *māyā* concept, Aurobindo says, creates more difficulties than it solves.

The opening *Mantra* of the Śāṇḍilya Vidyā in the Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad, "*Sarvam khalvidam brahma*" is interpreted by Aurobindo to mean that everything in the cosmos is Brahman. But actually according to Śaṅkara's understanding it is only a form of meditation. This universe differentiated into Names and Forms and forming the object of perception, etc. is Brahman, the cause. At all

periods of time, this universe remains one with Brahman and is never cognised apart from it. In this sense, the universe is Brahman itself. Even according to Rāmānuja, though the world and the individual souls have real existence of their own, neither of them is essentially the same as Brahman. Madhva holds that God, soul and the world, though existing eternally, are still fundamentally different from one another. But Aurobindo dismisses all these interpretations as wrong.

A comparison of Aurobindo's philosophy with classical Indian thought is not probably very appropriate because though both are based on the same *śruti*, his mode of understanding these texts and the final conclusion are entirely different in each. The ācāryas speak only of three categories, viz., God, the world of matter and the *jīva* or the soul and do not speak of the overmind and the Supramind. Indian thought takes a pragmatic attitude and explains that its goal is *mukti* or *niśreyas* of the individual soul. It lays down that realisation of God by the soul leads to *mukti* and that there are four chief means to this end. One who realises Brahman is ever at peace and is free from rebirth and Karma. Beliefs differ so far as the details of this *mukti* are concerned. Thus from one point of view the individual does not worry about the nature of the world and about other things. In unison with Tagore's attitude, the *jīva* is interested only in realising God and not in other things except so far as they directly affect him. But with Aurobindo the picture is different. He interprets the *śruti* passages in favour of the reality (one may say—real reality) of matter and the material world, life and mind and also finds significant passages in the *Ṛg-veda* in line with his cosmic evolution. Everything in the cosmos has itself consciousness though in varying proportions and hence everything evolves and ultimately becomes the supramental Reality, viz., *Saccidānanda*. Thus Indian thought has developed in its own way and Aurobindo's philosophy develops in the light of the involution and evolution basis, and one cannot say that his philosophy is in union with the traditional interpretation.



Aster Patel

SRI AUROBINDO AND  
HENRI BERGSON: TWO  
VIEWS ON EVOLUTION

The idea of evolution was the great discovery of the 19th century, which left few minds indifferent. It coloured the temper of a whole epoch and determined the direction in which thought and experience were to move definitively. This truth has become so much a part of our thinking today that it is hardly possible to consider an issue except within this general frame-work: issues acquire their full significance and validity only when considered *sub specie evolutionis*. Some of the most eminent of contemporary philosophers, whether in India or in the West, have made such attempts and there has resulted a great crystallisation of thought and experience on the subject. Prof. Julian Huxley has very rightly stated that the fact of evolution was bound to act as "the central germ or living template of a new dominant thought organisation". Of these several evolutionary philosophies, the most complex and the most enriching is the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, to commemorate whose birth centenary we have gathered here. We would have wished to take a few of the salient features of his theory of evolution and offer a comparison, in the hope of promoting a deeper understanding of the problem, with the views of some of the most creative philosophers from the West. But since the scope of the present paper is limited, we shall restrict ourselves to effecting this very brief comparison with the most original and stimulating of the early evolutionists, Henri Bergson, and shall be content to make passing allusions to le Pere Teilhard de Chardin and Julian Huxley.

At the time when Sri Aurobindo and Bergson considered the problem of evolution, the ideas generally accepted on the subject were: mutation of species by natural selection, necessity of adaptation to environment. Briefly, evolution was considered as resulting from a process of action and reaction with external factors. The problem was thus viewed from a mechanistic point of view. What characterises,

however, the basic orientation of Sri Aurobindo and Bergson is a total change of perspective. They do not consider the process of evolution on the basis of its external manifestations but seek to know the profound inner significance of the entire movement: evolution is seen not in terms of the 'without', but in terms of the 'within', the unseen real that is its secret origin and its moving force. There is an outer apparatus of form and species, there is an inner content of spiritual creativity and meaningfulness: it is this latter that the two philosophers seek to discover.

We shall present here just a few elements of some of the more interesting points of comparison.

1. The first point to be noted is that both Sri Aurobindo and Bergson affirm that evolution is essentially a fact of spiritual creativity and not merely an empirical phenomenon. Thus they attribute primacy to consciousness, with the difference that this primacy is, for Sri Aurobindo, absolute. It must be remembered, however, that consciousness is given, by each one, a different range of meaning. This spiritual evolution is for Sri Aurobindo distinctly teleological. Bergson, in rejecting mechanism, rejects also teleology but a note of finalism comes in retrospectively, though even at that later stage, it is present more by implication than as explicit avowal.

It is interesting to observe that both Bergson and Sri Aurobindo evince very characteristic initial attitudes on the subject of evolution. Bergson has a most vivid awareness of the "unforeseen novelty" in creation: whereas Sri Aurobindo feels a profound attraction towards the dimension of the prospective in evolution, for the infinitely richer possibilities of the future that await man. This exploration of the prospective, of the ranges of experience that lie ahead, their characterisation, the means of reaching out to them and actualising them — this is what Sri Aurobindo essentially seeks to do. Bergson also feels the pull of the future when he considers the place of man in the total process of evolution. But by virtue of both his training and his temperament, there is in him no urge to personally explore this dimension of the prospective. He feels only a great attraction for it and foresees its general character.

This pre-occupation with the future, a future which is not so much a temporal category but is symbolic of a further evolutionary reach of newer and higher levels of consciousness which can be attained, has become the dominant characteristic of contemporary thought, however variously it may be formulated or in whatever incipient a manner. This ascendancy of the future over the human



spirit, a kind of a polarisation of attention on this particular dimension, a reaching out towards the 'not-yet-there', the urge to actualise it—these seem to be, philosophically, the most powerful attitudes prevalent today. And of all philosophers, no one seems to embody them as does Sri Aurobindo. These find expression not only in the creation of a complex and consistent system of thought but what is more pertinent is the fact that he also elaborates a distinct psychological discipline that can help man to actualise this range of future possibility. In fact, this emphasis on the 'practical', the word being given its widest significance, or to use a richer Indian equivalent 'realisation' in fact of experience and qualitative growth of consciousness, is the most attractive and uplifting aspect of Sri Aurobindo's entire philosophy. To know is the first indispensable necessity but thus to know that knowledge remains not merely conceptual but is embodied in the totality of the being as a fact of concrete experience. This truth is firmly embedded in the Indian tradition generally and it finds, in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, a very powerful formulation in terms of contemporary understanding. It is interesting to note that the schools of existentialist thought in the West lay a similar emphasis on the primacy of the 'practical', but the term is given a different connotation.

2. Both Bergson and Sri Aurobindo consider the creative force behind evolution as being a conscious, cosmic reality. Could we establish a correspondence between the 'élan vital' of the former and the triune reality of *Saccidānanda* (Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss) manifesting itself in the world of becoming?

It must first be noted that the word 'vital' is used by Bergson with a certain amount of fluidity. In his work, "Creative Evolution", it denotes a biological reality and it rests within the framework of a philosophy of nature. But as evolution itself progresses, the term receives a more ample definition and it refers to the spiritual in reality. This fluidity of terminology is to be regretted but must, however, be taken due cognisance of. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, distinguishes the different levels of evolution with complete clarity, as constituting an ascending scale of values within the framework of an organic totality. He makes use of a special and distinct terminology to denote each level of evolution and thus avoids the over-lapping and ambiguity that we find in Bergson on this point.

If we might be permitted here a brief digression, we would like to offer a pertinent clarification. In most studies on Bergson by Indian scholars, his philosophy is considered as being merely 'vitalistic'. We would, however, like to draw attention to the fact that there is a very

distinct evolution in this philosophy of evolution. Evolution as a biological process is the 'point de depart' of Bergson, but as evolution itself progresses, it is enriched by other dimensions of reality. In the latter part of the book, 'Creative Evolution', this begins to become evident and one breathes already, one might say, a spiritual air! Between this work and the work which marks the point of culmination, 'The Two Sources of Morality and Religion', there is an important collection of lectures delivered by Bergson and brought out under the title, 'L'Energie Spirituelle'. This marks the transition, in very clear terms, between evolution viewed within a biological framework and evolution as possessing a spiritual significance and purpose. Unfortunately, this work has yet to be translated into English: it remains accessible only in the original French.

We would like to conclude, therefore, that the 'élan vital' corresponds not to one but to several levels of *Saccidānanda* manifesting in the world of becoming. The reality to which the two philosophers refer is that of a conscious spiritual force, which creates for the sheer joy of creation, thus expressing the supreme felicity inherent in it.

We would like to observe here that Sri Aurobindo elaborates at great length on how these levels within the organic totality interact with one another and how they stand related to the whole. If we may use, for this purpose, a term from contemporary Western philosophy, this 'structurisation' of the whole is a complex, multi-dimensional fact. The two primary dimensions that can be discerned are the upward and the inward. The interaction of these two at various levels would give rise to a host of further dimensions. This fact of an organic totality in which can be discerned various levels of experience constituting an ascending scale of values, the highest being that of a complete integration of knowing, feeling and willing, would be a most interesting subject for further study.

3. Bergson and Sri Aurobindo affirm an important difference in the actual process which this creative evolution pursues. For the former, evolution takes place along divergent lines. At the origin, different tendencies exist in a state of inter-penetration and they later diverge and become distinct. Bergson gives the analogy of the shell that bursts: there are divergent directions in which creative activity proceeds and the degradation of this movement is what he calls 'matter'. For Sri Aurobindo, the key-word is convergence. The one reality that manifests through different levels—from matter to life, from life to mind, from mind to spirit—to recover at the summit of evolution the real plenitude that is inherent in it. This implies, in



fact, two movements—that of a prior involution of the spiritual creative force in the successive terms of existence, and, subsequently, an evolution upward out of the lower terms and into the higher ones. For, Sri Aurobindo offers the Vedāntic solution that if consciousness were not involved in matter, it could not evolve out of it. Its latent involvement is necessary for a plausible explanation of the process as a whole. Evolution proceeds from one level to the next higher level by a process of widening, heightening and integration of consciousness. The movement is thus spiral and results in a transformation of the lower into the higher, the former is not eternally relegated to an inferior status and possibility but is taken up by the next higher level, and there assimilated and transformed. This principle of integration gives a cohesiveness and validity to the entire process of evolution as visualised by Sri Aurobindo. Bergson, no doubt, gives the analogy of the 'snow-ball', which gathers all experience into itself but this is at best a feeble attempt at integration. Le Père Teilhard de Chardin, who considers with Sri Aurobindo the process of evolution to be convergent, talks in a similar vein of 'un enroulement organique sur soi-même' (an organic coiling up upon oneself). In both cases, the necessity of integration of different levels of evolution is keenly felt but the problem has not received adequate elucidation. At the hands of Sri Aurobindo, however, the principle of integration receives a very special consideration and its various implications are elaborately worked out.

4. Sri Aurobindo and Bergson maintain that evolution does not terminate with man and that it continues far beyond his present status. However, man occupies in the total process a position of critical importance. For with him, a radical change in the process itself of evolution comes into effect. It is not necessary to create other species, for the form no longer limits the potentiality of further creation. Evolution is thus pursued within the being and consciousness of man. At one stage, evolution aimed at the acquisition of a greater knowledge of and a fuller mastery over the external reality; but at the present stage of man, evolution tends towards a growth and plenitude of consciousness itself—a plenitude that means joy, freedom, totality. This would be a level of consciousness *qualitatively* different from that of the mental level, which is our present possession. Bergson visualises this further extension by use of a general term 'supra-consciousness' (supra-consciousness), whereas Sri Aurobindo distinguishes a whole ascending hierarchy of levels, which culminates in what he terms 'the supermind', and which is essentially characterised by the possibilities of whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power. He characterises, at great length, the quality of consciousness that corresponds to each of these levels and indicates the means by which man,

individually and later collectively, can rise up to these levels and possess them in experience.

It is interesting to note here a corroboration offered by Prof. Julian Huxley on this issue. He insists with special emphasis that evolution tends, at the present moment, towards such a plenitude of consciousness. For the ultimate goal before man is not to arrive at a greater complexity of external organisation or a greater domination over the environment, but to realise an inner plenitude—in other words, the completest possible realisation of all potentiality, individually and, in slow stages, collectively too. Huxley introduces a certain ‘practical’ dimension, which really comes to its own in Sri Aurobindo as we have had occasion to mention earlier. Huxley states that once it is recognised that this plenitude is the true and final goal of man, we would need to create “a science of human possibilities” to help us work out the long process of psycho-sociological evolution that lies ahead. The expression “a science of human possibilities” is intriguing; Sri Aurobindo feels for this a very special attraction and elaborates in this connection a psychological discipline of growth and evolution of the individual, which he terms “Integral Yoga”. This is a fresh creation but which offers, at the same time, a synthesis of the essential elements of the traditional disciplines of *yoga*. It has a very special relevance for the contemporary consciousness in the matter of terminology, methodology and philosophical basis of the entire discipline. This is largely due to the fact that the “Integral Yoga” rests within the framework of a philosophy of evolution. For Sri Aurobindo affirms that the evolution of the individual can be pursued only by remaining faithful to the processes that evolutionary nature has herself pursued in her movement upward. The two are co-terminous one with the other. The difference between them being that the latter takes place subconsciously, whereas the former can proceed in a conscious and deliberate manner, thus greatly accelerating the course of the movement. These processes of evolutionary nature, i.e., the triple action which leads to the growth of consciousness—that of widening, heightening and integration—are systematised into a psychological discipline of individual self-development. It is interesting to remark upon the relevance of this discipline to the essential content of Huxley’s expression “a science of human possibilities”.

In fact, the feeling that a deliberate and methodised effort should be made towards self-enrichment and self-exceeding has become steadily more pervasive. For, with the appearance of man in the course of evolution, the product of the process becomes the agent of the process: the active participation of the individual in carrying the movement further becomes essential. On this point, there is a wide



consensus of opinion amongst contemporary philosophers but the question of real importance remains to be put: *how* is this participation to be effected? A mere statement made on the subject is hardly adequate: a way must be found to make this possible. Here Sri Aurobindo alone provides the answer: an answer that is being passionately sought by modern man. This incorporation, within the framework of a philosophy of evolution, of a psychological discipline that aims at the growth and evolution of the individual is one of the very special features of his approach to the subject as a whole. Its implications are far-reaching.

5. There is a final point that we wish to touch upon briefly.

When Bergson and Sri Aurobindo envisage a new quality of consciousness, or a whole range of future possibilities, towards which evolution tends, this further dimension of growth is seen in terms of dynamism and action, and not in terms of repose and status. It is an ideal of all-englobing, all-conquering spirituality which emerges here. The progressive realisation of this ideal is the vocation of all humanity, the individual being the fore-runner.

To bring to a conclusion this brief comparison of some views of Sri Aurobindo and Bergson on the subject of evolution, we would like to state the following. What is of particular interest here is the fact that the characteristic approach of the two philosophers to the study of the problem has been different, for each has essentially pursued the line of seeking represented by the philosophical tradition to which he was born. Bergson devoted the larger part of his energies to studying the scientific aspect of the problem of evolution, whereas Sri Aurobindo's chief concern was a profound inner exploration of the higher levels of consciousness towards which evolution progresses. And yet, and therein lies its deep significance, in spite of this difference in the line of approach, there is a firm ground of sympathy with regard to some of the major issues. What the two philosophers essentially impart to us is a rare optimism about the future destiny of man—a future towards which he tends, knowingly or unknowingly. Sri Aurobindo offers us, additionally, the possibility of doing so in full awareness of both the process and the goal and of making of this movement forward a fully conscious endeavour. This optimism does not call for merely a facile acceptance but requires a spiritual heroism, that gives us the courage to feel out for the future that is to be and to make an attempt to actualise it. There are very basic differences too between the two philosophers and these move us to further reflexion on the problem. Their mutual accord, however, strengthens our faith in their one fundamental affirmation:

“Earth's million roads struggled towards divinity.”

PART TWO

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINAR  
ON  
THE CONCEPT OF PERSON



THE HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION

IN

SWITZERLAND

C. T. K. Chari

TOWARDS A  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF  
"PERSONAL STYLES"

A characteristic thesis of personalist metaphysics in the East and in the West has been the contention that persons are unique and ineluctable members of the real world. The emphasis can be noticed in an American personalist like Royce, a Russian personalist like Lossky, a Polish personalist like Lutoslawski, a French personalist like Mounier, a Swedish personalist like Boström and a Spanish personalist like Unamuno. For *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, the *puruṣa* is the subject or self, *kṣetrajña*, differentiating itself from the non-self, *kṣetra*. For *Dvaita*, souls are distinct even in the state of *mukti*. The Sufi goes from the first intoxication (*sukr*) to the sobriety of union (*ṣaḥw 'l-jam'*) and thence to the second sobriety (*al-ṣaḥw althani*). Each of the thirty journeying birds in Fariduddin Attar's *Mantiqut-tair* mirrors the Great Simurgh. But many of us cannot speak from the altitudes of mysticism. How is the unique person found? Our ordinary description of anybody, however good, would seem to fit countless other persons among the millions who live on earth.

My concern in this paper is with one aspect of personality, its uniqueness as disclosed in the styles of its expressive movements. Style may be regarded as the most complex and the most complete expression of personality. It ranges anywhere from gait, gesture, posture, voice and handwriting to the most intricate aesthetic and literary products. The French adage *Le style c'est l'homme même* is not an inadequate summing-up of the astonishing diversity of phenomena. In approaching the problem of personal style, we must side-step, at least for the nonce, the socio-cultural determinants of style as set forth in Jourard's "self-disclosures", the modal personality theories of Benedict, Kardiner and Cora Dubois, and in the Sapir-Whorf approaches to language and thought. Impressionism is a style of



modern Occidental art; but we have to allow for innumerable refinements and personal overtones when we go from Monet and Pissarro to Seurat, Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh. The German *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement does not necessarily reproduce the finer effects of Otto Dix and Max Beckmann. Flaubert's *mot juste*, Mallarmé's music of words and Rilke's agitation of the "I" communicated to objects, are highly personal styles even if they serve as models for a host of imitators who fall into preciosity. Taking a vastly different problem, by way of contrast, an aphasic patient with a localized brain injury may seem to conform to one of the broad categories distinguished by Head, Weisenberg and McBride; yet the symptomatology varies from patient to patient and is a global condition, a unique *Gestalt*, in each.

Modern transactional psychology affords much evidence for distinctive styles of perceiving and responding to the world in the tilted visual frames of Witkin, the distorted room of Ames, the rotating trapezoid, aneisokonic lenses, the Gottschaldt figures, the Kohnstamm effect, positive and negative. Estes claimed to have found that judges who adopt an analytic and reflective standpoint in viewing personality, in everyday living, can be much less accurate than judges who adopt a global viewpoint. Taft discovered that even those who ordinarily adopt analytic and inductive assessments prefer global judgments in some situations. G. W. Allport's characterization of personality as the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that deal with his unique adjustments to his environment bears too obviously on the expressive movements of Klages, the *Ausdruckskunde* with their *Schwerpunkt*.

Patterns of expressive movements vary for different individuals while maintaining a puzzling overall or fine constancy in each person, for instance in doodling while listening to music, which seems to defy the uniformities prescribed by the nature of the task, convention, practice, sex, age, body build, health or disease, passing emotions. The most striking experiments in this field of research are those reported by Landis, G. W. Allport and P. E. Vernon, Wolff, Luria, C. L. Freeman, Malmo, Rinaldi, Elizabeth Duffy, Talmadge, McNamara and Lisina. There seem to be truly remarkable matchings between specimens of handwriting and phonograph records of voices, between voices and photographs, hands and silhouettes of profiles, styles of retelling a story and gait, ego distance and autokinetic phenomena, between the illusions on the right-half of the visual field in right-handed persons and those on the left half of the visual field in left-handed persons, between proprioceptive and interoceptive stimulation, for instance heart beats and activation of the gastric mucosa, and the concurrent images and words fashioned by the individual.



Is there a unique awareness of personal styles resisting scientifically statable general uniformities of behaviour? In putting the query, I must not be understood as reviving any naive antithesis between wholism and atomism, between the idiographic and the nomothetic, in the study of personality. Cattell, Stephenson and even Eysenck speak of factor analysis and multiple discriminants in wholistic language. Is uniqueness of any personal style the intersection of a large number of quasi-normally distributed variables extracted by, say, single occasion analysis (Q and R tests), single person analysis (O and P tests), and single test procedures (S and T procedures)? Allport contends that the "personal nexus" wherein all such variables are joined eludes every type of nomothetic analysis. Vernon maintains that the evaluative, potency and other dimensions of Osgood's semantic differential are the average attitudes of many judges and little calculated to reveal the richness of individual frameworks. D. N. Jackson and S. Messik have argued that "stylistic determinants" like acquiescence, over generalization, tendencies to react in socially adequate or inadequate ways, account for a large part of the variance in some personality scores like those of the California F or the Minnesota Multiphasic. Cronbach's  $D^2$  statistic is as impressionistic as his "narrow-band" and "wide-band" engineering assessments of personality.

The standard normal distribution, determining Eysenck's neurotic, psychotic and other dimensions of personality, arises from the Central Limit Theorem as the limiting distribution of a standard sum of independent and identically distributed summands as the number of terms increases indefinitely. The bivariate Rayleigh and the trivariate Maxwell distributions are special modifications of the standard form. If Shannon's informational entropy for the standard form is a linear function of the logarithm of the variance, taken along with a constant, it can be shown that, out of all possible distributions, the normal distribution has the largest informational uncertainty.

How far can we go with these random models in grasping highly personal styles? Wilsmann analysed gait into a number of variables like regularity, speed, pressure, length of stride, elasticity, direction, variability. For handwriting, we can use the variables of speed, width, slant, connectedness, direction, emphasis on initial letters, overwriting, distortions, pastosity. But it is significant that, over and above these variables, the investigators have had to reckon with a qualitative pattern of the whole, a poorly defined total rhythm, the *Gestaltungskraft* of Klages, which contributes most decisively to the recognition of personal style. Rinaldi showed that a person has not one uniform tempo, but a preferred tempo for each of several tasks, the



whole gamut constituting a kind of total rhythm without one channel ever being a replica of another. Estes, in some striking experiments, demonstrated that the judgments of personal styles offered by expert psychologists, on the basis of motion pictures and other records, were much less valid than the assessments of artists who were confronted with the same materials.

Information-theoretic measures and type-token indices in the stylometrics of art, literature and music, are not refined enough to catch the more delicate shades of personal style which are decisive in these domains. My colleague, Dr. Gift Siromoney of the Department of Statistics, Madras Christian College, found that the Shannon measures for *Tholkāppiyam* and Kambar's *Yuthakandam* are of the same order notwithstanding significant stylistic differences. A recent content analysis of the *vacanas* of Basavaṇṇa, the founder of the Vīraśaiva cult, by McCormack, has disclosed a predominance of personal and cultural metaphors and an almost total avoidance of animal and plant symbols. But the exceptions, for instance the metaphor of the black dog, have the most tantalizing cultural as well personal nuances.

In defending Dilthey's distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities, the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, Spranger and Hayek plead for grasping a "subjective meaning in relation to a totality". Nagel's attempts to surmount the uneasy dualism of the idiographic and the nomothetic rest, in effect, on canons of validity and adequacy in all intelligible discourse established for human behaviour in terms of empirically and statistically available uniformities. It is just here that my difficulty arises. The "methodological individualism" of Popper, which would break down proposed social or collective models of behaviour into the responses, attitudes, expressions of the individual, is but an ambitious programme when we encounter the vagaries of personal style and rhythm. Polányi established the continuity of the natural and the historical disciplines by injecting his tacit knowing and his fiduciary personal commitments in scholarship. Weber correlates the subjectively grasped meaning or motive, the *Sinn* seized by *Verstehen*, with statistically defined regularities of social behaviour. I quite see that psychology cannot be all *verstehende Psychologie* and sociology cannot be all *verstehende Soziologie*. I would still ask whether there may not be both a cognitive grasp of the person and a more intimate and elusive awareness, both fallible, both corrigible though mutually untranslatable, each limiting the other. All attempts to produce a tidy and unified logic or science of the person may be pious hopes or pious exhortations. Stern's dictum *keine Gestalt ohne Gestalter* confers only a formal or verbal unity on an unfinished personalistic psychology. Even



Allport's description of personality as a system of focal but interdependent states, the units being essentially different in each individual, looks like a compromise between general and individual traits.

I can only glance at some other approaches. For Max Scheler "acts" issue from the person and pass into "functions" like observing, attending, thinking, ascribed to an objective self by scientific psychology. The distinction between *Einzelperson* and *Gesamtperson* is finely drawn. But I am afraid that neither *einzel* nor *erlebnis-ich* comes to terms with personal styles, or should I say with *Einzigperson*? The *Daseinformen* of the existentialist psychologists, Straus, Binswanger, and Medard Boss, denies all cause-effect relationships in the phenomenologically given *Eigenwelt* and *Mitwelt*, but shows no great insight into personal styles of appropriating space and time. The earlier psychoanalysis, discredited by the existential psychologists, spoke more discerningly of claustrophobias and agoraphobias in time. I find the "personal space" of Stern and Schulz more promising than Binswanger's *gestimmter Raum*.

P. F. Strawson's exposition of the unity of the person as the logical subject owning both P and M predicates is inadequate to the niceties established by experiments. The scanning of dreams is convertible into the delicate Kleitman patterns of the flutterings of the eyes behind the closed eyelids of the dreamer. Hafferline, by using an electronic screen, found that subjects who were engaged in talking, could identify readily the proprioceptive information about the contraction and movements of the jaw muscles in the visual form. Even when the visual information was cut off, the subjects could convert into the visual terms the tensing of the jaw muscles.

The solitary person aware of his own rhythms is a myth. T. H. Pear found that one recognizes one's voice best not in tape-recorded monologues but in dialogues. One's intervention in dialogue may be measured by Chapple's interaction chronograph. A vocoder may economize the frequency band required in telephony by coding the sender's voice and replacing it by a "synthetic speech" at the receiving end; personal recognition of style survives some filtered speech. Signal-plus-noise theories are quite insufficient for the problem. Pear demonstrated that listeners' judgements are as valid as the test scores. Human voices can be recognized in spite of changes in frequency, amplitude, phase, with mutilated tonality and cadences, under conditions of high masking noise. Recent experiments in which intersubjective intercourse was televisioned and videotaped have disclosed that one becomes aware of the unity of one's P and M attributes only by becoming aware of such unity in others. The conclusion is suggested



also by John Mann's synergistic psychodrama in which a person shifts chairs as he changes roles. D.A. Bell, from the expert informational and engineering point of view, admits frankly that two lovers may fill trunk telephone calls with highly personal and significant "sweet nothings" which would rank low on all scales of information. Brillouin recognizes the serious limits imposed on his theory by the "human element".

Does empathy hold the key to the phenomenology of personal styles? I must point out that the English word is a dubious translation by Titchener of the *Einfühlung* proposed by Lipps. Empathy is often vaguely described as an imaginative transposition of oneself. Lipps interpreted it as a kind of objective motor mimicry, but was careful to add that it is more than a subconscious kinesthetic inference based on one's own proprioceptive and interoceptive experiences. The empathic act involves a unique reference to the consciousness of another self. Lipps even spoke of a "negative empathy" overcoming the resistance of settled habits and dispositions. R. L. Katz includes in empathy the Freudian identification and introjection as well as what he calls "reverberation". H. S. Sullivan invokes empathy as a postural transfer in dealing with anxiety states in a mother which arouse similar tensions in her child. He admits that it is all very mysterious and reminds us that we have to live with many mysteries in the universe. Not all mysteries apparently taper off into the solvable problems of science.

Empathy is an assertion and not an explanation. Donald Spence has shown that the threshold of relevance for the interpersonal world is very different from the threshold of reportability. The relevance of the interpersonal world is appreciated, and reacted to, in appropriate ways even when one has no reportable impressions. Self-recognition itself poses problems, as I pointed out earlier. One gets the "feel" of one's gait and swing in walking; one also recognizes the total rhythm in an unmistakable fashion in masked motion pictures even on the first occasion. To call it a postural empathy in self-recognition raises more questions than it answers. Subception and unconscious inference are most definitely not the whole story. Attempts at a mechanical reproduction of a whole gamut of personal styles will run into formidable difficulties. The human response to a stimulus is never linear. Even as a non-linear function it is far from simple. It varies from task to task, occasion to occasion. The general form of a function shows a puzzling constancy amidst all variations.

Person awareness shades off into the penumbra of the interpersonal domain. The "psycho-graphology" of Raffael Scher

mann, investigated experimentally and in great detail by Professors Fischer and Arnold Pick of the University of Prague, illustrates the baffling complexities of the recognition of personal style which Occidental science seems little prepared to accept. I see no valid reason why Oriental philosophers should share this extreme reluctance. From the scrupulously drawn-up records, we learn that Shermann could recognize and mimic a whole series of personal rhythms of totally unknown individuals by barely looking at their handwriting or even by touching an opaque envelope in which a few lines were scribbled. By touching one such envelope containing AB's handwriting, Shermann described AB as wearing a *pince-nez*, waving it too and fro on certain specific occasions, using his left hand for this purpose although he was right-handed. Shermann also gave a marvellous imitation of AB's gait by walking up and down the room with a swaying motion, taking long strides with a slightly bent back. AB's friends spontaneously identified Shermann's mimicry as a genuine imitation, from the photographic and other records of the experiments. Quite often Shermann could not describe the personal styles and had to act them out. To call the feat enkinesis induced by extra-sensory perception, as Jan Ehrenwald seems content to do, is to leave unexplained the awareness of a whole constellation of personal styles effected with the most exiguous cues. I suggest that, in some mystical states at least, the direct I-Thou confrontation overcomes the exteroceptive and proprioceptive responses to the so-called external world.

A discerning student of comparative philosophy cannot help suspecting that, in some generalized theories of mind recently propounded by philosophers of science, there is a characteristic Western obsession with randomness, whether postulated in the shape of axioms on some theory of the *Kollektiv* or deduced as theorems from a set-theoretical model consisting of a "label space" or *Merkmalraum* or conceived in other ways. Popper, in his Compton Memorial Lecture of 1965, conjectures that mind emerges as a general hierarchical system of plastic controls by a trial and error conducted in the evolutionary process. He rejects the suggestion that mind operates as a kind of "master switch" and amplifies changes induced by single quantum jumps. For Popper, clocks are but clouds characterised by the intrusion of a radical randomness or Peirce's tychism. Controls are super-imposed. It is rather surprising to find that Polányi, after all that he has written about personal knowledge, should speak of hierarchical biological controls figuring as boundary conditions. In one of his recently published essays on "Being and Knowing", he says that man-made servo-mechanisms are boundary conditions harnessing the laws of inanimate matter. The background of randomness stares us in the face again.



It is not a little instructive to find that J. M. Burgers and Abner Shimony, two students of quantum physics who have conducted some sustained discussions of the Wigner paradox of measurement, should seek proto-organismic features in all events of a universe preserving the essentials of Whitehead's metaphysics. The superposition principle of quantum mechanics, according to these writers, renders ambiguous all the usual whole-part, system-component analyses. Suppose that a quantum-mechanical system is represented by self-adjoint operators on the tensor product of the state spaces of the measured object and the measuring apparatus, then the components of the system may not be definite even when the system is described as in a definite state. I suggest that personalist metaphysicians in the East must not be awed or coerced by a much-publicized Positivistic West and its highly professionalized distinctions between the physicist and the philosopher, between the psychologist and the philosopher. The *atmānubhava* of the *Puruṣa* is integrative, as P. N. Srinivasachari remarks in his little book, *The Idea of Personality*, his Annie Besant Memorial Lectures. The *Puruṣa* includes and transcends the *Dehātma*.

*H. R. T. Roberts*

STRAWSON'S PERSONS<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of "The Concept of Mind" Ryle, anticipating allegations of behaviourism, warns that his attempt to lay the ghost in the machine should not drive us to the view that man has been degraded to a machine. Man might be an animal, even a higher animal. Then he adds, "There has yet to be ventured the hazardous leap to the hypothesis that perhaps he is a man."<sup>2</sup>

My paper is an analysis of a few aspects of one trend in recent linguistic philosophy to work out this notion. The take-off point in this line of argument is the innocuous-looking fact that we say different things of human beings and of material objects. D. H. Hamlyn's version of the trend is to show that human action cannot be defined in terms of bodily movement, and the circumstance he relies on is that identical bodily movements could constitute entirely different actions.<sup>3</sup> For example, the arm raised so that it is parallel to the ground may be a signal that one is turning right or it may be the act of pointing to an interesting landscape or it may be the exercising of that limb. The distinctness of these three bits of human conduct would be lost if we confined ourselves to a description of the bodily movement involved, as it was exactly the same in all the three cases.

Consider an example from Langford's study of human action: a landslide that results in a road being blocked is an event, and so is a murder that results in someone's death. But the murder, unlike the landslide, is also an action. What is this difference we draw between events and actions? Rainfall might be casually responsible for the landslide, and Brutus might be casually responsible for the murder of Caesar, but only Brutus is also morally responsible. So we may say that events happen, but only persons act.<sup>4</sup>



Strawson illustrates this difference more schematically and it is some parts of his version of the trend that I mean to scrutinize. He points out that we commonly apply predicates like "weighs ten stone" or "is in the drawing room" to material objects. He calls such predicates M-predicates. But we also use predicates like "is smiling", "is going for a walk", "is thinking hard" or "believes in God" which we do not ascribe to material objects. These predicates are applied to persons and Strawson calls them P-predicates. Persons are defined as entities to which we apply both M-predicates and P-predicates, e.g., Tom weighs 10 stone and is an atheist, where Tom is not a Cartesian ego and not a material body, but a person. The Strawsonian concept of person is that of a type of object such that both states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics can be ascribed to it.

The first thing to consider is the basis of the distinctions between bodily movements and human actions, between events and acts, between M-predicates and P-predicates. Strawson's distinction, and indeed his whole thesis, is supposed to arise out of our ordinary habits of descriptive speech. We do apply some predicates to material objects and we do ordinarily confine the use of some predicates to people. Descartes thought that the former type of predicate, (e.g., 'is big' or 'looks pink') when used of human beings was actually ascribed to their bodies, while the latter type of predicate (e.g., "is intelligent" or "hopes to win") characterised a man's mind or ego. Strawson gives short shrift to this view. His argument, in his own words, is that "one can ascribe states of consciousness to oneself only if one can ascribe them to others. One can ascribe them to others only if one can identify other subjects of experience. And one cannot identify others if one can identify them only as subjects of experience, possessors of states of consciousness."

Strawson goes on to dispose of a view that he calls the "no-ownership" theory. This is the view that attempts to make an experience's contingent relationship to a body the criterion of ownership; my experiences are mine because of their relation to my body. The trouble with this theory, Strawson shows, is that it cannot even be stated without presupposing what it sets out to deny: a sense of ownership independent of the body. On the other hand, if the ownership of experiences is made analytically dependent on the body, i.e., my experiences are defined as those experiences related to my body, then we get physicalism, and it is Strawson's policy to leave physicalism strictly alone.

Now the argument with which he disposes of the Cartesian ego is the Wittgensteinian insight<sup>5</sup> that one can only ascribe characteristics

(in this case, P - predicates) to oneself if one can also ascribe them to others. The argument is by general consent conclusive. How can one apply P-predicates to oneself on a purely introspective basis, as language is a social phenomenon, and one can apply words correctly only if there are public criteria for their application? That we can only use words of ourselves if we can use them of others seems obvious, today, but Strawson says that they must be used "in the same sense" in either case, and this gives one pause. What could the words "in the same sense" mean? Strawson says that the dictionary does not give two sets of senses to mental words, one for self ascription and the other for external use only. But it is also a Wittgensteinian doctrine<sup>6</sup> that sense (or meaning) is related to use, and use is related to the criteria for use. The criteria for using P-predicates of oneself and of others are wholly different (as Strawson admits when he says that I feel but do not observe my depression while X observes but not feel it). So it is difficult to see how such words can be said to be used in the same sense. Yet one cannot comfortably say that the words are used in a different sense as one has no way of specifying the difference. The problem is similar to asking whether the intersubjective concept "green" involves the same experiential content in its users. One is tempted to use the positivist epithet "meaningless" to this question. But Strawson needs to use the qualification "in the same sense" if his argument against Cartesianism is to be conclusive.

Ordinarily after a discussion of the Cartesian angle on the problem of our use of mental and physical words, one would expect a discussion of the rival candidate in the field—I mean the theory of physicalism. But Strawson provides no such discussion. The only explanation that I can offer for this lacuna is that physicalism runs directly counter to common linguistic usage. It offends against ordinary practice to say "Tom's body is intelligent", and it is Strawson's intention to spell out the ontology inherent in our ordinary form of discourse, to lay bare the features of our common conceptual structure. His aim is descriptive, not revisionary; and physicalism is certainly revisionary. So he just gives it the bye and so shall we.

Let us take a closer look at the way we normally apply predicates by considering a few examples. We use predicates like "is black" or "occupies space" of inert physical objects and, of course, of many other things. We use "is growing" or "has died" of plants, but not of blocks of iron, though we might use "is dead" of a wireless set or a telephone. We use "can move" or "is lifting" of an elephant or a fork-lift, but not of a glass of water or a rose bush. We use "is intelligent" or "is bad-tempered" of a dog or a philosopher, and we use "is calculating" or "has a good



memory" of a human being or an electronic computer. It is an open question whether there are any predicates that we use of men which are precluded from application to computers, actual or possible in theory. These examples suggest that, in ordinary language, we use a wide variety of predicates of a wide variety of subjects, and not all predicates can be applied to all things. But we do not find any sharp cleavage into two categories. Everyday usage is not polarised into M- and P-predicates, and it is difficult to resist the suspicion that Strawson's dichotomy is based on some revisionary metaphysical concern. Prof. Puccetti, for example, who has different metaphysical interests, divides up predicates into M-, P-, and C-predicates, the last being ascribable to entities that are conscious but are not persons.<sup>7</sup> Take the predicate "can lift 200 kg" which may be used of a human being or of a mechanical crane. Strawson says that such predicates "mean one thing when applied to a material object and another when applied to persons". But such a contention can only be based on an antecedent distinction which is not obtainable from a scrutiny of the ordinary use of predicates.<sup>8</sup> Strawson's bifurcation is evidently made on a Cartesian model and then imposed on his predicates; it is not descriptive of any facts of linguistic practice. Nor does Strawson offer any arguments for the irreducibility of M- and P-predicates as, for instance, Chisholm does when he attempts to provide a logical basis for Brentano's intentionality?<sup>9</sup> So it might be argued that the M and P dichotomy is nothing but an implicit rejection of physicalism, and along with the rejection of the Cartesian ego, creates the problem that the concept of person is designed to solve. The apparent reason why Strawson does not consider physicalism is because it is counter to normal usage, but the dichotomy that serves to emphasise physicalism's counter-normality is itself an infliction based on a preferred dualism.

The final stage of Strawson's argument is another appeal to modern English usage. We say "Tom is 10 stone" and also "Tom is an atheist", and this shows that both M- and P- predicates are applied to the same subject. The subject is not a mind or a body, but Tom himself, that is, is a person. But what is a person? It is a type of entity that attracts both M- and P- predicates.

But what is the introduction of this concept of person supposed to achieve? Sometimes the introduction of a word could provide a model that facilitates the tackling of the right sort of questions, e.g., the concept of light as "travelling" in straight lines (i.e. the rectilinear propagation of light) enabled scientists to ask "How fast?" or "What travels?" and these were fruitful questions that could not have been asked before the concept was formulated.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand the



introduction of a word could sometimes provide the illusion of an explanation, e.g., "Why do these pills put one to sleep?" "Because they are soporific". But "soporific" only means "tends to put one to sleep" and so is no aid to understanding. Strawson does not offer his concept as a model or as a bogus answer to the question, "How do we manage to ascribe such radically dissimilar predicates as 'is 50 kg' and 'is an atheist' to the same entity?". It would be puerile to answer "Because the entity is a person and 'person' has been stipulatively defined as that which can take both M- and P-predicates".

It is as a logically primitive term that Strawson appropriates the word "person", and in this capacity it cannot, of course, be expected to provide inference tickets or predictive guidance. But what does "logically primitive" mean? I think there is more than one sense that lies behind Strawson's use of the expression. In one place Strawson's explains his use as indicating that a person is a simple entity that is not to be thought of as being compounded of separate elements. But I have argued that there is an implicit dualism in Strawson's concept. Another meaning of the word "primitive" as Strawson uses it is in reference to the underived, epistemologically fundamental status of "person", as a basic particular. But I have suggested that the need to postulate such an entity has by no means been established, and indeed cannot be established without demonstrating the untenability of physicalism. So we are left with a third sense in which "logically primitive" is used of an undefined sign in an axiomatic system. No justification would be provided within the system for such a term, whose *raison d'être* is that it helps justify what is non-primitive in the system. Axiomatic systems generally aim at being consistent and complete, but as the system in which the term "person" is primitive is ordinary language, the question of completeness can hardly arise. And so one of the things we may suppose Strawson means by his postulation of person as logically primitive is that it makes ordinary descriptive language about human characteristics and human action consistent. He thinks we are incoherent if we regard our ascriptions of states of consciousness as applying to immaterial egos, but believes that we can ascribe them to persons without getting into a mess.

But does this concept help us achieve the consistency we seek? Let us look at some of the things Strawson says. He says that though it is a conceptual truth that persons have bodies, it is a contingent truth that a person's experiences are related to the particular body that they are related to. Thus bodies are logically transferable, but experiences, which cannot be independently identified, are not transferable. Strawson, evidently thinking of cases of split personality, says we might in unusual circumstances actually speak of two persons alternately



sharing one body. Well, apart from the psychiatrist's unhappiness in cashing in on one bill when he has been treating two persons, we get some pretty obvious paradoxes. Tom weighs 50 kg. Tom has a body. The body weighs 50 kg. But this duplication somehow fails to add up to 100 kg. Again, Tom's leg is a part of himself, but Tom's body is not a part of himself. Tom's body could be a part of Tom only if there were some other part, such as a Cartesian ego, to complement it; and, of course, we can have no truck with such an entity.<sup>1</sup> But the more serious objection is that we get the same sort of incoherence that Strawson finds in the notion of a Cartesian ego. A person is identifiable by the spatio-temporal characteristics ascribable to him. But how do you speak of two persons alternately sharing one body? How do you distinguish one of these persons from the other? By their separate experiences? But this is just what Strawson says is impossible when he was discussing the ego theory. So we get the identical sort of incoherence with Strawsonian persons as he got with Cartesian egos.<sup>12</sup>

The assumption behind Strawson's essay is that it is possible to extract an ontology from ordinary language. And the assumption behind this assumption is that ordinary language is consistent or could be rendered consistent by the sort of stipulation about the use of the word 'person' that Strawson makes. My analysis suggests that even if we accept 'person' as a primitive concept we do not achieve rigour in ordinary talk about human characteristics or actions. This does not, of course, mean that it is not a handy term in other parts or for other purposes in philosophy.

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*Harsh Narain*

THE MICROCOSMIC  
CONCEPT OF PERSON

Formerly, the universe gravitated towards and revolved round God and rotated on the axis called man or the human person. Man was the very centre of the universe, even as the earth was of the cosmos. He was a unique, privileged superaddition to the cosmos. Everything was created for and as subservient to him. Even the gods pined for personhood, the immediate stepping-stone to Godhood. With the advancement of science, there occurred what may be called a Copernican revolution, and man ceased to be the unique, privileged being he was. He became a mere by-product of nature which is not very kindly disposed to him. The scientific formula for production of a human person, as suggested by Howard, is :

Enough water to fill a ten-gallon barrel ;  
enough fat for for seven bars of soap ;  
carbon for 9,000 lead pencils ;  
phosphorus for 2,200 match-heads ;  
iron for one medium-sized nail ;  
lime enough to whitewash a chicken coop ; and  
small quantities of magnesium and sulphur.

Thus, man became matter, pure and simple. Biology traced the ancestry of man to the ape. Psycho-analysis reduced the human to the instinctual, to the animal. (It is Jung, however, who strikes a note of dissent in repudiating the thesis that the spiritual life is merely a superstructure upon the instinctual.) Biblically, the first human person upon this earth had had a fall from paradise after tasting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Man has had a second fall, so to speak, a fall from his pristine spirituality to base animality, after tasting the fruit of science.



To the scientific view of man, this life, this precarious existence upon this planet, is all. Hence, man's fate is nothing better than that of an infinitesimal drop in the fathomless ocean of time. But, if this life is all, then this vast cosmos is, as Joad would have it, 'a bad joke beyond our understanding, a vulgar laugh braying across the mysteries.' And, if personality is no better than materiality, if, as the Persian poet sardonically remarks, the heart is just a piece of flesh, [Oh Beloved!] the butcher of the town knows the price of the heart better than thee !:

*Gar dil ba-mazhab-i tu hamīn gosht-pāra est*  
*Qassāb-i shahr bih 'z-i tu dānad bahā-i dil*

With the advancement of man's insight into his own being, it is getting clearer and clearer that he is a beast in disguise and that his seeming rationality, morality, and spirituality are mere bubbles in the ocean of bestiality, mere eddies in the unconscious slime. But those who go by this verdict of man upon himself and get away with the impression that man is nothing but a beast, fail to realize that no beast is conscious of his being as such and that it makes a lot of difference with the being of man. The deeper is our insight into the layers of our being, the more bestial as well as rooted in the dust do we appear to ourselves. But it cannot escape notice of the discerning eye that the process is more and more revelatory of our transcendental character. It is, after all, the person himself who succeeds in revealing to himself the deeper and deeper layers of his being, which means that there is something in him, unshared by the subhuman kingdom, which may be, and has been, called the witness-self and which has held its own throughout the process of introspection eluding its grasp and transcending all objects and objectifications. This serves to testify to our essentially transcendental character. Man or person, that is to say, is essentially a self-transcending being. Hume's oft-quoted analysis of the self misses this most significant point. "For my part," Hume writes, "when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception."<sup>1</sup> Hume concludes that a person is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions. But what, after all, about the witness of the perceptions? Does it not transcend everything and is it not an identity? This question does not appear to have bothered Hume. It is, indeed, the person within whom is the witness of all the items inventoried by Hume. The person, that is to say, is not exhausted by Hume's inventory. The person is all that *plus* much more. He is a system comprising the perennial subject and fleeting objects. The author of the *Taittiriya-Upaniṣad* seems to be wiser



than Hume. He also dives deeper and deeper into the interior of personal being and finds a series of sheaths in which the witness-self is lost.<sup>2</sup> The objects he found within did not constitute the self itself but were mere coverings under which the self lay hidden. Of course, by Hume's procedure, one can hardly do better than stumble at some such sheaths. For realization of the self proper, there are other procedures which we may look to.

But it is wrong to suppose that substantive Hinduism values only the witness-self and not the full person. According to it, both the cover and the covered, the object and the subject, make up a complete whole. That is the person. According to the *Atharvaveda*, the human body is a city of gods and of Brahman.<sup>3</sup> In the human body, says the same *Veda*, all the gods come to dwell like cows in the cowpen—the sun becoming the eyes, the air the breath, etc.<sup>4</sup> The theme is expanded upon in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, according to which different gods entered the human body in the form of different sense-organs.<sup>5</sup>

Far from denying or underrating the coarser side of the person, the body, the compounded (*sambhūti*), and attaching exclusive importance to the uncompounded (*asambhūti*), the self, the *Vedas* inculcate a synthetic approach, a harmonious blending of the compounded and the uncompounded, the immanent and the transcendent.<sup>6</sup>

Such themes pertain no less to the microcosm than to the macrocosm. In fact, on the Vedic world-view, there is a very close correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The *Atharvaveda* is categorical in the statement that 'this person' is Brahman.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Vedic Absolute itself is called Person and is cast into the form of a person. The Absolute that is Person is also conceived by the Vedic texts as incarnated into the form of gods on the super-physical plane and of human persons on the earth.

The human person is, according to the Vedic texts, rooted in the divine and created literally in God's own image, after His own likeness. Elsewhere, he is also conceived as a spark of the divine.<sup>8</sup>

As a matter of fact, substantive Hinduism is without a parallel in viewing the Absolute as a person, as an organism, at such a great length. Each human person is a microcosm representative of the divine Person, the macrocosm. This microcosmic view of the human person is a great distinguishing feature, a great speciality, of Vedic philosophy.

Phenomenologically, what makes a person person is not existence, which belongs even to inanimate objects; not even existence



and consciousness, which are characteristic of even animals; but existence, consciousness, as well as conscience. Conscience is not entirely a highly developed and enormously complicated tissue of tastes cultivated for generations and generations together. It is woven round a nucleus of a transcendental character endued with the power of deconditioning us from and raising us above such habit-formations and enabling us to have intimations, clear or vague depending upon what we have made of ourselves, from the macrocosmic Person, so to speak. Thanks to this nucleus, our conscience is basically not a handmaid of instinct or desire: it sometimes goes the length of thwarting our instincts, our desires. It presupposes a vision of the Good, which, though desirable, is not always desired. It has the potentiality, to borrow Jung's expression, of shifting "the centre of gravity from the ego to the self, from man to God."<sup>9</sup>

Here we must address ourself to a difficulty arising in our view of conscience out of a certain thesis developed in mediaeval Hindu philosophy. According to the Nyāya, the prime movers or motivators (*doṣāḥ*) of human action (*pravṛtti*) are attachment (*rāga*), aversion (*dveṣa*), and delusion (*moha*).<sup>10</sup> Thus, all action is essentially evil. Śaṅkara quotes the relevant Nyāya formula on the subject approvingly and concludes that even compassionate activity is essentially egoistic.<sup>11</sup> Reinforcing his position, Vācaspati and Ānandagiri contend that compassion causes pain, in removal of which one indulges in other-regarding activities.<sup>12</sup> This means that conscience, while inspiring us to action, activates the ego, instead of shifting the centre of gravity from the ego to the self. Hobbes also favours a similar egoistical analysis of pity and is very ably criticized by Butler. Butler seems to succeed in establishing that the sentiment of pity aroused in our conscience is a unique aspect of our experience, be it ever so much involved in the maze of a subtle satisfaction at our own freedom from the misfortune visiting the case before us and anxiety about our liability to similar misfortune. Indeed, in its pristine purity, conscience is the bridge between person and the Person.

So, person is existence, consciousness, and conscience, corresponding respectively to the divine triplicity of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*),<sup>13</sup> alternatively expressed as isness (*asti*), illumination (*bhāti*), and agreeableness (*priya*).<sup>14</sup> Here, too, person and the Person stand related by way of microcosm and macrocosm respectively.

The entire burden of the *Gītā* is to exhort the human person to anchor his self in the divine Person, to shift the centre of gravity from the person to the Person, so as to transmute the personal into the

impersonal divine. In fact, like the Vedic Person (*puruṣa*), the *Gītā* Absolute, too, is a Person, designated as the Superperson (*puruṣottāma*). The human person partakes of the perfection of the Superperson potentially. Thus, the Superperson is perfect actually and the human person, potentially.<sup>15</sup>

As a matter of fact, the nucleus of the human person called soul or self is nothing but the divine involved. In other words, it is potentially perfect and all that is wanted of it is to realize the native perfection, to become God. This God-realization does not lead to total cessation of human action or the world-process, as held by the Advaitin. What actually happens is a new interpretation of human action and the world-process. Everything remains as it is, only it begins to be regarded in a new light. What was man's becomes God's. The difference between the divine and the undivine disappears altogether.

Vedic Hinduism knows no such summum bonum as postulated by the Advaitin. The words *mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa* do not figure in the *Saṃhitā* texts at all. According to these texts, *svarga* or heavenly bliss is the highest attainable by man, and attainment of heaven does not result in the cessation of human action or the world-process. The world-process is not a process of decay or degeneration of the divine : it is an essential mode of being of the divine.

This presupposes a serious meaning in the world-process. In the present state of human knowledge, the meaning is hardly discoverable, much less demonstrable. It has to be an object of faith. In fact, there are two radically different, mutually opposed, and apparently equally valid or invalid attitudes to existence. According to one attitude, existence is informed and ensouled by meaning, value. According to the other, it has no meaning, no value, in the ultimate sense of the terms : it is just there without rhyme or reason. The religious view of man is inspired by the first and the scientific view, by the second attitude to existence. Being attitudes, they lie beyond the purview of reasoning. What is possible to do by way of deciding between the two rival attitudes is to search the depths of our own being, our own experience. In fact, on all ultimate issues, our last court of appeal has to be our own conscience, our own intuition, in justification of which we are led to frame a suitable philosophy. "Philosophy," says Bradley, "is finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct." This proposition does appear to have a kernel of truth. Man cannot live without the instinctive belief in the meaningfulness of existence. Such belief must, therefore, be granted some validity. "Truth," says Nietzsche, "is that kind of error which maintains a species."



The substantive Hindu tradition grants the utmost autonomy to the human person. He is said to be next to God,<sup>18</sup> to be capable of becoming God,<sup>17</sup> to be God.<sup>18</sup> There is nothing higher than man.<sup>19</sup> He is often depicted as invincible by gods and demons. In the epics and the *Puṇyāṇas*, seers and heroes challenge gods openly and successfully. Arjuna and others defeated even Indra, the king of the gods. A certain seer is said to have produced *Kṛtyā*, a supernatural force, to burn Indra to death, and Indra had to yield. An oft-repeated verse in the *Mahābhārata* is that man can do what the gods and demons are incapable of. Iqbal, the great Urdu-Persian poet of undivided India, would sing :

*Khudī ko kar buland itnā ki har taqdīr se pahle  
Khudā bande se khud pūche batā terī razā kyā hai*

(Raise thy self so high that, before fixing each fate, God should Himself ask the creature what the latter wants.) Such ambition fits Vedic Hinduism better. Here, the human person is cognate with God. In the Semitic tradition, God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. There is no consubstantiality between man and God, as in Hinduism. In Buddhism man's fate is worse. To the Buddha, personality is a resultant, a joint product, of the five psychophysical aggregates called *skandhas*. A Buddhist poet sings :

*Nartakī-bhrūlatā-kṣepo na hy ekah paramārthataḥ  
Paramāṇu-samūhatvād ekatvaṁ tasya kalpitam*

(The movement of the creeper-like eyebrow of the dancer is not a unity. Its unity is a mental construction out of the conglomeration of atoms.) Here, person becomes as insignificant in effect as on the afore-mentioned scientific view.

In a short paper, it is not possible to bring out fully the significant implications of our concept of person. Suffice it to say that, without a universal faith in the sanctity of person, sociocultural life would run the risk of coming to a standstill. Democracy treats persons as ends in themselves, as absolutes. Only faith in the divine origin of the human person can vouch for such a view. A philosophy which reduces his status to that of a beast or dust serves to cut the ground from under the feet of democracy, for the simple reason that he loses all significance *per se*.

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12. *Loc. cit.*
13. See, for example, *Maitreyī-upaniṣad*, 3.12.
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*Pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇamevāśiṣyate.*
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S. Chennakesavan

THE PERSON AS  
THE "MORE"

It is usually maintained, at least with reference to Indian Philosophy, that all philosophical discussions have to be on accepted lines of thought since the last word in philosophising has already been said. Whatever this might imply, I am not competent to comment. But if discussion is going to be confined to either clarification or elaboration of what is already accepted, then I feel that it is not a philosophical problem. Human being is a many faced personality and there has been a continuous development of his nature, at least empirically speaking. Therefore it is my personal opinion that all these facts have to be considered in detail before we can arrive at any conclusions about the composite personality. If required, such conclusions may be tested at the bar of scriptural testimony, but it does not mean that what is not so guaranteed by authority is not valid. It is in this context that I have taken a passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and sought to explore ways and means of explaining the body-mind-self complex indicated in the *Upaniṣad* in the light of modern developments.

Whatever may be the emotional reactions to certain latest developments in the field of body-mind and the factor of consciousness, I expect that we as philosophers would necessarily have enough objectivity to evaluate such developments and not shut our minds to them. The final pattern of human development as a person has not yet been reached.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7th Chapter) there is a progressive definition of the concept of a person where the person is treated as that which is all-inclusive and 'more' than all that which can be so included. The self here is the '*Bhūman*', the 'great' or the

'more'. The context in which this instruction is given is interesting. The great sage Nārada who not only mastered the available sciences, but also the sacred knowledge of the *Vedas* is dissatisfied with his knowledge, for he is still not able to understand the highest truth. Sanatkumāra to whom he goes for instruction adopts the empirical method of analysis and evaluation. The teacher shows that by analysing the various grades of reality starting from mere denotation or 'that' and ascending to *prāṇa* or life-principle one can reach ultimate truth which is here designated by the comparative term *greatest* or Bhūman. This is also the person of the human being. The several steps used to arrive at that which is the 'more' indicate the necessity of not ignoring any level of existence if one really wants to know the nature of the ultimate person. That there is such a person is not doubted as we can see this from the very nature of the analysis of factors attempted.

It starts with the name, *nāma*. The most fundamental requirement for the human person is the physical body which is always given a name. The name denotes the body as one object. Our empirical experience does not give evidence of disembodied persons. So, one has to start with the embodiment of the person. The person is the Puruṣa, the dweller of the body. But merely denoting the body as an object amongst others is not enough, for then it would be no different from inanimate bodies. The body is denotable by a name and unlike other bodies, the human body knows its name, for it is capable of speech. By using speech, we not only refer to ourselves, but we go beyond mere reference and think of the person as one amongst others. This would not be possible if speech were merely naming. Thus speech is *more* than name. It is merely not a *more* than name. It is merely not a *more* but a more that includes the named object and goes beyond it and conceives of it as a symbol. Next in the order is *mind* which is responsible for both name and speech, but which is not exhausted by it. *Mind* here means the function of intention. Speech is used and actions are performed only when there is an intention to do so. The most important and characteristically human quality is that of intention. It may be argued that we cannot deny communication through some sort of symbolisation to non-human beings first because we are not in the know of the symbolisation used by them. This is true. Therefore intention as the fundamental characteristic of the possession of a *mind* is stated *more* than speech and name. From here onwards we have a series of 'more' concepts where each includes the lower and goes beyond it as that which is *More* than it. These in order (as given in the *Upaniṣad*) are *saṅkalpa*, will and determination, *citta* meaning both thought and intelligence, *dhyaṇa* or contemplation whose two characteristics are



tranquillity and contentment, *viññāna*, the capacity for understanding, *smara*, memory which alone makes human life human, *āśā*, the eternal hope in the human breast, *prāṇa*, life-principle without which all this discussion would be meaningless. The highest *More* is *happiness* (*sukham*). Every action which is consciously undertaken by man has for its goal some satisfaction or other. Without such satisfaction all action is impossible. The highest satisfaction arises when man knows himself. This self-knowledge is the same as the supreme happiness which is the *more*, mentioned in the *Upaniṣad*.

So far what I have stated is the outline of what is to be found in the *Upaniṣad*. The problem which arises out of this is the question: in what sense are we to understand the word *more* in the context of the human person? That it is a term of inclusion we have already stated, and it is not enough explanation. The nature of inclusion has to be examined now. An empirical examination of the purposes and functions of the body and mind provides a clue to this principle of inclusion used by the *Upaniṣadic* seer. I have always held that we need explore a trans-empirical possibility for an explanation only when all empirical approaches fail. I include a logical and an epistemological explanation under the latter. It is an indisputable point that we have to seek the meaning of consciousness only in the context of body and mind. Consciousness is the most fundamental and primary principle the possession of which makes the characterisation of a man as a person possible. A dead body is never treated as a person. As the *Upaniṣad* says, we may dismember a dead body, it is not a crime. But if we use harsh words to a conscious living person, it is like murdering him. Therefore granting that consciousness is that which makes a body a person, we have now to explore the relation between the two. It is easy to understand the body complex. With the help of chemistry and physics, we arrive at the conclusion that the composition of the physical body is made up of elemental substances such oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, etc. But that is not the whole problem. The particles that go to make up the body behave in a peculiar fashion that is in conformity with the peculiarities of the functions of the body. For example, when an injury takes place, the cells of the body repair the injury, fight the intruders. This is not their natural function. It is their function, because they are obeying not only the laws that are pertinent to their own level of existence, but laws of biological existence which involve the principle of life and the purposes of maintaining life. These are higher laws. But a biological law cannot function in vacuum. It functions through and with the chemical and physical components of the body. Similarly, the morphological alignment and functioning of the physiological organs implies that it is also under the control of dual principles. The higher



purposes of the body as a whole are carried out by the parts of the body. If we look at them as mere organs, only these purposes will not be evident. But if we look at them as organs participating in the actions of the whole, then we will see that there are certain purposes which are achieved not for themselves, but for the sake of the whole. This is what is meant, I think, when the *Upaniṣad* talks of the eye which sees and that by which the eye sees. Arguing similarly we find that the functions of the mind described in terms of neurological and electronic structures and functions do not describe the activities of the mind fully or satisfactorily; when such observations are made, we are only looking at fixed structures which operate in a fixed manner. But there is a further aspect of the functioning of the neurological complex which strikes only when we look at it as a whole. The integrating powers that are evident are neither aspects of neurology nor of electronics. It is something *More* which is present due to the fact that mind serves the purposes of consciousness which is always associated with the structure of the mind, but which is not identical with it. It is this consciousness which provides a meaning and a direction to mental operations. Merely an external examination of the brain processes can only tell us of their behaviour as physiological process. Looking at and observing the facial expressions of a man, we know what he might be experiencing. It is only the man who is experiencing who can say what feelings he has. Similarly merely examining a brain pattern does not tell us what the mind-self is doing. This can be given to us only by the conscious person himself. Mere morphological assessment is not enough. A something *More* is necessary to provide integration and the sense of interiorisation. This is consciousness. The mind will not interfere with the physiological processes of the body. The operations of the mind depend and rely on the services of the body. Similarly, in the normal course, the self or consciousness is just integrating and receiving whatever the mind is offering. But consciousness cannot operate independent of a functioning mind-brain. The operations of the mind-brain may present even an integrated pattern, as it is claimed today. But they would still lack a meaning and a purpose, if consciousness is not there for which alone the terms 'meaning' and 'purpose' are valid. Thus we have to arrive at the conclusion that in the hierarchy of existents the self or consciousness is the greatest, *Bhūman* whose purposes are achieved by the mind-brain-body complex. Each of these is a *more* than that which is below it, and less than that which is above it. The conditions which are in control at any one level are always extraneous to that level. But the functioning of the higher level controls can only be done through the lower level material. Each level relies for its working on the principles of the level below it, while it itself is irreducible to the level below it.



The ideas which I have submitted in the above paragraphs are borne out by the well-known parable of the charioteer. The chariot moves, the horses draw the chariot, the driver guides the chariot—all to serve the purposes of the person minding the chariot.

Just a word of caution before I finish. The exploratory approach made above to understand the nature of the person as the conscious controller, is a limited approach. I have not equated ultimate reality with the ego-consciousness. Nor have I stated that the ego is the last word in experience. I am only interested in pointing out two<sup>1</sup> factors. The first is what I have already stated. We can only understand the nature of the embodied person, and that embodiment does not exhaust the person's potentiality. If we understand by the word *Puruṣa* the one that is embodied, then we cannot escape examining this person as such. Secondly, I am interested in pointing out that the embodiment itself speaks of a type of a logical relation between the self and the body-mind complex. It cannot be a relation of difference, for two things opposed cannot come together. It cannot be identity, for it goes against all human experience where the body, certainly, is not recognised as the self. I am afraid to talk of that hybrid relation, identity-in-difference. So I wish to say that the relation is one of contingent identity. Since consciousness as such cannot be known unless it is embodied, consciousness is identical with the body-mind complex. Since consciousness is not actually the body-mind complex but something more than it, it is possible to envisage the identity as being only contingent making it possible on the consciousness to be itself of some level. I can only give an example to clarify this. Energy is identical with the work it turns out. But energy is not merely work but something *more*, greater, than the work which exemplifies it.

## REFERENCE

1. For the idea of dual control at physical level and its implications for the body-mind complex, I am indebted to Polanyi's book *Knowing and Being*.

Richard V. De Smet

IS THE CONCEPT OF  
'PERSON' CONGENIAL TO  
ŚĀṆKARA VEDĀNTA?

I

Since the time of the great translators of Sanskrit works in the Max Müller era the custom has been established to render the terms *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* by 'personal' and 'impersonal' although, strictly speaking, they denote either the presence or the absence of an endowment of *guṇas*, whether the latter are understood as accidents of a substance in Vaiśeṣika fashion or as internal tensors which complexify *prakṛti* as in Sāṅkhya. My contention is that such renderings are very unfortunate, because they pervert the original and traditional understanding of 'person' and impede the task of comparative religion or philosophy especially when the traditions compared are Vedānta and Christianity. As a philosophico-religious term, 'person' has been coined and elaborated by the Christian thinkers so as to fit both man and the divine Absolute, and it is only in recent times (not more than 200 years ago) that some philosophers began to restrict it to man alone. I may therefore be allowed to recall briefly this traditional understanding of 'person'.

The term 'person' belongs to the realm of activity broadly understood as including such immanent activities as knowing, being conscious, etc. It designates the ultimate subject of attribution of all activities implying intellectual, namely, suprasensuous knowledge and consciousness. Being ultimate, such a subject is not, like a function, subordinated to the purpose of another but acts for its own sake and exists autonomously. Hence, it is an end-in-itself and is characterised by ontological freedom and moral responsibility. It is signified by such pronouns as I, thou, he, which are indeed called personal pronouns. Since it assumes total responsibility, it is not simply the conscious principle or element in the agent but the whole agent itself,



not simply the spirit or the soul though it has to be spiritual. Thus 'person' is a holistic concept ; it refers to the whole, to the integrality of the agent, whether the latter is pure spirit like God or rational animal like man. It is, however, immaterial whether the personal agent is in itself simple, partless, absolute spiritual substance without accidents, and thus pure Consciousness, or whether it is a complex subsistent, comprising parts and functions, spiritual and also corporeal. What matters is that its integrality be predominantly spiritual, i.e., intellectually conscious. This, indeed, is required to make it subject of attribution ultimate, freely responsible and an end-in-itself.

Besides these, a remarkable property of the person is that it can initiate the kind of bi-polar relationships which we call interpersonal. These exist between persons as persons. They transcend utility, for they imply an absolute valuation of the other as an end in itself. In order to be truly what they pretend to be, they demand in their subject a fair degree of selflessness without which there could be no opening up to the other as personal other.

Regarding relations, a question may arise : how can God, understood as the incomplex Absolute, be related to finite persons ? Would not such relations accrue to him as accidents to a substance and thus complexify him ?

The theory of relation of the Christian schoolmen, especially of St Thomas Aquinas, permits them to eliminate this difficulty. According to them, a relation need not be an ontological entity in order to be true. Its truth depends on its foundation or ground. If this ground is intrinsic to the subject of the relation, the latter is not only true but real. If, on the contrary, this ground is extrinsic to the subject and intrinsic to the term of the relation, the latter is true but only logical, not a real entity, in the subject though its correlation is real in the term. On the basis of this theory, the problem of the relations between the personal but immutable and absolute God and the perfectible finite persons finds the following solution. Since God's love for us, for instance, does obviously not change or perfect God but does perfect us, it is this change in us which is the foundation of the relation that arises from it. This foundation being extrinsic to God, the relation of God to us as our Lover is only logical though true (since it has a ground). As to our relation to him as the terms of his love, it is a perfecting actuation of our potentiality and thus an ontological complement of our being, that is to say, a real accident. Parallely, our love for God perfects only ourselves and not God, hence gives rise to a similar unequal pair of relations, real in us but only logical in God. Since this solution derives from a general theory of relation, it

is not merely an ad hoc solution of the case of interpersonal relations but is valid for all the relations between the Absolute and the relative beings. Thus creatorship, lordship, etc. are logical, whereas creature-ship, dependence, etc. are real relations.

The conclusion of this is that none of the conditions for being a person, not even the property of initiating interpersonal relationships, prevent the absolute Deity from being considered as personal in the proper sense of the term. The concept of person transcends the opposition between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*, unqualified and qualified or rather incomplex and complex. Indeed, 'person' like 'being', 'spirit', 'bliss', (*sat, cit, ānanda*), etc. is not a predicamental, but a transcendental term whose highest range reaches the Absolute not only metaphorically but properly.

It must, however, be recalled that no human term or concept, not even the transcendental ones, can apply in univocal fashion to God and creatures. To apply to God they must be "definitised" and elevated, i.e., analogised or to coin a new term, "lakṣaṇised". And to apply to God in their proper sense, which is only possible for transcendental terms, their *lakṣaṇā* must be *jahad-ajahat*, that is, such that the *apavāda* moment of purification does not destroy their proper meaning or *svārtha* but only allows it to be elevated to its most eminent signification or *paramārtha*. As Śaṅkara explains clearly in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2, 1, even so Brahman is not expressed but only indicated properly, i.e., defined, by such "lakṣaṇised" terms: *tal-lakṣyate na tūcya*. He has also given there the rule that not only 'satyam-jñānam-anantam' but all Upaniṣadic definitions of Brahman-Ātman must be understood similarly through *jahadajahal-lakṣaṇā*.

The term 'person' as philosophically elaborated by the Christian tradition is obviously not Upaniṣadic. It has not even any adequate equivalent in Sanskrit. But when the question is put, is the Brahman personal, our answer should, it seems to me, take into account and even be based upon the original usage and understanding of 'person' as found in Christianity.

If this is done, there will be no doubt that we may and must say that Brahman even considered in the strict *advaita* perspective of Śaṅkara's Vedānta is most properly and eminently personal, indeed the Super-person. How could the supreme Ātman whose integrality is pure Consciousness and whose freedom is absolute not be supremely personal? Its very *nirguṇatva* and *akhaṇḍatva* are the marks of its perfection and fullness as person. The term 'person' is therefore perfectly suitable as an appellation of the absolute Brahman of Advaita Vedānta.



Unlike 'saguna' it is introduced not as a pedagogical device or a first but deficient approach but rather as an enrichment of the proper and correct (though ever inadequate) understanding of the Absolute according to the Upaniṣads.

## II

The second point to be treated in reference to my initial question is: how far is the term 'person' suitable to the Vedānta conception of man? Limiting myself to Śaṅkara's *advaitavāda*, I shall refer chiefly to his *Bhāṣya* on BAU 4, 3, 7 and to ch. 2 and 18 of his *Upadeśasāhasrī* while not ignoring his other writings.

Śaṅkara agrees with the Mīmāṃsā that "the self is the object of the notion 'I' (*ātmā ahaṃ-pratyaya-viśayaḥ*)."<sup>1</sup> But in his search for the uppermost Ātman he ascends with *Kaṭh Upaniṣad*, III, 10-12 through the ladder of more and more interior *ātman*s from the senses to the *Puruṣa*. The latter is really ultimate, it is the inner source and ground of man and the absolute, self-luminous light (*svayam-jyotis*: BAU 4, 3, 9) which integrates him, but it is not the ultimate subject of attribution of his actions and experiences. The *Puruṣa* or *Paramātman* is, indeed, neither an agent (*kartr*) nor a patient (*bhoktr*). It is, therefore, short of it that we must look for the ultimate subject of attribution of actions, etc. What we find immediately short of it is the *jīvā* or *jivātman* or ego (*aham, ahaṃkartr*). This is properly the 'I'. The innermost Ātman stands within the sphere (*gocara*) of the term 'aham', but it is only indicated by it, not directly expressed. What is then this ego?

First of all, it is a reflection (*ābhāsa*), an image of the absolute Ātman, in the mirror-like inner sense (whether referred to as *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, *manas* or *antaḥkāraṇa*). Its existence is contingent on the illumination of the inner sense by the Ātman. The latter is the prototype, the ego its image. The ego is, however, unequal to its prototype. Though similar to it in imitated consciousness, freedom, centrality, etc., it irremediably shares in the finiteness, mobility, possibility and other attending deficiencies of its reflector. Its being an image does not relegate it to the rank of illusions but it makes it ontologically relative and dependent, however wonderful an image of the Ātman it may be. It cannot find its truth in itself but only in its prototype. There is its true *vastu*. In this sense it is not *svārtha*, finding its meaning in itself, but *parārtha*. This does not mean that it exists and acts for the profit of the Ātman for the latter is self-sufficient and seeks no profit. It only means that the ego finds its own sense, meaning and goal in another,

namely, the *Ātman*. But in its life of action, enjoyment and suffering, it is autonomous insofar as it sets its own purposes and takes its own decisions as befits a *kartr*.

For a Christian there is nothing repugnant in this conception of the conscious ego as an image and reflection of the Absolute, for Christianity has always cherished the teaching of the *Genesis* that man is made in the image and similitude of God and its theologians have taught unanimously that this character of being an image of God resides essentially in man's intellectual soul.

The second thing to be noted in the *Sāṅkarian* ego is its integrative role with regard to the various functions and the body of man. This role it performs in intimate dependence upon its supreme *Ātman* and Prototype which shines in its midst like a luminous gem.

"As an emerald or any other gem, dropped for testing into milk or a similar liquid, imparts its lustre to them, so does this luminous *Ātman*, being finer than even the heart or intellect, unify (*ekī-kr*) and impart its lustre to the body and organs, including the intellect, etc., although it is within the intellect; for these have varying degrees of fineness or grossness in a certain order, and the *Ātman* is the innermost of them all." (BAU 4, 3, 7)

The reflection of the light of the *Ātman* is produced within the *buddhi* which is its direct reflector. This reflection is the *jivātman* which says 'I' and 'mine' and which acts and experiences. It is so similar to the *Ātman* that even wise men (*vivekinaḥ*) as a rule identify both and are unable to distinguish them. From it and through the mediation of the *buddhi*, the light of the *Ātman* passes on to the *manas*, and thence pervades the senses, the organs and the gross body. Thus there is established the existential unity of man signified by the verb *ekīkr*, the integration of his existence and essence, first radically by the luminous *Ātman*, then through an instrumental diffusion by the *jivātman*.

In such a conception the *Sāṅkhya* dualism is really overcome. Man is no longer the heterodit assemblage of a blind and a lame. The due distinction of his different constituents is still made but he recovers the existential wholeness which the notion of person requires and guarantees. As in the parable of the chariot of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, III, 3-9, the *bhoktr* is "ātman, senses and mind conjoined."



A third point must now be considered. What about the self-subsistence and responsible autonomy which the conception of person also demands? Speaking again from a Christian standpoint, let me first remark that these are not understood in Christian metaphysics as closed and absolute. As a creature, the human person is totally dependent, and dependent at every moment on its Creator, the absolute *Esse*. This is the innermost Ground of its subsisting and the uppermost Ruler even of its moral freedom. The spiritual soul of man is not a windowless monad, it is open to the world of persons and, like the cosmic tree of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, VI, it is rooted above in the Pure, the Brahman.

Yet, if such a soul is only a reflection of pure Consciousness, can it still be said to be spiritual? Yes, because a spirit needs only be a centre of self-consciousness, it need not be *anādi*, without beginning, and even though it may be without temporal beginning, it cannot, unless it be the Absolute itself, ever exist independently and apart from this Absolute.

But should not a spiritual soul be *ananta*, unable ever to cease to exist? Absolutely speaking, i.e., considering only its ontological dependence upon God's power, the soul might cease to be if the divine radiation that produces it came to be withdrawn. But God is not a senseless or whimsical illuminator, he is Wisdom which has regards for the nature of its effects. Now the nature of the spiritual soul is to be the immediate reflection of pure Consciousness. As such it has such a dignity that it must be said to be an end-in-itself and God, being wise, cannot annihilate an end-in-itself. Nevertheless, could not the soul as reflection come to an end through the dissolution of its reflector? Yes, if the simile of the mirror were to be taken literally as the absolute explanation of the soul. But the all-powerful and self-sufficient Ātman requires no reflector to sustain in existence the subsistent images of itself which the souls are.

A final difficulty may be raised insofar as *mokṣa* as the direct experience of the Ātman seems to imply a complete effacement and vanishing of the jīvātman. Regarding this, the Christian thinker might prefer the formulations of the *Gītā* to those of strict Advaita. But he stands all the same very close to these. For him also salvation consists in the return of the image to its Prototype, hence to its own supreme truth and reality. This return, however, is not physical in the manner of a jar turning back into clay; it is epistemic, a matter of knowledge and cessation of ignorance. This ignorance is that of the soul unaware of its nature as image and, through the effect of its diffusing function towards the senses and the body, imagining itself as the absolute centre of the light it diffuses. This self-centredness, featured

as *ahaṁkāra-mamakāra*, has to come to an end and, in that sense, the *aham*, the ego, is called to disappear. This happens when the *jīvātman* discovers its own truth in its own centre, the *Paramātman*. Such a discovery is so fulfilling, so blissful, that there is no sense in claiming a place in it for a separate self-affirmation which could only mar the ecstatic recognition of the one that is fullness. Many a Christian might hesitate to accept this formulation of the "beatific vision" but the themes of the soul as image of God, of God as light, of divine illumination have given rise in Christian theologians and especially mystics to formulations either close to the Vedānta or which appear to be corollaries of it.

My conclusion is that the anthropology of those texts of Śaṅkara without being itself formulated in terms of person is at least consonant with the Christian understanding of the human person. This congeniality makes up a strong case for declaring that the term 'person' is not unsuitable to the Śaṅkara Vedānta conception of man. How close this suitability really is deserves attention and a more extensive examination.



*Kamalakar Mishra.*

PERSON IN THE LIGHT  
OF PRATYABHIJÑĀ  
PHILOSOPHY

I

The object of this short paper is to bring out the Pratyabhijñā conception of person. Our aim is not so much to present an exposition as to try to justify it to the extent it can appeal to philosophical understanding. We will incidentally also point out its relevance to society.

It would not be far from truth to say that the whole Pratyabhijñā system centres round the concept of person. It seeks to know the real nature of the person and his relationship with the rest of the world. The Divine or the Absolute too is conceived here as personal. The human person is in reality the divine one; reality is absolute personality. Of course, the Pratyabhijñā understanding of person is mainly based on the Tantras or the Āgamas. Any intellectual study of the human person is inadequate. If we advance purely on the basis of reason, we cannot know much; all our search would amount to surface-scratching only. Either the estimates of human personality are purely speculative, or there is no knowledge worth the name. All rational attempts to know the reality of the person fail. At the most what we are left with is a formal unity of apperception in Kantian terms.

But suppose there is a tradition which declares that the human person is in reality one with the Divine, and that this divine nature can be experienced here and now, and that there are definite ways and means to achieve it, and that there have been persons who have succeeded in doing so, then it becomes obligatory on the part of philosophy to investigate into the claims of such a tradition. To turn our face back saying that this is all mere faith and has only emotive value, is unphilosophical. If we accept this, then the Āgamic tradition

deserves closer study. The Pratyabhijñā philosophers find truth in this tradition and base their entire philosophy on that.

According to the Pratyabhijñā system, the human person or self which appears to be finite (*aṇu*), is really one with the Infinite (*Śiva*) which is consciousness (*saṃvit*). In fact, it is the *Pati* or the Lord who has out of His freedom (*svātantrya*) taken the form of the bound soul (*Paśu*). The Lord has for His *līlā* or play freely accepted limitation using the agency of *Māyā* which is an aspect of His own *Śakti* or power, It is this that brings about *āṇava* or egoity which is responsible for the apparent finitude of the *paśu*. *Aṇava* is the most deep-rooted kind of *mala* or dirt, other *malas* follow from *āṇava*. When this egoity (*āṇava*) which is the principal obstruction to the manifestation of the real nature of the person, is removed, the person realizes his unity with *Śiva*, he becomes aware that he is no other than *Śiva* Himself, and that he had mistaken himself to be *paśu*. This awareness is called *pratyabhijñā* or recognition. This is the recognition or realization of one's own real nature which is *Śiva*. This is what is symbolically called *Śiva-prāpti* or becoming *Śiva*.

It is clear from the above statement that I am the same *saṃvit* or consciousness which *Śiva* is, with the only difference that the consciousness in my case has adopted individuality or egoity. It is the limitation of individuality that separates me from *Śiva*. So it is a question of the removal of the covering of individuality, and the moment this individuality is pulled down, there remains no difference between me and the ultimate Reality, which is pure consciousness.

An important question arises here : if my separation from *Śiva* is due to the sheath of individuality, it implies that *Śiva* should be something impersonal, and that my shaking off the sheath of individuality would amount to my being impersonal ; and then in that case I would no longer remain an 'I'. But the Pratyabhijñā does not seem to accept *Śiva* as impersonal. *Śiva*, according to it, is the Absolute as well as the Supreme Person. Here the Pratyabhijñāite would point out that personality is not the same as individuality. Individuality is the sense of ego which is limited and which marks the separation of the 'I' from the rest of the world. But personality is simply the awareness of one's own existence. And when this self-consciousness reaches the level of the Absolute where it comprehends the entire universe in its bosom, then it need not mark the separation of 'I' from the universe.

But still the question remains : how can the absolute be personal ? Will the introduction of personality not debar the absolute from being



independent and all-embracing? How can we establish absolute identity of Śiva with the universe without impersonality? Absolute personality seems to be a contradiction in terms. In the theistic conceptions of reality God or Śiva is personal, but He maintains His difference from the world. In Advaita, Brahman is the Absolute and is completely one with the universe, but it is impersonal. The Pratyabhijñā position seems to be peculiar and also difficult, for it tends to preserve in Śiva absoluteness and personality both.

## II

Let us see how the Pratyabhijñāite tries to steer clear of this difficulty. It is obvious that the problem of personality is connected with the problem of self-consciousness. In this regard the Vedāntic logic is that I cannot have the awareness of myself unless I have the awareness of something different from me. I must encounter the 'not I', and if there is nothing to confront me as 'not I', I cannot have self-consciousness. Brahman is pure identity and it has nothing to confront as different from it, and so Brahman can have no self-consciousness.

The Pratyabhijñāite does not seem to accept this logic. He would point out that it is necessary to know others only when I am to distinguish myself from them. It is not necessary to know others when I have simply to know my existence. It is one thing to know that I am different from others, and it is quite another thing to know simply that I exist. The two should not be confused. The individual person not simply knows himself, but he knows himself as a limited being, i.e. not all-pervading. Therefore, his knowledge implies the knowledge of others. He needs the knowledge of others not for simply knowing that he is, but for knowing that he is limited. If he has simply to know his existence, he can do that even without being aware of others. Śiva is the sole reality. He is not limited, because there is nothing other than Him, which can limit Him. Śiva in the absolute 'I'. It is understandable that Śiva is unable to distinguish Himself from anything else, for there is nothing different from Him. But it is not understandable why Śiva should be debarred from knowing that He alone exists even though he is *cit*.

Suppose an opponent says that self-consciousness is dependent on the consciousness of the 'not-I', there is a necessary relation between the two; for nowhere on earth we find the knowledge of 'I' without the knowledge of the 'not-I'. In answer to this it may be pointed out that the mere presence of the two together does not prove that there is a necessary relation between the two. The relation may be accidental. That the awareness of 'I' is present with the awareness of the 'not-I'

does not mean that it would always be so, and that the awareness of 'I' cannot exist in its own right. How do you know that it cannot exist in its own right? It seems to be a mere presupposition to hold that there can be no self-consciousness without the presence of the 'not-I'; this is really one particular angle of logic which may be suited to a particular metaphysical system. But this is no absolute logic. A different logic is equally possible.

It may further be objected that if it is a presupposition to hold that self-consciousness requires the duality of the subject and the object, then it is no less a presupposition to hold that self-consciousness is possible without this duality, since it is not found to be so in our ordinary experience. Here it may be pointed out that the Pratyabhijñite does not seek the proof of his position in our ordinary experience, since he is aware that ordinary experience can provide no such proof. The proof comes from the *Āgamas* or the *Āgamic* experience. The Pratyabhijñā philosopher is interested in showing that what the *Āgama* says is a position from the rational point of view. Reason cannot prove the truth of the *Āgama*, but it (reason) can give a kind of line-clear by showing logical consistency there. Reason shows logical possibility, and the *Āgamic* experience puts on it the stamp of certainty.

It seems to us that the Vedāntin takes the 'I' to be a synonym of the awareness of limited existence; and so, for him the 'I' is by the very definition a relative term like the 'son' or the 'father'. But the Pratyabhijñite would object to this. He would say that the 'I' is not a relative term in itself. It becomes relative only when it has to distinguish itself from others. The 'I' means self-existence and when it means self-existence, it is not a relative term. What the Vedāntin calls 'I', the Pratyabhijñite would call the 'ego' and point out that 'I' and 'ego' are not the same. Ego is the awareness of limitation and therefore the awareness of distinction from others. But 'I' is simply the awareness of self-existence.

The Pratyabhijñite is anxious to point out that self-consciousness is natural to consciousness; it is this that distinguishes consciousness from what is *jaḍa*. He would ask: if there is no self-consciousness in Brahman, how is Brahman better than the insentient (*jaḍa*)? It is no good to have a conception of Brahman which is 'dark with the excess of light'.

The Pratyabhijñite further argues that an impersonal Brahman cannot be the goal of life. The Upaniṣads declare Brahman to be the highest value, because it is the state of perfect bliss (*ānanda*). But how can there be enjoyment of *ānanda* without self-consciousness? If Brahman is conceived merely as truth or reality and not as value, then there is no harm if there is no self-consciousness in Brahman. But if



Brahman is conceived as value too, then the issue of self-consciousness cannot be ignored. The spiritual aspirant will see no sense in becoming Brahman if it amounts to be something like a state of unconsciousness. To accept Brahman as self-conscious is an axiological necessity. If we have to understand the Upaniṣads consistently, we will have to take Brahman or Śiva as a state of self-enjoyment. Of course, the self here is not the individual self, but it is the self that identifies itself with all. The entire *jagadānanda* (world-enjoyment) becomes *ātmānanda* (self-enjoyment).

The Pratyabhijñāite has a different logic (different from the Advaitic one) regarding self-consciousness. According to him, self-consciousness implies activity in the self. And unless the self or consciousness is conceived as dynamic or active, there can be no self-consciousness there. Here comes the principle of *Śakti*. Śiva is pure consciousness (*jñāna* or *prakāśa*) and is of the nature of being in a spontaneity of activity which is *Śakti* or *kriyā*. This *kriyā* which is natural to Śiva is also called *vimarśa* or *spandana* or simply *aham* (I). It is this that makes Śiva self-conscious. Self-consciousness is a kind of spontaneous activity of the self or consciousness. It is this spontaneous activity, and not the awareness of others, that is required for self-consciousness. And because the Pratyabhijñā philosopher is able to provide such a condition, it is not difficult for him to conceive the Absolute as self-conscious. Again, it is this spontaneity that makes self-enjoyment also possible.

Śiva is *cit* (consciousness), and *śakti* is *kriyā* (activity), and the two are in eternal harmony (*sāmarasya*). This *sāmarasya* doctrine may apparently suggest that Śiva and Śakti are two different entities which are put together in a harmony. But this is not so. The *tattva* (reality) which is consciousness, is one and is conceived as being dynamic. And this very dynamism or spontaneity of the *tattva* itself is called *Śakti*. So there is no question of there being two entities. The analogy of physical light (*prakāśa*) is quite befitting, for light is not merely an entity, but is also an activity; it is illumination or self-illumination. Light is both an entity and a continuous act of illumination; and so is consciousness too.

Here a question may be asked from the Vedāntic side: how can *jñāna* and *kriyā* go together? Are the two not opposed to each other like light and darkness, since *jñāna* is passivity, and *kriyā* is just the opposite? In answer to this, it may be pointed out that *kriyā* should not be confused with *karma*. *Karma* is the volitional action; it is action in the moral sense, and it is this that is opposed to *jñāna* (knowledge). But *kriyā* is the natural spontaneous activity; there is no volition there. We may call it relaxed activity. In *karma* we exert our will; *karma* is performed by a voluntary agent. But in *kriyā* we are passive; we do not voluntarily do, but everything flows from us automatically or



spontaneously. The whole confusion is due to the use of the word *kriyā*. Actually *kriyā* does not mean action at all; it means what may be called free movement or vibration (*spandana*). This *kriyā* cannot be opposed to *jñāna*, and it is logically possible to conceive *jñāna* and *kriyā*, Śiva and Śakti together. In fact, as the Śaiva points out, it is this spontaneity that is the real beauty of consciousness.

### III

The real person, according to the Pratyabhijñā, would be one who, after completely shaking off his ego, is seated in the Self, allowing all activity to flow from him in a natural spontaneous way. We would refer this person as 'Śaiva'. This may be taken as synonymous to *jivanmukta*. The Śaiva would be moving, fighting, enjoying, and performing all the worldly duties; and while doing all this, he would be doing nothing, for all this would be done by him automatically.<sup>1</sup>

He would promptly respond to every call; and he would act according to what the situation demands. He would appear to be taking active interest in everything. This positive involvement in the affairs of the world is the characteristic of the Śaiva. But in his case there is a basic difference from the ordinary man. While the ordinary man is really involved straining his will and using his faculties in a forced way, the Śaiva is inwardly detached and passive. To use a modern terminology, the ordinary man is in tension, while the Śaiva is in perfect relaxation; all that he does is relaxed activity.

It may be objected that it is impossible to remain active without the will. In answer it may be pointed out that activity does not really come from the will or the ego: it springs forth from the Self. Spontaneous activity is natural to the Self. When the will or ego is relaxed or surrendered, activity does not cease. On the contrary, one becomes more active. The reason is that the ego is an obstruction to the Self, and the moment this obstruction is removed, the activity of the Self begins to flow freely. Of course, all this activity is relaxed or spontaneous (*svābhāvika*) and not voluntary.

In ordinary experience also we may find that sometimes when we strain our will too much, we spoil the activity. And on the other hand, when we perform it in a relaxed state, we are able to do a lot of activity without strain. We also feel joy while doing such activity. The sublime creative activity is not a result of the straining of the will, but it is spontaneous expression of the Self. A real poet, for example, does not compose by forcing his will; poetry in the true sense of the term flows so to say. The more we are seated in the Self, that is, the more we are relaxed, the more the Self expresses itself through us in the form of creative activity.

It may be further objected that what appears as automatic or spontaneous, is really the result of the conditioning of the will. In



answer, the Pratyabhijñāite would put it the other way. He would say that the will itself is the result of the spontaneity of the Self. Even if conditioning of the will be granted, it is clear that after conditioning the activity is spontaneous. The fact remains that it is spontaneous. And if spontaneity can be there after conditioning, why can it not be there naturally? All spontaneity is not due to conditioning. The Pratyabhijñāite does not mean that there is no voluntary action at all. At the ordinary level of the bound soul (*paśu*) there is a lot of voluntary action. But the point is that the deeper and deeper the *paśu* advances toward the Self, the more and more his activities become spontaneous. And there comes a stage when there is perfect spontaneity. In that state what appears as willing, is really spontaneity.

It is interesting to note that such an activity does not come within the category of the moral, and yet it is naturally good. In this state the person is one with Śiva, the Benign, and the natural activity which flows from him can be nothing but benign. As for himself, he only plays in joy, but his play or *līlā* becomes beneficial for others. We may add here that the activity which emerges out of this state alone can be beneficial for the world.

The Śaiva feels one with the whole universe. This is not an artificial or acquired feeling, but this is the forgotten truth which he recovers. All are his own self, he is in the state of supreme love, and there is no room for hatred there. And this love saturates his whole being and keeps him lively and gratified eternally. It is joy for himself and also for the society in which he lives.

In the end it may be observed that the Śaiva rejects nothing, but sublimates everything as being Śiva or his own self. For him, everything is a play (*līlā-vilāsa*) of the Divine Power. It is in this spirit that he accepts all the enjoyments of the world. His desires (*vāsanās*) cease to be impure; they are divinised. In him there is no conflict of the 'Id' and the 'Super-ego', and psychoanalytically speaking, he is the perfect integrated personality. It is he who is really healthy (*svastha*).

The Vedāntin, in order to reach Brahman, rejects the world and the worldly values. The Vedāntin and the Śaiva both go beyond the world, but while the Vedāntin does so by rejecting the world, the Śaiva does the same by sublimating it. The approach of the Vedāntin is negative, while that of the Śaiva is positive. The attitude of the Śaiva is that the entire world-process is the dance of Śiva. Abhinavagupta says, 'Do not renounce nor do adopt, but be at ease taking everything as it is (that is, as the *spandana* of Śiva)'.<sup>2</sup>

1. 'Automatically' is not a happy word, because it carries the sense of mechanicality, and the activity referred to is not mechanical, but free, spontaneous activity. The word is used here simply to mark the difference from voluntary action where one has to exert one's will.

2. "na tyāgī na parigrahī bhāja sukhān sarvān yathāvasthitah".

PART THREE

SPECIAL ARTICLES



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T. M. P Mahadevan

VEDĀNTIC MEDITATION  
AND ITS RELATION TO  
ACTION\*

The Vedānta is not only a view of reality but also a way of life. The Upaniṣads which constitute Vedānta (literally, the *Veda-end*) not only teach about the ultimate reality which is referred to by such terms as *Brahman* and *Ātman*; they also detail the methods by means of which the reality is to be realized. Here, the expression 'realized' does not mean 'to be made real,' but 'to be experienced as the sole reality'. According to the Upaniṣads, as expounded by Śaṅkara, "The Absolute Spirit is the sole reality; the world of phenomena is an illusion; the so-called individual soul is the Absolute itself, and no other." The world appears to be real, and the soul as different from the Absolute, because of nescience or ignorance. It is ignorance that causes the bondage of the soul which consists in its involvement in the recurring cycle of birth and death. What can remove ignorance is knowledge — knowledge of the non-dual; Self-knowledge effects the release of the soul by removing ignorance. When ignorance is removed, there is release (*mokṣa*). Release is only another name for the eternal Self (*Brahman*, *Ātman*). The Self which is to be realized is not the object of an act. It is ever existent, or is existence *per se*; it does not depend on human activity. This is the position of Vedānta, according to Śaṅkara; knowledge (*jñāna*) is the means to release, and not action.

The goal of Vedānta as taught in the Upaniṣads, which is release, is not what-is-to-be-accomplished. It is the eternal nature of the Self. The expression that "it is attained" is but figurative. Release is not a new acquisition; it is the realization of what eternally is. Anything that is caused by action is bound to perish. Through action one of four results may be obtained: origination, attainment,

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purification, and modification. Of these, origination, attainment, and modification are not possible in respect of the eternally attained unchanging Absolute. Nor may we suspect the possibility of purification consisting in the removal of impurities like ignorance, unrighteousness, etc.; for the Absolute is ever pure. It is flawless and undefiled. In reaching a place, say, a village not attained before, and in removing a disease, etc., not already remedied, there is required action in the form of movement, taking in medicine, etc. But, in the case of the Absolute Self which is eternally attained what need is there for activity? What should be removed is ignorance; and for the removal of ignorance what is potent is knowledge. A person not knowing what is already attained like the gold ornament round his neck, desires to attain it again, and not knowing that there is no snake in the rope desire to avoid it. But what he desires is accomplished not by any act, but by mere knowledge. Similarly, in the attainment of the eternally attained Self and in the remedying of the eternally remedied transmigration, the means is the knowledge of the truth.

That the attainment of the Self (*Brahman*) is figurative is evident from scriptural texts like "And being (already) released, he is released,"<sup>1</sup> "Being (already) Brahman, he attains Brahman."<sup>2</sup> Release has neither a beginning nor an end. If release had a beginning, there would be an end also to it. And if it has an end, it is a misnomer to call it release. Further, if release be accomplishable by an act, then, its relation to body, senses, etc., would have to be predicated, and there would be for it the capacity to increase and decrease. And that which is subject to growth and decay is not imperishable. There is no embodiedness for the self in release. Release, as we have noted, is the natural and eternal state of the self. It comes to be clouded by nescience, and as a consequence, the non-embodied, appears as if embodied, the pure appears as if impure, the eternally attained appears as if unattained. When ignorance is removed by knowledge, Brahman is attained as it were.

Action which is a product of ignorance cannot destroy its parent. The delusive cognition of the rope-snake is not removed by darkness which is its cause. Pain is the result of being embodied; the body has its root in the previously acquired merit and demerit; merit and demerit are the fruit of prescribed and prohibited acts; these acts are dependent on appetite and aversion; appetite and aversion are conditioned by attractiveness and unattractiveness which are superimposed on sense-objects, superimposition is caused by the world of duality which appears to be real on account of non-inquiry; the world of duality, however, is illusory, like nacre-silver, and it is the result of the ignorance which obscures the non-dual self. Hence ignorance of



the self is the sole cause of all evil ; and it is only knowledge that can remove ignorance. Delusion which is brought about by nescience is dispelled by the cognition of the true. Darkness is destroyed by light alone. The removal of nescience could be by knowledge alone, not by any act.

Is not knowledge, it may be asked, an act of the mind? The reply is that knowledge is not an act. Action is dependent on the will of the agent ; knowledge should conform to the nature of reality. To go to a distant town, for instance, action is necessary. The action of going, however, is determined by the will of the agent. One may go, or not go, or go by alternative modes of transport. But the case of knowledge is otherwise. In the matter of perceiving a green parrot perching on a tree, for example, the perceiver has no option. He cannot "will" to perceive it as a leaf. Knowledge must conform to the object. It is true that action may precede knowledge but knowledge itself is not an act. In the book, *A threefold Cord*, which is in the form of a dialogue between Viscount Samuel and Professor Herbert Dingle covering the areas of Science, Philosophy, and Religion, the following explanation offered by Professor Dingle, of the distinction between experience and voluntary action, will be found to be instructive. "By experience I mean that of which we are aware, that which is given to us, so to speak without our having designed it and independently of any wish of our own.... Voluntary action, on the other hand, is what we choose to do and could avoid doing if we would. Of course, the two things are often associated with one another. I might choose to look at the sky to see the stars, but my choice here is merely that of opening my eyes and turning in a certain direction : what I then experience is not of my contrivance" (pp. 251-2). If this is so even in the matter of the knowledge of empirical objects, it is clear that knowledge of the Self is not of the nature of an act. Self-awareness is the plenary experience ; it is not willed activity.

Let me now discuss what knowledge is, and how it differs from action. In order to understand what knowledge is — that understanding is in fact, knowledge of knowledge — we should contrast it with action. Although both action and knowledge relate to the mind, action is what the agent does and is dependent on his will, as we have seen, whereas knowledge must be conditioned by its object. Action is *kartṛ-tantra*, it depends on the agent. Knowledge is *vastu-tantra* ; it depends on its content. For instance, it is within the sphere of a man's will to decide to go to a place or not to go, and if to go how to go there. It is not so with knowledge. If what is in front of me is a post and I mistake it for a ghost, that would not be know-



ledge. Knowledge should conform to its content ; it cannot be arbitrarily constituted by an act of will. Will is not Idea. Opinion and belief, in so far as they are conditioned by will, do not constitute knowledge. If one worships an Image believing it to be Viṣṇu, one may obtain the appropriate meritorious results; but this is a case of knowledge. Acts may precede knowledge such as the act of turning the face in the direction of the object and opening the eyes, etc., in visual perception. But perception itself consists in the revelation of its content.

If knowledge is the means to release, and not action, is there no place at all for action in the scheme of Vedāntic discipline, it may be asked. The answer is: "There is a place for action." The competence to tread the path of knowledge is gained only when one's mind has become pure. For the purification of the mind, the means is *karma-yoga*, the performance of one's duties without attachment to results.

Disinterested and dedicated action serves to purify the mind, and thus becomes a remote auxiliary of the path of knowledge. Although knowledge itself is not an act, it is the mind that has to seek for and gain it. A mind that is impure, filled with passions and selfish desires, cannot even turn in the direction of Self-knowledge. The discipline by which the passions may be eliminated is the performance of one's duties without caring for rewards. The craving for possessions, the thirst for sense-enjoyments, is what defiles the mind and makes it unfit for the higher pursuits. Therefore, the mind must first be freed from defilements through actions that are performed without selfish motives, and are not directed towards finite ends. This is *karma-yoga*.

It is not action that binds us so much as our attachment to the fruit of action. So, desirelessness or freedom from attachment is what we should first achieve. By mere inaction it is not possible to achieve this. We may be inactive outside, but intensely active inside. Action does not mean mere bodily movement. Action is conditioned by the soul's sense of agency through the wrong identification with its body, etc. Freedom from the sense of agency cannot be gained by making the body motionless. The desire for inactivity is as much harmful as that for the fruit of action. So, the principle of *karma-yoga* is: Let not the desire for fruit be the motive for your actions; and let not there be a longing for inaction too.

Is it possible to act without motive? It is true that there cannot be endeavour without motive. But instead of having a different



motive for each action, one should have one and the same motive for all actions. That motive should be inner purification, which is essential for following the path of knowledge which leads to Brahman-realization. Unless the mind is thoroughly cleansed, it will not receive the ray of wisdom, the illumination which reveals the non-dual Self.

The path of knowledge consists of three phases: study or 'hearing' (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*), and contemplation (*nididhyāsana*). Study stands for the proper understanding of the Vedāntic texts. The texts fall into two categories: intermediary and major. The intermediary texts relate to the nature of the world, the nature of the individual soul, the nature of the non-dual Self, etc. The major texts impart the supreme knowledge of identity. From the intermediary texts, only mediate knowledge of the truth is gained. From the major texts, the direct experience of the plenary reality may be obtained. In the case of the eminently competent seeker, even a single hearing of the major text "that thou art" (*tat tvam asi*) will be enough to effect release. But in the case of others, this does not happen because of impediments — the impediments are in the form of long-established false beliefs, the belief that the Vedānta teaches what is impossible (*asambhāvanā*), and the belief in what is contrary to the truth (*viparītabhāvanā*). The first of these beliefs should be countermanded through rational reflection (*manana*); and the second should be removed through the practice of contemplation (*nididhyāsana*). When the impediments have been destroyed, there arises the intuitive experience of the non-dual Self. The intuition which is the final mental mode is technically called *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, the mode which has taken the form of the impartite Self. Although it is a mode of the mind, it is not like the other modes. It destroys the other modes and finally destroys itself, with the result that the self-luminous non-dual Brahman alone remains. The final mental mode destroys ignorance or nescience; when nescience is destroyed, bondage disappears, and there is gained self-realization which is release.

To follow the path of knowledge which is the path of inquiry, certain qualifications are necessary. Śaṅkara lays down these as the qualifications: the discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal phenomena, non-attachment to the enjoyment of fruit here or in a hereafter, the possession in abundance of virtues like calmness and equanimity, and the longing for release. Of these four qualifications, each earlier one is the cause for acquiring each subsequent one. He who is endowed with these qualifications is the one who is eligible for pursuing the path of knowledge.

It should be obvious that the qualifications of eligibility are difficult to obtain. What one should basically achieve is perfect



mind-control. The method of mind-control through concentration and meditation, which is known as *rāja-yoga*, is an auxiliary discipline to the path of knowledge. This method which is generally referred to as *yoga* is very ancient. In the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, the yoga-technique of controlling the mind is taught. The basic text of the classical Yoga school, however, is the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali. The most important concept of the Yoga school is that of *citta* (mind). By itself the *citta* is all-pervading and is called the *kāraṇa-citta* (the cause-mind). But when it is associated with a body it contracts, and is called the *kārya-citta* (the effect-mind). The object of *yoga* is to make the *citta* assume its original, pure unmodified status, and thus release the *puruṣa* (soul) from its travail.

It is through the functioning of the *citta* that the *puruṣa* acts, enjoys and suffers. The functionings produce also latent tendencies, which, in turn, give rise to other tendencies; and thus the cycle of *saṁsāra* revolves. Tossed by the surge of desires and passions, the individual ego is restless and knows no peace; it is subject to the five afflictions of *avidyā* (ignorance), *asmitā* (erroneous identification of the self with the mind, body, etc.), *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion), and *abhiniveśa* (the instinctive clinging to life and dread of death. In order to free the self from the stranglehold of *prakṛti* (primal nature), the modifications of the mind must be quelled. The modifications are *pramāṇa* (valid knowledge), *viparyaya* (false knowledge), *vikalpa* (verbal knowledge), *nidrā* (sleep and dream), and *smṛti* (memory). These must be abolished by removing the afflictions.

How are the afflictions to be removed and the mental modifications suppressed? Through continued endeavour (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*). It is only by long practice that a person acquires the habit of detachment which will impart to him the discriminative knowledge of the self and the not-self. The details of this practice are set forth in the form of eight steps which are called the limbs of *yoga* (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*). The eight steps are: *yama* (abstentions), *niyama* (observances), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (control of breath), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses from their objects), *dhāraṇā* (fixed attention), *dhyāna* (meditation), and *samādhi* (concentration).

The first two, *yama* and *niyama*, constitute the ethical basis of yoga. The third, fourth, and fifth members of yoga, viz., *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*, govern respectively the disciplining of body, vital-force, and sense-organs, and are accessory to mind-control. The last three limbs of yoga, viz., *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* mark the different stages of concentration. It is they that constitute *yoga* proper. Together they are called *saṁyama* (constraint). A perfectly



controlled and concentrated mind is essential for a fruitful inquiry into the nature of Brahman.

Meditation, however, should be distinguished from inquiry which is the path of knowledge. Meditation is a mental act which is different from knowledge. It is prescribed for those who are not fit for the path of knowledge. It arrests the current of the mind which courses its way to objects of sense, and causes it to contemplate Brahman. Meditation on Brahman may be compared to a delusion that becomes fruitful. A delusion which yields a fruitful result is called *saṁvādi-bhrama*. *Viśaṁvādi-bhrama*, its opposite, is a delusion which does not lead to any fruitful consequence. Both the light of a lamp and the light of a gem may be mistaken for a gem. Both are cases of delusion. But the man who mistakes the lamp-light for a gem and approaches it gains nothing, whereas the man who mistakes the light of a gem for the gem itself gets the gem. Meditation on Brahman is like the latter. There is meditation on Brahman with attributes (*saguṇa*); there is also meditation on Brahman without attributes (*nirguṇa*). Brahman, the ultimate reality, is unconditioned, without attributes, without qualifications (*nirguṇa*). It is the same reality, as endowed with attributes (*saguṇa*), that is called God when viewed in relation to the empirical world and the empirical souls. Brahman is the same, as *nirguṇa* (attributeless) and as *saguṇa* (with attributes). There are not two Brahman, as wrongly alleged by some critics. Even when God is referred to as the lower (*apara*) Brahman, what is meant is not that Brahman has become lower in status as God, but that God is Brahman looked at from the lower level of relative experience. These are two forms (*dvirūpa*) of Brahman and not two Brahman: Brahman as-it-is-in-itself, and Brahman as-it-is-in-relation-to-the-world. The former is the unconditioned Brahman; the latter is Brahman as conditioned by nomenclature, configuration, and change.

Meditation on Brahman with attributes is the same as the worship of God. The object of being devoted to God is to gain His grace, and to achieve one-pointedness of mind. It is to be noted that Hinduism in general — and Vedānta in particular — does not take any narrow view of devotion to God. Indian theism has certain unique characteristics. The foremost of these is that it is not fanatical in its outlook, and it provides for a variety of conceptions of the Godhead. No one has a right to say that his view of God is the only view. As early as the age of the *Ṛg-veda* it was discovered that, though the Truth is one, it is called variously by sages. As the *Mahābhārata* puts it, there is no *muni* without a view of his own. This is as it should be. As no two minds are identical, the form of



faith that suits one may not suit another. Śrī Kṛṣṇa expressly declares that there are different ways to God, and that even those who worship other gods reach Him alone. What one finds in Hinduism is, thus, a philosophical theism, which is often mistaken for polytheism. The Hindu is prepared to bow before many gods, because he knows that the principle of Divinity is the same in all the gods.

Devotion to any of the forms of God is called *bhakti*. The external accessories of worship are not important. What is essential is that we should offer ourselves to Him. The offering of a flower or a fruit is only symbolic. The ideal devotee is one who leads a dedicated life. "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever oblation you place in the sacred fire, whatever you bestow as a gift, whatever you do by way of penance, offer it to Me,"<sup>8</sup> says the Lord. When one's love of God becomes constant and complete, one attains wisdom through His grace, the wisdom which liberates the soul from the bonds.

Superior to meditation on Brahman with attributes is meditation on Brahman without attributes. The criterion by which the superiority of a particular method is determined is its relative proximity to Brahman-knowledge. That which is more proximate to Brahman-knowledge is superior to that which is less proximate. Judged by this standard, meditation on the attributeless Brahman is superior to the remoter methods like the performance of rites and rituals and formal worship. Just as a delusion that turns out to be fruitful becomes very much like valid knowledge at the time of yielding fruit, even so meditation on Brahman, when it matures, becomes like knowledge at the time of release.

Meditation on the attributeless Brahman usually takes the form of meditation on the sacred syllable *Om*, referred to as the *praṇava*. Gauḍapāda, an illustrious predecessor of Śaṅkara, explains the method of meditating on the significance of *Om*, in his verse commentary on one of the Upaniṣads, the *Māṇḍūkya*. *Om* is the sound which is indicative of Brahman. It is inclusive of all sounds; and hence it is the support of the world of speech (*vāk-prapañca*). And of all that is denoted by sound, the ground is Brahman. So, for the purposes of meditation the sound '*Om*' is made to stand for the Self or Brahman. Of all the symbols, the sound '*Om*' has come to be regarded as the most important and fruitful. The *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* says, "The word (or goal) which all the Vedas declare, that which all penances proclaim, and desiring which people lead an austere life, that word (or goal) I tell thee in brief: It is *Om*."<sup>4</sup> The *Muṇḍakōpaniṣad* compares the *praṇava* (the syllable *Om*) to the bow, the individual soul to the arrow, and Brahman to the target, and says that the target is to be unerringly hit:



thus is union with Brahman attained.<sup>5</sup> The fifth question of the *Praśnopaniṣad* relates to the meditation on *Oṃ* as a means to the realization of the higher and lower Brahman, i.e., the unconditioned Brahman and Brahman as conditioned. It is stated there that by means of *Oṃkāra* the wise one arrives at the Highest which is quiescent, and free from decay, death and fear.<sup>6</sup>

The use of *Praṇava-dhyāna* or meditation on *Oṃ* is, thus, well-recognized in the Upaniṣads. In fact, the *Māṇḍūkya* starts by saying that its object is to expound the significance of *Oṃkāra*, and sketches the method of identifying the components of the sound 'Oṃ' with the aspects of the Self, and thereby realizing the truth of non-duality. There are four mātrās or morae of *Oṃ* corresponding to the four phases of the Self. The four mātrās are *a*, *u*, *m*, and the fourth which is really amātra or morales part which is represented by the point (*bindu*) of the *anusvāra*. The phases of the Self, are *Viśva*, *Taijasa*, *Prājña*, and the *Turiya*; the first three stand for the self in waking, dream and sleep respectively, and the fourth is the self *per se*. The principle of the meditation on *Oṃ* is to equate the mātrās with the phases. Gauḍapāda calls the knowledge of equation *mātrāsampratipatti* (i.e., knowing the mātrās to be identical with the phases) and *oṃkārasya pādaśovidyā* (knowledge of the morae of *Oṃ* as the phases of the Self). Now, if two things are to be identified or compared, there must be some similarity between them. The *Māṇḍūkya* and, following it, the *Kārikā* give reasons in each case for the identification of the phases of the Self with the mātrās. And the reasons, it is well to remember, are intended only for helping concentration on the significance of *Oṃ*.

The first of the mātrās is *a* and the first of the phases is *Viśva*. These two are to be regarded as identical because of the common quality of being the first (*ādi*) as well as that of pervading (*āpti*). Of the sound-components of *Oṃ*, *a* is the first; so also of the aspects of the Self, *Viśva* is the first. And just as *a* is pervasive of all speech, *Viśva* is pervasive of the universe. In the case of the second mātrā, *u*, and the second phase of the Self, *Taijasa*, the common qualities are exaltation *utkarṣa* and intermediateness, (*ubhayatva*). The exaltation of *u* is due to its being subsequent to *a*. Similarly, *Taijasa* is exalted over *Viśva*, because of its superior order. *U* is intermediate between *a*, and *m*, as *Taijasa* is between *Viśva* and *Prājña*. The common features that constitute the basis for the identification of *m* and *Prājña* are being the measure (*miti* or *māna*) and the locus of mergence (*apīti* or *laya*). In pronouncing *Oṃ* repeatedly, *a* and *u* merge into and emerge from *m*, as it were. Hence *m* is said to be the measure of the other two mātrās. *Prājña* is the measure of *Viśva* and *Taijasa*



because these two evolve out of it in creation and enter into it in dissolution; the worlds of waking and dream get resolved in sleep, and from sleep they emerge again. The second common quality is *laya* or disappearance; just as *a* and *u* end in *m*, Viśva and Taijasa disappear in Prājña. It will be clear that the letters, *a*, *u* and *m* are employed in this meditation as mnemonics. Each letter stands for the first letter of the words signifying certain feature of the Self in its manifestations as Viśva, Taijasa and Prājña. The second quality of Prājña is the only exception. Thus *a* stands for *ādi* and *āpti*; *u* for *utkarṣa* and *ubhayatva*; *m* for *miti* or *māna*.

The fourth mātṛā is, as we said, really amātra. It is the silence into which the sound *Oṃ* culminates. It is the *Oṃ* without the distinction of parts. It has not even a name, and therefore it does not come under the purview of empirical usage. It is the Turiya Self or pure consciousness which transcends the distinctions involved in the forms of Viśva and Taijasa, and the seed of plurality implicit in Prājña.

The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* eulogizes the meditation on the identity of the mātṛās and the phases of the Self by specifying the fruit which each stage in the meditation yields. He who knows Vaiśvānara (i.e. Viśva) as *a*, says the *Upaniṣad*, obtains all desires and becomes first among the great. He who knows the identity of Taijasa with *u* exalts or increases the continuity of knowledge and becomes equal or of the same attitude towards all and in his family none who does not know Brahman is born. He who knows the oneness of Prājña and *m* measures the whole world (i.e., knows its true nature) and becomes the place of its mergence (i.e., he becomes the self which is the cause of the universe). He who knows the morales *Oṃkāra* in its fulness as signifying the Turiya realizes the Self and does not return to empirical life.

Meditation or *upāsana* is defined thus by Śaṅkara: the process of taking hold of some stay or *ālambana*, established as such in the sacred texts, and directing a continuous flow of even modes of the mind towards it, without the intervention of any other cognition contrary to it, is *upāsana*. There must be some point of attention for concentration. This is the *ālambana* (support). It is of service in steadying the thought-current and making it flow in one direction. The *pratikas* or images are useful in this way. The centrifugal tendency of the mind is arrested, and it becomes unflickering and one-pointed like the flame of the lamp kept in a still place. The images which are mis-called idols have a place in spiritual discipline because they help to turn the mind of the aspirant Godward.



That *Praṇava* or *Oṃkāra* has the pride of place among the symbols of the invisible Spirit, we have already stated. Its significance and the method of meditation thereon have also been explained. Gauḍa-pāda concludes his exposition of *Praṇava-yoga* by praising it and those who practise it. The mind should be yoked to *Praṇava*, for *Praṇava* is Brahman in which there is no fear. For him who is ever united with *Praṇava* there is no fear anywhere. *Praṇava* is the lower Brahman; it is the higher as well. It has no cause; there is nothing besides it, nothing outside it. Nor is there anything that follows from it. *Praṇava* is the immutable. It is the beginning, middle and end of all. He who knows *Praṇava* thus attains the Self. *Om* is to be known as the Lord present in the heart of all. Having understood the all-pervading *Oṃ*, the wise one does not grieve. *Oṃkāra* is without measure (*amātra*), and its measure is limitless (*anantamātra*); it is that in which all duality ceases; it is bliss. He who knows it thus is a saint, and no other.

We shall end this essay by summarizing a short composition ascribed to Śaṅkara, which consists of five verses. In this quintad of verses, *Sādhana-pañcaka*, the disciplines required for gaining release are set forth in an ascending order. The tradition about this composition is this. On the eve of Śaṅkara's departure from this world, his disciples gathered round him and begged him for his final instruction. In response to their request Śaṅkara is said to have composed this quintad known also as *Upadeśa-pañcaka* (the Five verses of Instruction): (1) Let the Veda be studied everyday; let the *karma* taught there be performed well; through such performance let God be worshipped; let one reject all thought of desire-prompted action; let the stream of sin be shaken off; let one reflect on the defects in empirical pleasures; let one endeavour in the direction of inquiring into the nature of the Self; let one go out of one's home quickly; (2) let there be association with the good; let there be cultivated firm devotion to God; let virtues like calmness, etc., be practised; let *karma* with its stranglehold be given up soon; let a good teacher be approached; let everyday his *pādukās* (sandals) be worshipped; let him be entreated to teach the one-lettered Brahman, i.e., *Oṃkāra*; let the major texts of the Upaniṣads be listened to; (3) let the sense of the major texts be inquired into; let the view of the Upaniṣads be well adopted; let one retire from bad logic; let logic that is in conformity with scripture be explored; let there be meditation of the form 'I am Brahman'; let day after day pride be eschewed; let the notion of 'I' in the body be given up; let debate with the wise be abandoned; (4) let hunger, as a disease, be treated; let everyday alms be eaten as medicine; let one not beg for delicious food, let there be contentment with what one is



destined to obtain ; let one bear with cold, heat, etc. ; let no futile words be uttered ; let the attitude of indifference be cultivated ; let favouritism and cruelty to people be discarded ; (5) let one remain comfortably in solitude ; let the mind be concentrated in what is superior ; let the plenary self be easily intuited ; let this world be seen as sublated thereby ; let past *karma* be allowed to get destroyed ; let there be, on the strength of knowledge, no attachment to future actions ; let the *karma* that has begun to fructify be enjoyed here ; and then let one stay as the supreme Brahman-Ātman.

The instructions given by Śaṅkara in this quintad of verses are designed to lead the aspirant from the valley of bondage to the heights of release — in the words of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*—

from the unreal to the Real,  
from darkness to Light,  
from death to Immortality.

## REFERENCES

1. *Kaṣhhoṇiṣad*, v, 1.
2. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, IV, iv, 6
3. *Bhagavad-gītā*, ix, 27.
4. *Kaṣhhoṇiṣad*, I, ii, 15.
5. *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*, II, ii, 3
6. *Praśnopaniṣad*, v, 7.

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SELECTIONS FROM  
POYGAI ĀLVĀR

I

*The World and its Cause*

“Viewing the world as an earthen lamp, the deep ocean as ghee, and the hot-rayed sun as light, I offer the garland of hymns at the feet of the Lord who is armed with the luminous discus, for crossing over the ocean of sorrow.” [1]

The mind of a true devotee is constantly engrossed in the Lord. Neither time nor place stands in the way of the practice of devotion by him. Wherever he may be and whatever may be the time, he cannot but think of the Lord. Uninterrupted thought-stream suffused with intense love for the Lord is *bhakti*. True devotion leads to communion with God. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (IX, 34): “Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; bow down to Me. Thus having made thy mind steadfast in me as thy supreme goal, thou shalt come to me.” Whatever the devotee offers is acceptable to the Lord. “Whoever with devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that I accept—the devout gift of the pure-minded.” (*Gītā*, IX, 26) One can practise devotion through thought, word and deed. Whatever a devotee does is free from selfishness and out of sheer loving devotion to the Lord.

A true devotee that he was, Poygai Ālvār began his worship of the Lord, being equipped mentally with the necessary accessories of worship such as the lighted lamp and the garland of flowers. He explains the mode of worship he followed in the hymn given above.

The place where the Ālvār stays is his temple. Or, it could be said that remaining where he is, he constructs mentally a temple and



installs the Lord therein. He imagines first of all the earth as an earthen lamp, and the waters as ghee therein. He further imagines the luminous sun as the bright flame of the lamp. Having lighted the lamp, he strings the hymns together and makes a garland of them, which he offers at the feet of the Lord. The Ālvār is convinced that only the divine grace can save him from the ocean of bondage in which he is caught; and so he worships the Lord and implores His grace for rescuing him from the ocean of sorrow.

It is first of all necessary to call attention to the aptness of the choice of objects which are to do the work of a lamp, ghee, and the burning wick. In the place of the lamp made of earth, Poygai Ālvār brings in the solid earth itself. He substitutes the liquid water for the ghee, which is necessary to feed the flame. The luminous sun is the substitute for the bright flame of the lamp. In the place of the garland of flowers which are physical, he brings in the garland consisting of hymns uttered by him, which are equally physical. The Ālvār bases his analogy in every case at the physical level—the analogy between the earthen lamp and the earth, between the ghee and the waters, between the bright light and the luminous sun, and between the garland of flowers and the garland of hymns uttered by him.

Of the three entities, *cit*, *acit*, and Brahman which are organically related according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, the opening hymn of Poygai Ālvār's *First Tiruvandādi* seeks to explain the nature of the physical universe (*acit*) consisting of the earth, the ocean, the sun, and so on, all of which are necessary for human life. It may be stated here that Bhūtattālvār brings out the nature of the *jīva* (*cit*), and Peyālvār that of Brahman in the first verse of their respective *Tiruvandādis*.

There is another way in which we may bring out the significance of the opening hymns of the first three Ālvārs. Poygai Ālvār speaks of knowledge (*jñāna*) of the world and God; Bhūtattālvār refers to devotion (*bhakti*) on the part of the *jīva*; and Peyālvār records his God-realization attained through *bhakti*, in the opening hymn of their respective *Tiruvandādis*.

The opening hymn of Poygai Ālvār has a deeper philosophical significance. The Ālvār speaks of the three elements, *viz* earth, water, and fire, in the course of working out the analogies mentioned above for the purpose of refuting the standpoint of those who argue that the "void" (*śūnya*) is the ultimate reality, and that there is no God who is the cause and controller of the physical universe. If the sun which symbolises fire remains what it is in the solar system, if the



unfathomable water of the ocean and the expansive earth maintain their levels, it is because of the control exercised over them by the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*) who is both omnipotent and omniscient. Raising the question, "How does the fire which all of us see shine?" the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* answers by saying, "Everything shines only after that shining light. His shining illumines all this world." It means that the luminosity of the sun and other heavenly bodies is due to the self-luminous God. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, vii, 3-4) refers to God as the indwelling self and the inner controller of earth, water, and other elements as well as of the *jīva*. It says: "He who dwells in the earth, yet is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, He is your self, the inner controller, the immortal." It gives a similar account with regard to water and other elements. On the basis of Scripture we have, therefore, to admit the existence of God as the inner controller of all sentient and insentient beings. Thus, from the opening hymn of Poygai Ālvār we get the idea that the supreme Brahman is the cause and controller of the entire universe. It may be stated here that while Bhūtattālvār in the first verse of the *Second Tīruvandādi* identifies the supreme Brahman as Nārāyaṇa, Peyālvār brings out the association of Śrī with Nārāyaṇa in the first verse of the *Third Tīruvandādi*.

The physical universe consisting of earth and other things which we cognize is real.<sup>1</sup> A pot which comes into existence requires a cause. Likewise the physical universe which comes into existence requires a cause, which cannot be anything else but the supreme God. This is one of the arguments by which the existence of God is sought to be proved. However, it is wrong to conclude from this that the Ālvār argues for the existence of God by means of inference (*anumāna*). It is from Scripture alone that we come to know of God as the cause of the universe, as one endowed with infinite wisdom and infinite power, and so on. Though by means of inference we may establish that the world requires a cause, we can never conclude that the cause of the world is no other being than God. Considering the vastness and the wonder of the world, one may be justified in drawing the conclusion that its creator is one of great wisdom and power; but one cannot draw the conclusion that its creator is God who is real (*satyam*), knowledge (*jñānam*), and infinite (*anantam*), who is pure and blissful and so on. However, what is known through Scripture must be reflected upon through reasoning. And reasoning is a valuable supplement to Scripture. Through the practice of devotion and other

1. Even for the Advaitin, the external world exists as different from cognition, and endures as something real till Brahman-realization takes place.



means one must try to realize the truth taught in Scripture. The authentic experience of the Āḷvārs and other mystics testifies to the truth taught by Scripture.

## II

### *Deeds of Redemption*

“When the ocean was churned, I know not. Nor do I know the world which became yours by accepting the offering of water (from Mahābali). That ocean on which you constructed the embankment once upon a time and removed it (later) is the abode for you. This world is the one created by you, rescued by you (incarnating as Varāha from Hiraṇyākṣa), swallowed by you (for protecting it at the time of dissolution), and brought out later on.” [2]

To a mystic there is no need to prove the existence of God by means of rational arguments. None of the arguments such as the ontological, causal, and so on, are conclusive. Even if they are conclusive, we cannot know the nature of God through them. A mystic like Poygai Āḷvār realizes at the very sight of the ocean and the earth the presence of God everywhere. The visible things such as the earth and the ocean put the Āḷvār in a meditative mood. In the state of infused contemplation, the Āḷvār is raised from the level of the visible to that which is normally invisible to others. To his enraptured vision God is visible in everything and everywhere. He sees heaven in earth. The entire universe is charged with the grandeur of God. The visible things put him in a reminiscent mood making him recall the great deeds performed by the Lord for protecting those in distress. There is the assurance of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VI, 30): “He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, of him will I never lose hold and he shall never lose hold of Me.”

One will notice the meditative mood of the Āḷvār in the first two lines, and the reminiscent mood in the last two lines of the hymn stated above.

The Lord got the ocean churned and protected the gods (*devas*) by offering them the nectar obtained from the ocean. The entire universe is His. “In his hand *are* the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills *is* his also. The sea *is* his, and he made it; and his hands



formed the dry land." (*Psalm*, 95) He is the support (*ādhāra*) as well as the controller (*niyantā*) of the universe. But yet with a view to help Indra, He assumed the form of a dwarf, *Vāmana*, and asked of *Mahābali* just three feet of ground as gift. Then assuming the cosmic form, He measured the entire universe in two steps. As there was no more ground for the third measure, *Mahābali* offered his own head to be measured. By placing his foot on the head of *Mahābali*, the Lord sent him down to the nether world. These two deeds exemplify the redemptive will of the Lord.

Though these events took place once upon a time, it appears to the *Ālvār* whose mind is filled with the thought of the Lord as though the ocean full of waves and foam has been churned only a little while ago. It looks as though he sees the imprint of the Lord's feet left on the world when He measured it. It is not out of inquisitiveness that *Poygai Ālvār* wants to know *when* the ocean was churned, or *when* He accepted the gift of three feet of land from *Mahābali*. When the *Ālvār* says, "I know not any of them," it is only to express his profound regret that he did not have the good fortune of witnessing them when the Lord performed those acts of redemption.

Meditation is followed by reminiscence. Meditation on the visible things reminds the *Ālvār* of some other deeds performed by the Lord. In a reminiscent mood, he first refers to the construction once upon a time of an embankment on the ocean by the Lord incarnating as *Rāma* for reaching *Laṅkā* and the removal of it later on. Then he remembers the intimate relation between the world and God. The Lord, says the *Ālvār*, not only created the world, but also wrested it from *Hiraṇyākṣa*, swallowed it with a view to protect it at the time of deluge, and again brought it out.

The philosophical idea that is sought to be conveyed here is that the physical universe is completely dependent on God, for, as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (III i, 3) says, the universe comes out of Him, is supported by Him, and is finally resolved in Him. God is both the efficient and the material cause (*abhinna-nimittopādānakāraṇa*) rolled into one. Creation and dissolution alternate like day and night. Creation is followed by dissolution, and dissolution by creation. Creation, maintenance, and dissolution of the world are for the purpose of helping the *jīvas* attain liberation.

### III

#### *One Reality in Many Forms*

"Hara is the name of the one, and *Nārāyaṇa* that of the other. Bull is the vehicle for the one, and the



white-headed kite for the other. (Śaiva) *Āgama* is the source of our knowledge of the one, and the *Veda* that of the other. The mountain (Kailāsa) is the abode of the one, and the milky ocean that of the other. While one performs the function of destruction, the other that of protection. The one is armed with the trident, and the other with the discus. The form of the one is like the glowing fire, while that of the other is like the dark cloud. For both the body is one." [5]

A mystic, whether he is of the extrovert or of the introvert type, whether he is from the East or the West, speaks of the oneness of all things. The experience of unity—the experience that all is one—is considered to be one of the important characteristics of mysticism. Meister Eckhart says: "All that a man has here externally in multiplicity is intrinsically one. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are one. This is the deepest depth." Normally in our everyday experience, grass is understood as different from wood, and wood as different from stone. Nevertheless, a mystic like Eckhart intuits them as one. Eckhart makes a distinction between the level of understanding and the level above understanding. When a person sees one thing as different from another, he is at the level of understanding; but when he sees all in all, *i.e.* when he intuits the oneness of all things, he is above the level of understanding. What Eckhart calls the stage of pure understanding is the standpoint of reason, and what he calls the stage above understanding is the standpoint of intuition. That there is a stage which transcends understanding or reason wherein one realizes the oneness of all things is frequently referred to in the *Upaniṣad*. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* (6), for example, says, "He who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, feels no hatred by reason of such a view."

Mystics all over the world have affirmed that all is one, and that the one reality is seen in different forms as different objects. It is the One that appears as the many—as stocks and stones, as a plurality of individuals, and as gods and goddesses of the pantheon. There is a text of the *Yajur-veda* (XXXI, 19) which says: "Though unborn, It appears to be born in diverse ways." The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II, V, 19) declares: "Indra (*i.e.* the Supreme Being), on account of *māyā*, is perceived as manifold." Though the ultimate reality is beyond form, name, and characterization, we view it, limited as we are, in a particular form, as male or female, give it names such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti, and so on, and endow it with various attributes



and functions. A well-known passage in the *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (IV, ii, 3) is relevant in this context. It says, speaking of the ultimate reality, "That, indeed, is fire, that is the sun, that is the wind, and that is the moon. That, indeed, is the pure. That is *Brahmā*. That is the waters. That is the creator of all." It adds: "Thou art woman, thou art man. Thou art the youth, thou art the maiden. Thou art the old man tottering with his staff. Thou facest everywhere." One may choose any particular God according to one's inclination and training for the purpose of worship, prayer, and meditation. The conception of personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*) finds an important place in Hinduism.

Since every form of God is a manifestation of the One, it is meaningless to think of one form of God as superior, and another as inferior. It follows, therefore, that Śiva and Viṣṇu, which are manifestations of the supreme reality, are one, though it is open to a devotee to worship any one of these two forms, or both, or any other form according to his inclination and training.

Poygai Āḷvār testifies to the oneness of the Supreme Being manifested as Śiva and Viṣṇu in the hymn stated above. He gives a beautiful description of Śiva and Viṣṇu, which is not wanting in essential details, as understood by the devotees. Gifted as he is with mystical intuition, he is able to realize their oneness. The two, Śiva and Viṣṇu, are distinct at the level of understanding; but they become one at the level above understanding, *i.e.* at the intuitive level of mysticism. Blades of grass, wood, and stone are no doubt different when we view them through reason. But they become one to a mystic like Eckhart at the level of intuition. Distinctions cease to exist and opposites coincide in mystical intuition. To a mystic, grass is wood, and wood is grass, and all are one. This looks absurd and untenable to us, and we fail to see the point of the mystic. To a mystic like Poygai Āḷvar, both Hara and Nārāyaṇa are one. To him at the mystical level distinctions fade out, opposites coincide, and the basic unity in all its vividness emerges. This may appear to be absurd and untenable to us at the level of understanding or reason, and consequently we fail to see the truth realized by Poigai Āḷvār and other mystics.

The gulf between the two levels of reason and intuition is the handiwork of ignorance (*avidyā*). Reason or understanding which is conditioned by *avidyā* divides, as it were, the one reality and introduces therein all sorts of distinctions. And so the probing eye of reason does not see the oneness of reality, but sees only diversity of forms. We catch hold of the multiple forms and lose sight of the One, what



the *Upaniṣad* calls "the effulgent eternal principle" and what Shelley calls "the white radiance of eternity". Shelley says:

"The One remains, the many change and pass ;  
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly.  
Life like a dome of many-coloured glass  
Stains the white radiance of eternity."

We will see only plurality when we look through the many-coloured glass of reason which is stained by *avidyā*. To intuit oneness, as the *Ālvār* does, one must rise to the level of mystical intuition which is a medium altogether different from reason.

#### IV

##### *Certainty of God-realization*

"Even then (before birth) when I was lying in the womb, did I worship with the hand united in the direction of the Lord who resides in Śrīraṅgam, and saw Him. Even for a moment I have not forgotten the Lord who is of the colour of the ocean full of waves. O ye poor! How can I forget Him now?" [6]

Normally it is not possible for a person to recollect the experience he had in the first few years of his infancy, or when he was lying in the womb unless he is specially gifted with supernatural powers. That mystics speak of the God-experience attained by them in the post-natal state either all on a sudden or as a result of the pursuit of a rigorous discipline, is well-known. There are also cases of mystics who speak of their God-experience in the pre-natal condition when they were lying in the womb. That Poygai *Ālvār* is one such gifted soul to have not only the experience of God while lying in the womb, but also the extraordinary power to recollect that experience, is obvious from the hymn under consideration.

William Wordsworth speaks of "a presence" which gave him the joy of elevated thoughts. Being more certain about that "presence" than we are of the things we see in our normal waking consciousness, he declares very emphatically, "I have felt a presence ...." "a spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things." Poygai *Ālvār* is equally certain about the God-experience he had even as he was lying in the womb. The case of Poygai

Ālvār is not a solitary one in this regard. There were also other mystics who claimed such an experience.

Addressing the Lord of Tiruppādirippuliyūr, Tirunāvukkarasar says that when he was lying in the womb he was thinking only about the feet of the Lord, and that after his birth he learnt His name through His grace and applied the sacred ash offering obeisance to Him. He implores the Lord to provide him the way to the goal which is none other than His own being. We have a reference in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* (II, i, 5) to the experience which the sage Vāmadeva had while lying in the womb and the saving knowledge he attained even then which enabled him to come out of the meshes of bondage. Vāmadeva says: "Even while lying in the womb, I came to know of the birth of all the gods. A hundred iron citadels held me down. Then, like a hawk, I forced my way through by dint of the knowledge of the Self."

It is necessary to note the tone of certainty with which Poygai Ālvār speaks of his experience of God. He says that while lying in the womb he worshipped the Lord who has taken His abode at Śrīraṅgam, and as a result of worship *saw* Him. There is no reason to think that the Ālvār misreports his experience. Further, the Ālvār did not attain the knowledge of God through any process of reasoning. His condition when he was in the womb was such that he had neither a developed mind nor the instruments of knowledge fit enough for action at that time. Nevertheless, he recollects the God-experience he had at that time, and claims that he was in touch with a reality which is outside and beyond himself. Though his experience is subjective, the object of his experience is trans-subjective. It is, therefore, wrong to treat the mystical experience of God, which Poygai Ālvār and other mystics had, as an emotional state, and nothing else than that. The experience which Poygai Ālvār speaks of is the perceptual experience of God, involving Self-transcendence.

God alone is the invaluable treasure which neither perishes through time or any other agency nor becomes scarce through sharing by His devotees. Those who do not possess this treasure of God through intuitive realization, is, indeed, poor, according to Poygai Ālvār. Inasmuch as he had already worshipped and realized the Lord even in the pre-natal stage, it is impossible, the Ālvār declares, to forget the Lord in the post-natal state when he is in possession of the fully developed mind and the organs of knowledge. Recollecting his experience, he further claims that he never forgot the Lord even for a while.



## V

*Modes of Bhakti*

“My mouth will not praise anyone but the Lord. My hands will not worship anyone but Viṣṇu who (as Trivikrama) measured the world in three strides. My eyes will not see anything except the form of the Lord, and my ears will not hear anything except the name of the Lord, who consumed the poison smeared on the breast of the demoness, Pūtanai.” [11]

In this hymn, Poygai Āḷvār refers to some of the modes of *bhakti*. For the practice of *bhakti* control of the mind is necessary. If so, how is the mind to be controlled?

One must make proper use of one's body, senses, and mind. The different organs of knowledge and action are given to us only for the purpose of knowing and adoring God, and for serving others. They should not be allowed to go outward in search of objects of pleasure. If they go outward, they will be entangled in the external objects of desire which are impermanent. One does not have peace of mind so long as one's mind is trammelled and agitated by desires which crop up one after another. Desires cannot be extinguished by their fulfilment. On the contrary, they grow by what they feed on. The mind cannot remain quiet when it is drawn outward by the senses. Only when it is quiescent, concentration will be possible. For attaining concentration or one-pointedness of the mind, which presupposes control of the mind and the organs, it is necessary to turn the mind and the organs inward and make them dwell constantly on God, the indwelling Self in all beings. If the mind and the senses are allowed to go astray from the thought of God, and if the body is allowed to indulge in bad conduct, the attainment of the goal which is God-realization through concentration of the mind is not possible. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 24) says: “One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Self through knowledge.”

In the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, purification of the body (*kāya-śuddhi*) is called *viveka*, and purification of the mind (*sattva-śuddhi*) is known as *vimoka*. These are the first two steps in the sevenfold discipline (*sādhana-saptaka*) for the practice of *bhakti*. It means that the body should be disciplined through food and exercise, and that the mind controlled by freeing it from desire and aversion.

As a result of the purification of the body and the mind, *abhyāsa* or continuous contemplation on the Lord, which is the third step in the ladder of *bhakti*, is made possible.

It is necessary here to explain the connotation of the term *bhakti*. In the course of his commentary on the *Gītā* text, XIV, 26, Śaṅkara observes that *bhakti* is service and that it is itself *yoga*, as it leads to the union with God (*bhajanam bhaktiḥ, saiva yogaḥ*). It means that to practise *bhakti* one must resort to service. *Bhakti* consists in rendering service wholeheartedly, unselfishly, and with the belief that the person to whom service is rendered is worthy of it. A life of genuine service to God and His devotees is a life of *bhakti* or love.

If *bhakti* or love consists in service, could we think of any model here? According to Evelyn Underhill, the service of a sheep-dog should be our model of love. A good sheep-dog at work, Underhill says, "is not an emotional animal. He goes on with his job quite steadily; takes no notice of bad weather, rough ground, or of his own comfort. He seldom or never stops to be stroked..." So to practise *bhakti* one must do service to God and others; and one must render service like a good sheep-dog.

*Bhakti* as service to God is of nine kinds. There is first *śravaṇam* which is listening to the auspicious qualities of the Lord. Uttering the sacred qualities of God is *kīrtanam*, which is the second variety of *bhakti*. *Smarāṇam* which is recollection of the auspicious qualities of the Lord is the third kind of *bhakti*. The next one is *pādasevanam* which is service to the feet of the Lord. The fifth one is called *arcanam* which consists in worshipping the consecrated images of God in the sacred temples. Obeisance to the images installed in the sacred temples is called *vandanam*, which is the sixth kind of *bhakti*. The seventh one, called *dāsyam*, consists in playing the role of a faithful servant to the Lord. Friendship with the Lord known as *sakhyam* is the next variety. And the last one is called *ātmanivedanam* which means self-oblation to God. One can practise *bhakti* in any of these forms for the purpose of attaining union with God. Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* (XIV, 26): "He who serves me with unfailing devotion of love, he, crossing beyond those three guṇas, is fit for becoming Brahman."

*Kīrtanam*, *vandanam*, and *śravaṇam* are the forms of *bhakti* emphasized by Poygai Ālvār in this hymn. There is bound to be difference among the devotees in their practice of *bhakti*. Modes of *bhakti* differ as minds of men differ. A particular form of *bhakti* which is appealing to one may not be appealing to another; and so there is difference in the modes of *bhakti*. Nevertheless, all forms of *bhakti* are



equally valuable. They are complementary in their character. They contribute to only one music—the music of spiritual life. The differences among them which we notice are but variations in spiritual symphony.

## VI

### *Means to God-realization*

“The five senses, *viz* the ear, the mouth (*i.e.* the tongue), the eye, the nose, and the skin; the body composed of the five elements, *viz* the red fire, earth, air, water, and ether; the ceaseless knowledge (or knowledge which turns into *bhakti*), sacrifice, and virtues—these are the means to attain Viṣṇu, who incarnated in the form of a boar.” [12]

Practice of scripture-ordained karmas, possession of virtues, knowledge, and *bhakti* are necessary for God-realization. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV, iv, 22) says: “The Brāhmaṇas seek to know it through the study of the Vedas, sacrifice, charity, austerity...” Poygai Ālvār speaks of all of these as means to God-realization in the hymn given above.

In this hymn, reference is first of all made to the five organs of knowledge (*jñānendriya*), *viz* the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile senses. These are the external senses through which knowledge of things outside is obtained. Mind must also function along with the senses for obtaining the knowledge of external things. It is through the mind which is the internal sense that we get the knowledge of subjective states such as pleasure and pain.

Reference is then made in the hymn to the five elements, *viz* earth, water, fire, air, and ether, out of which the human body is composed. The body, the mind, and the senses are necessary for the practice of *bhakti* and the pursuit of knowledge. They must be controlled and disciplined; only then are they indirect aids to God-realization.

Poygai Ālvār then speaks of scripture-ordained karmas, virtues, and knowledge as means to God-realization. Three expressions used by him in this connection are *jñānam*, *veḷvi*, and *nallaram*. *Jñānam* means knowledge. Following the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, it may be explained as *bhakti*. *Veḷvi* is sacrifice. *Nallaram* is virtue.



According to Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the sequence of discipline for attaining release is *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*.

Like Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita maintains that the body and the senses, the practice of *karma* without attachment to the fruit thereof and the cultivation of virtues, are but remote aids to God-realization. It says that all these are conducive to *bhakti*, which is the direct means to God-realization. The practice of *niṣkāma-karma* brings about the purification of the mind. The spiritual aspirant at this stage does not view *karma* in terms of utility, and is free from the egoistic feeling of "I" and "mine". Through *jñāna-yoga*, which follows *karma-yoga*, the spiritual aspirant attains self-knowledge. He realizes that the self is different from *prakṛti*, and enjoys, by withdrawing his mind and the senses from external things, spiritual solitude and freedom called *kaivalya*. The stage of self-knowledge achieved through *jñāna-yoga* must lead to *bhakti*. It means that the *jñāni* himself must become a *bhakta*. It may be noted here that, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, there is no gulf separating *jñāna* and *bhakti*, and that knowledge itself, as a result of repeated contemplation, turns into *bhakti*. Hence the oft-quoted expression "*bhaktirūpāpannajñāna*." Accordingly, the word *jñāna* occurring in the third line of the hymn is explained as *bhakti*.

It is necessary in this connection to draw attention to the significance of the two terms, *para-bhakti* and *parama-bhakti*, employed in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. *Bhakti* as the means to the realization of the supreme God is called *para-bhakti*; and it can arise only as a result of the practice of the ethics of *niṣkāma-karma* and the possession of the knowledge of the supreme God as the support, controller and indwelling self of the sentient *jīva* and the insentient *prakṛti*. When this knowledge of the supreme God, called *para-jñāna*, as a result of the continuous, uninterrupted meditation, deepens into the supreme love of God, it is termed *parama-bhakti*.

Viśiṣṭādvaita formulates the sevenfold discipline called *sādhana-saptaka* for the practice of *bhakti*. This discipline comprises the cultivation of the following virtues: (1) *viveka*, (2) *vimoka*, (3) *abhyāsa* (4) *kriyā*, (5) *kalyāṇa*, (6) *anavasādhā*, and (7) *anuddharṣa*. *Viveka* is purification of the body through food and exercise. *Vimoka* is purification of the mind by overcoming desire and aversion. *Abhyāsa* is repeated contemplation on God, the indwelling Self. *Kriyā* is the performance of the fivefold duties to subhuman species,\* fellow beings, teachers, forefathers, and gods. The practice of truthfulness, non-violence, and so on, is called *kalyāṇa*. *Anavasādhā* is freedom from despair, and *anuddharṣa* is absence of exaltation. A devotee must be in possession of these virtues in order to practise *bhakti*.



Is *bhakti* a discipline or *yoga* which can be practised by an aspirant through endeavour? The two schools of Śrīvaiṣṇavism differ in their answer to this question. While the Northern school (*Vaṇkalai*) holds the view that *bhakti* is the means which can be accomplished by a devotee and therefore thinks of it as *sādhya-upāya*, the Southern school (*Tenkalai*) maintains that God is both the means (*upāya*) and the end (*upeya*), and that unless He shows the way and provides the means, there is nothing which an individual can accomplish by his endeavour. It means that God is both the impelling force (*prāpaka*) and the end (*prāpya*). Man being what he is under the control of *avidyā* and *karma* which are dead weights on him and "with the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to", he cannot do anything on his own unless he is helped by God. To be in possession of virtues and other qualifications for the practice of *bhakti*, God's grace is necessary. It is not virtue that calls out the act of God, but it is the act of God that makes one virtuous. One does not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but one does righteous deeds only in so far as one is made righteous through the grace of God. In short, God must take hold of man and choose him to be the beneficiary of His grace. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 23) says: "Whom He chooses, unto him he reveals." There is a similar view in the Christian tradition also. There is, for instance, a text from the *Romans* (IX, 16): "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." It means, as Augustine put it, "We could neither will nor run unless He stirred us and put the motive force in us." Further, the redemptive act of God is not causally determined. It cannot be explained in terms of the merit of the individual. Since God Himself is the means whose operation is not dependent on any merit in man, the *Tenkalai* school thinks of God as *nirapekṣa-upāya*. It also looks upon divine grace as *nirhetuka-kaṣākṣa* as it operates without any reference to the merit of the individual. So according to the *Tenkalai* school, Poygai Ālvār in the hymn quoted above pities those who think of *bhakti* as well as the preliminary discipline it presupposes as the means to be accomplished by the will of man for attaining God-realization. The word "*enbare*" which occurs in the third line of the hymn is interpreted as "*enbaro*" expressing astonishment at those who think of *bhakti* as well as its accessories as the means under the control of man. The truth is that *bhakti*, according to the *Tenkalai* school, is not *sādhya-upāya*, the means amenable to human endeavour.

Reference must be made to another point stressed by the *Tenkalai* school. A devotee of the superior type will consider *bhakti* as an end in itself and not as a means to something else. *Bhakti* may be evaluated from three points of view—*first*, as a means to such ends as prosperity, spiritual solitude and freedom called *kaivalya*, which are

inferior to God-realization; second as a means to God-realization which is the highest end; and third, as an end in itself and not as a means to anything whatsoever. A devotee of the superior type will not care for anything except *bhakti*. He will not be attracted even by *mukti*, if it were a state of without any scope for the practice of *bhakti*. Such a devotee who lives, moves, and has his being in *bhakti* is termed a *paramaikāntin*, one who is exclusively devoted to *bhakti* as an end in itself.

There are mystics who speak not only about their God-experience, but also about the way to that experience. Plotinus, Eckhart, and Al-Ghazzali—to mention only a few—are some of the outstanding mystics of this type. They are those who are capable of philosophical analysis and psychological description of the path and the destination. Sometimes they speak in symbolical and paradoxical language. But they also convey their ideas in a language which is simple and direct giving a wealth of details. They do this for the benefit of others. Poigai Ālvār also belongs to this category of mystics. He is a mystic and a philosopher as well.

## VII

### *Different Ways of Worship*

“Every one, according to one’s understanding, considering this God or that as the supreme being, praises and worships Him by drawing a picture of him on the wall or by installing an image of him. The divine form of *Trivikrama* who measured the world is supreme.” [20]

In this hymn Poygai Ālvār speaks of the different forms of worship of the supreme Being by devotees who are mentally of different nature.

The supreme Being, which is one and which is free from forms and attributes, is worshipped in different forms and with different attributes by devotees, each according to his faith (*śraddhā*). A person is what he is because of his faith; and the faith of each one is dependent upon the nature (*svabhāva*) of his mind, which may be *sāttvic*, or *rājasic*, or *tāmasic*. On the basis of the nature of the mind, the spiritual aspirants may be classified into three groups—those who are *sāttvic*, those who are *rājasic*, and those who are *tāmasic*. Speaking about the faith of a devotee whose mind is conditioned by a particular *guṇa* which predominates—*sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* as the case may be—Lord



Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VII, 3): "The faith of each one is in accordance with his nature, O Bhārata. The man is made up of his faith; as a man's faith is, so is he." So according to his own faith as determined by a *guṇa*, a person worships a particular God or other divinities or beings such as Vasus, Kubera, and so on. All these beings, when worshipped, answer the prayers of the devotees by granting their respective desires. The following two verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā* (VII, 21-22) are relevant in this context: "Whatever devotee seeks to worship with faith, what form so ever, that same faith of his I make unflinching;" "Possessed of that faith he engages in the worship of that (form); thence he obtains his desires, these being indeed ordained by me." In the first verse the Lord assures the devotee of His help to keep him steadfast in his faith whatever it may be; and in the second, there is the assurance of the fulfilment of his desires as a reward of the practice of worship.

The one supreme Being is manifested in the numerous gods and goddesses of the pantheon. It is difficult for an ordinary devotee to meditate on Brahman, the supreme Being, which is *nirguṇa*. Worship of God as endowed with attributes is, therefore, of great help to him. According to his own understanding and qualification, a devotee is drawn to the worship of a particular God. And he may worship the God of his choice in his own way. He may worship his personal God (*iṣṭa-devatā*) by uttering His name and praising His greatness. Or, he may worship a picture or image of Him by invoking His presence therein. Or, he may meditate on some symbol like *aum* (*praṇava*) signifying God. His worship of god may also take other forms such as prayer, repeating *mantras*, listening to chanted liturgies, and visiting temples and holy places.

As a devotee of Viṣṇu, Poygai Ālvār says that *Trivikrama*, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, is supreme; and he offers his obeisance to him.

## VIII

### *The Redemptive Grace of God*

"The trinity alone is the principal cause (of the world). Of this trinity, Viṣṇu who has the colour of the great sea, is foremost. Without the grace of God who is supreme and good, the grace of others in this world, which is surrounded by the sea, is useless." [21]

Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra who constitute the trinity (*trimūrti*) in Hinduism are the manifestations of the supreme Being. Each one of

them is assigned a particular cosmic function—Brahmā, that of creating the world, Viṣṇu, that of maintaining it, and Rudra, that of destroying it. A devotee who worships any of these Gods considers the God of his choice (*iṣṭa-devatā*) as supreme. As a devotee of Viṣṇu, Poygai Ālvār looks upon Viṣṇu, whose colour is described as that of the great sea, as supreme and emphasizes His saving grace in this hymn.

In the first two lines of the hymn reference is made to the trinity and the supremacy of Viṣṇu who is the personal God of the Ālvār. The last two lines of the hymn stress the greatness and excellence of the divine grace.

God is perfect, for He is endowed with all sacred qualities, and there is no place for profane qualities in him. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VIII, 1, 5) speaks of God “as free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow... whose desire is the real, whose thought is the real.” The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, (VI, 582-583) declares: “He transcends the matter of all beings, its modifications, properties, and imperfections. He transcends all obscuring influences, He who is the self of all. All auspicious qualities constitute His nature.” A being who is perfect must necessarily be good; and so God who has all auspicious qualities without any trace of imperfection is good. He is *amala*. It may be stated here that *amalatva*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, is one of the determining qualities (*svarūpa-nirūpaka-dharma*) of God. Poygai Ālvār speaks of God as “*nallān*”, one who is good, in the third line of the hymn. He is “*nallān*” because He does good to His devotees.

God is not only perfect and good, but great as well. There is nothing comparable in the world to the greatness of the divine grace. There is nothing in this life nor in the next which can redeem one excepting the divine grace. Man needs God alone by cleaving to whom he is virtuous as well as happy. The divine grace is unique. There is no substitute to it. The help from others, individually or collectively, is of no avail for achieving the highest end, for it is neither unlimited nor spiritually uplifting. The grace of God alone can save one and not the succour of even the supreme sovereign, who indeed suffers more of mortal gifts than his worshippers. It is, therefore, futile, declares the Ālvār, to worship anyone but God.

## IX

### *Regret for Godless Life*

“I saw and worshipped the feet of the Lord who, being touched by the waves of the ocean, is in *yoga-nidrā*



on the bed of Ādiśeṣa, whose eyes are red, and who has the colour of the mighty ocean. I wept in anguish that many days were spent uselessly (before I saw him).” [22]

Normally a person is awake during the day time and sleeps in the night. A good part of our precious life is wasted in sleep. The life that one leads yielding to the temptations of the senses while being awake is utterly useless, for it is a godless life. A person who leads such a life, though wide awake, is really in sleep. He is in the night of ignorance. Day is also night to him. Real awakening is God-realization. So long as a person does not realize God, he is in the night under the sway of sleep. But a mystic who has subdued the senses and who has shaken off the sleep of ignorance (*avidyā*) is fully awake to the supreme reality. He is, indeed, in the waking state; he will no more be in the state of sleep. What is night to an ignorant man, is day to a God-realized soul. What is day to a man of God-realization is night to an ignorant one.

In the sixth hymn there is reference to God-realization which Poygai Ālvār attained even as he was lying in the womb. From “sleep” he has woken up. The time that he spent prior to God-realization, the Ālvār now says, is a total waste. Many lives he must have gone through before he was blessed with God-realization through the divine grace. The Ālvār feels sorry that he wasted time for which he could not but weep. The regret expressed by him reminds us of Saint Tirunāvukkarasar’s lamentation that he spent many days without seeking God, who is the sacred way to the devotees, who protects them without falling into the encircling hell, who is beyond, who has made the *Ārdra* (*Tiruvādirai*) day sacred, who has the third eye in the forehead, who is the first in the trinity.

Like Tirunāvukkarasar, Poygai Ālvār has been redeemed by God who by choosing him has revealed to him. From the time of God-realization he is in the “waking state”. Inasmuch as he has realized God, time cannot now waste him by taking revenge on him for what he did earlier. Contrast this with what King Richard II says, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.” Poygai Ālvār has no regret, lucky as he was to be the beneficiary of the divine grace.

## X

### *The Good Luck of the Milky Ocean*

“O, black Ocean! You are in stupor due to your physical contact all the time with the Lord when He is in

*yoga-nidrā* — the Lord with red eyes, dark in colour, and armed with the discus, who slept on the banyan leaf after having kept the world inside Him (at the time of dissolution). What penance did you perform (for this good luck)?” [23]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār compares his lot with that of the milky ocean.

Time was when the Ālvār being engrossed in things sensuous was indifferent to the Lord, although he did not think of anything excepting the Lord from the time he worshipped and saw Him. The Ālvār seems to think that the milky ocean is more fortunate than himself, for, unlike the Ālvār, it has been in union with the Lord all the time. Being overwhelmed by the joy of union with the Lord, it is in a state of utter amazement. Poygai Ālvār wants to know the penance that the ocean did for attaining the blessed state in which it finds itself.

Though the milky ocean is white in colour, it has become dark, because of the reflection of the Lord who is dark in colour. Hence the expression *karuṅgaḍal* (black ocean) used by the Ālvār.

## XI

### *Supremacy and Easy Accessibility of God*

“O Lord ! you ride on Garuḍa who has shining wings. I am not the only person who knows the scar in you caused by the cord with which you were tied down by Yaśodā, whose soft shoulders are like the bamboo, for having eaten stealthily the fragrant butter churned by her. The entire world knows it.” [24]

Supremacy (*paratva*) and easy accessibility (*saulabhya*) are two of the important characteristics of God. God is the supreme ruler of the entire universe. However, He is easily accessible to the devotees who pine for union with Him through service and prayer. The very fact that Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who is supreme and boundless, allowed himself to be tied down by Yaśodā, his foster-mother, for the mischievous act of stealing the butter brings out the easy accessibility of the Lord. The *Iśa Upaniṣad* (5) says, “That (Brahman) is far off ; That is very near.” It is, indeed, a paradox beyond human comprehension that God who is supreme and remote should play the role of a



child, and be so near as to be easily accessible for no other purpose than to make the devotee the beneficiary of His grace.

Many things which are great in the world are not easy of attainment. Things which can be easily attained are not usually great. The divine supremacy is such that it is easily accessible. Though it is within our reach, it does not on that account lose its greatness and supremacy. What is unique in the case of God is the happy combination of supremacy and easy accessibility. Poygai Ālvār lays emphasis on both these aspects in this hymn. While he refers to the supremacy of God speaking of Him as riding on the mighty Garuḍa, he brings out God's easy accessibility by mentioning the episode of Yaśodā fastening the divine play-boy, Kṛṣṇa, with a cord. The scar in his body is a good livery of his redemptive act. The whole world, declares Poygai Ālvār, knows it.

## XII

### *Knowing Scripture Alone Will Not Do*

"My mind, without stopping with scriptural knowledge, will come up by praising always the Lord, who lies down on the milky ocean like the green emerald set on a mountain, who tore the body of Hiranya, and who, incarnating as *Varāha*, recovered the world." [25]

Mere scriptural knowledge will not do for attaining God-realization. It must be supplemented, according to Poygai Ālvār, by constant meditation on God. This is the central idea conveyed by this hymn.

Scripture is the means (*pramāṇa*) for getting the knowledge of God. Since the knowledge obtained therefrom is mediate (*parokṣa*), it has to be made immediate (*aparokṣa*) by constant meditation on God. In order to practise meditation, the mind must be made to dwell constantly on God, by chanting His names, by praising His greatness, and so on.

In the first line of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār lays stress on the fact that scriptural knowledge alone, though necessary, is not adequate for attaining God-realization. He refers to the importance of praising the greatness of God, which is a spiritual practice, for God-realization in the last line of the hymn.

The expression *urai-meṇkoṇḍu* may be construed as *mel urai koṇḍu*, *melāna urai koṇḍu*, conveying the meaning "with good or sacred

words". In that case, the meaning of the hymn is this: "My mind will come up by praising always the Lord through good or sacred words—the Lord who lies down on the milky ocean..."

## XIII

*Greatness of the Venkata Hill*

"The hill of *Tiruvenkaṭa* which puts out the fire of evil deeds (which obstruct the attainment of the goal) of those who bid good bye to the Lord after having attained *kaivalya*, and of those who dwell worshipping always the Lord, who wears the fresh basil, is the one which kindles the flame of the mind (*i.e.* knowledge) of the eternalists (*nityasūris*).'" [26]

*Para*, *vyūha*, *vibhava*, *antaryāmin*, and *arcā* are the five forms of Brahman. Brahman as *para* is the transcendental Absolute. The *vyūha* aspect of Brahman is the power which creates, sustains, and destroys the universe. Brahman who is the indwelling self in all beings is the *antaryāmin*. *Vibhava* is the incarnation of Brahman in a particular form playing the role of a saviour. *Arcā* is the permanent incarnation of Brahman worshipped in a temple by the devotees. In view of the fact that *para*, *vyūha*, and *vibhava* cannot be directly experienced by us now, special importance is attached to *arcāvatāra* by the Āḷvārs. Though all the five forms of Brahman are from the philosophical point of view of equal value, from the point of view of the spiritual aspirant *arcāvatāra* is more valuable than others, since the permanent divine form in which God's grace (*kṛpā*) is concretely manifested is easily accessible at any time to the earnest devotees.

One such permanent incarnation (*arcā*) greatly praised and adored by the Āḷvārs is on the hill called *Veṅkaṭa* (*Tirumalai*). The hill itself, according to Poygai Āḷvār, is as much great and powerful as God Himself in the *arcā* form manifesting supreme power and redemptive mercy. Poygai Āḷvār praises the greatness of the *Veṅkaṭa* hill in the hymn given above.

There are some who look upon *aiśvarya* as the highest end to be attained. Some others consider *kaivalya*, which is self-realization,—spiritual solitude, different from *mokṣa*—as the supreme goal. *Mokṣa* which is God-realization is the highest goal to some others. It may be noted here that *kaivalya* which is spiritual solitude attained through self-realization is inferior to *mokṣa*, and *aiśvarya* is very much inferior



to *kaivalya*. Obstacles that stand in the way must be removed for attaining any of these goals. Poygai Ālvār says that the well-known hill, *Veṅkaṭa* (*Tirumalai*), the abode of Lord, will put out the fire of evil deeds which give rise to obstacles that prevent the attainment of the goal, whatever it may be—*aiśvarya*, *kaivalya*, or *mokṣa*—desired by those who are in bondage. In the case of a *nityasūris*, who are eternally free, the same hill, the Ālvār says, functions in a different way. It rouses and enlivens their fire (light) of knowledge (*dharma-bhūta-jñāna*). The *Veṅkaṭa* hill is the object of adoration by gods as well as by those who are in bondage. Hence Poygai Ālvār praises the greatness of *Tiruveṅkaṭa*, the divine abode.

#### XIV

##### *Accessibility of God to a Serene Mind*

“The mind of those who keep it steady by making it serene and who fully realize through knowledge (their dependence on God) in the right way will, without any effort, find its way to the feet of the Lord, who wears the garland of the cool basil, in the same way as a calf will find its way to its mother.” [30]

The mind of a person will be tranquil only when he is free from desire, aversion, and bad conduct, and keeps the senses under control. The tranquillity of the mind is an indication of the preponderance of of the *sattva-guṇa* therein. From the mind which remains steady because of its serenity, knowledge arises. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, 11, 24) stresses the importance of the tranquillity of the mind for the purpose of attaining the knowledge of Brahman as follows: “One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Brahman through knowledge.” That knowledge arises from the mind predominated by *sattva-guṇa* is stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (XIV, 17): “From *sattva* arises knowledge.” It is this idea that Poygai Ālvār brings out in the first two lines of this hymn.

Poygai Ālvār explains how God is easily accessible to one whose mind is clear, calm, and steady and who knows his relation to God, by giving an example in the last two lines of the hymn. Just as a calf that remains isolated will make its way to its mother in the herd of its own accord without any difficulty, even so the mind will be able to comprehend God without any difficulty, once the disturbing influences

of the mind, viz oblivion (*laya*), distraction (*vikṣēpa*), passion (*kaṣāya*), and satisfaction (*rasāsvāda*) are removed.

## XV

*God's Concern for the Devotee*

“Is it possible to think, even for a moment, of anything else than the feet of the Lord who, holding the conch (whose spirals turn to the right) on the one hand, and supporting the incomparably beautiful discus on the other hand, assumed the form of the Lion-man (*Narasimha*), and tore the chest of Hiraṇyakaśipu whose colour was like that of fire.” [31]

The relation between God and His devotee is reciprocal. Just as a devotee thinks of God all the time uttering His name and praising His greatness and goodness, even so the Lord is very much concerned all the time about the well-being of His devotee. God knows what is good for the devotee, and how He should take care of him at the appropriate time.

The case of Prahlāda is a testimony to the Lord's concern and affection (*vātsalya*) for the devotee. Prahlāda, when challenged by his haughty and cruel father, Hiraṇyakaśipu, told him that God who was adored by him all the time was omnipresent. When Hiraṇyakaśipu questioned Prahlāda whether God was present in a pillar which he spotted out with a view to test the omnipresence of God, the latter replied in the affirmative. In order to prove the truth of Prahlāda's statement God came out from that pillar in the form of *Narasimha* (Man-lion), even though Prahlāda did not pray to God invoking His presence therein, and killed Hiraṇyakaśipu without using any weapon.

God acts on His own without waiting for the prayers and petitions of the devotee. When such is the affection of the Lord for His devotee, how is it possible, asks Poygai Ālvār, to think of anything else excepting the Lord.

## XVI

*God-realization and the Inward Eye*

“Those who, without controlling the five senses and their objects, embrace the body of women, are those who



do not keep the senses contented by knowing Brahman through the eye of the mind, removing the darkness of ignorance. Such people cannot reach the City of the Lord who has the thousand-hooded snake (*Ādiśeṣa*) as His bed." [32]

It is the very nature of the senses to go outward in search of the objects of enjoyment. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 1) speaks of the five senses such as eye, ear, etc., as *parañci khāni* meaning outgoing senses. Though desires seem to be fulfilled when objects to which they are related are attained, they can never be appeased thereby, for they grow by what they feed on. Just as fire cannot be extinguished by adding fuel to it, even so desires can never be removed by satisfying them through the attainment of objects. When a person fulfils a desire, the satisfaction which he enjoys is only temporary. There is once again a want towards the same object whose attainment will give him only a temporary satisfaction. Though paradoxical it may seem, the truth is that desire needs fulfilment which again is followed by desire. And the process has to continue so long as one is overwhelmed by desires. A person who is involved in this process cannot be free from desires and cannot keep his senses under control. Such a person will be sensuous and self-indulgent, caring only for the flesh and things which cater to the flesh.

When the senses are not under control, the mind too is agitated, disturbed, and unsteady. When the mind is not calm and steady, it will not be possible to realize God, the supreme Self. It is through dispassion (*vairāgya*) and discrimination (*viveka*) that one must break the vicious circle of desire leading to fulfilment, and fulfilment being followed by desire which again needs fulfilment. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I, ii, 24) says: "One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Self through knowledge." This passage stresses the need for the control of the senses and a calm mind for the purpose of God-realization. One who does not undergo this discipline cannot realize God. Poygai Ālvār conveys the same idea in the hymn given above.

Poygai Ālvār suggests in the first line of the hymn that Brahman, the supreme reality, can be known, not through the outward visual sense, but only through the "inward eye", viz the mind. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (III, i, 8) says: "It (the Self) is not comprehended through the eye, nor through speech, nor through the other senses; nor is it attained through austerity or *karma*. Through the favour of the

mind which is pure, one can see that indivisible Self by means of meditation." That the ultimate reality can be known only through the mind which is pure and tranquil is stated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV, iv, 19): "Through the mind alone (it) is to be realized" (*manasaiva anudraṣṭavyam*). Poygai Ālvār conveys the Upaniṣadic idea in his own inimitable way in the first line of the hymn given above.

The expression "*ākattu aṇaippār*", which occurs in the third line of the hymn, means those who embrace the body (of women). The word *aṇaivare* may be interpreted in the sense of *aṇaivaro*. Mind will be fit enough to know the real nature of the *jīva* as well as that of Brahman, only when it is calm and one-pointed. Knowing one's own nature as a dependent being (*śeṣa*) and that of God as the supreme independent being (*śeṣi*), through the mind which is pure and steady, one must keep the senses contented. On the contrary, one who yields to the senses and leads a life of self-indulgence cannot, the Ālvār declares, realize God.

The hymn may also be interpreted in another way. The expression "*ākattu aṇaippār*" may be explained to mean "those who think of God in the mind". A man may be bad leading a life which is sensuous and licentious. Nevertheless, because of the spontaneous grace (*nirhetuka-kṛpā*) of God, which functioning on its own takes hold of him, his mind, without any effort on his part, becomes engrossed in God; and so he leads a new life. Such a person who is the beneficiary of the spontaneous grace of God realizes Him.

Another explanation is also possible. When a person has itching sensation in some part of his body, he cannot normally avoid scratching that part. It is well-known that frequent scratching does not provide any relief to the itching sensation. The senses which go outward towards objects cannot be appeased and controlled by providing objects which they demand. To provide objects for the senses is just like scratching the skin affected by a disease. The word *namaiyāmal* which occurs in the second line of the hymn may be understood in the sense of "without scratching", i.e. without providing objects to the five senses.

The mind is the "inward eye". It is pure only when it has *sattva-guṇa* predominant in it. The outward eye cannot see anything when it is covered by the two lids. In the same way the inward eye (mind) cannot know God when it is covered by *rajas* and *tamas*, which are its two lids. So the meaning of the hymn is that those persons who control the senses without providing objects to them and who contem-



plate on God (*ākattu aṇaiṇṇā*), having known Him through the *sāttvic* mind which is not overwhelmed by *rajas* and *tamas*, will realize God.

Poygai Āḷvār emphasizes the importance of *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti* as means to God-realization in the hymn mentioned above. When he speaks of *knowing* God through the mind, the emphasis is on *jñāna* or knowledge. The importance of *vairāgya* or dispassion is brought out when he says that the senses should not be provided with the objects of enjoyment. He lays stress on *bhakti* or contemplation when he speaks of keeping the mind engrossed in God.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, liberation (*mokṣa*) consists in communion with God by reaching the divine abode called *Vaikuṇṭha*. It is not just intellectual or spiritual awakening. It involves a real attainment of the supreme Being by reaching the celestial City of God—a pilgrimage which one can undertake only when the physical body falls off. This idea, the Āḷvār brings out when he speaks of attaining the City of God who has made the thousand-hooded Ādiśeṣa His bed.

## XVII

### *Godless Mind and Slavery to Rituals*

“What is the use of recitation and taking count of it, and the offering of morning and evening prayers without the mind reflecting on the names of the Lord, who provided on His navel-lotus the abode for the four-faced Brahmā, who revealed to him the *Vedas* to be taught to others, and who is endowed with auspicious qualities?” [33]

Poygai Āḷvār speaks of God as ‘*paṇṇan*’, i.e. as one who is endowed with auspicious qualities like *sausīlya* (uprightness), *vātsalya* (affection towards the devotees), etc. The Lord not only provided an abode in His own being to Brahmā, the creator, but also revealed to him the *Vedas*. Such was His affection for Brahmā.

Every deed must be done as an offering to the Lord. Recitation of the names of the Lord and offering of prayers at the stipulated time will be of no use, says the Āḷvār, so long as the mind is not engrossed in the Lord. The orientation of the mind at the time of the performance of these overt acts must also be considered. Deeds must be guided by a God-oriented mind. A person who allows his mind to wander about without thinking about God at the time of the

performance of the scripture-ordained deeds is a slave to external rituals. The deeds of a person who is mentally far away from God do not count at all. Rituals done with a godless mind are, indeed, a loss; and one who performs them as a matter of routine without proper mental orientation is a slave to them.

## XVIII

### *The Evil of Egoism*

“Is it not for removing the sense of I and mine (of the individual souls) that you, by begging, accepted (three measures of) ground, lowering your hands which have the lustrous discus and sharp nails by which, causing wound, you tore earlier Hiraṇyakaśipu, who claimed the world as his own?” [36]

The spiritual aspirant who aims at God-realization should be free from egoism. The sense of “I” and “mine” which are the two forms of egoism arise because of ignorance. The inward Self which is immutable is free from action. It is not the doer or agent of any action. Not knowing its real nature and superimposing the nature of the mind thereon, a person thinks of himself as an agent. Moreover, the inward Self is non-dual. It is not related to anything else. Owing to the false identification of the Self with the mind, the senses, the body, and the external things, a person develops the possessive sense, the sense of “mine”; he speaks of “his” mind, “his” senses, “his” body, “his” wealth, and so on. Mind, senses, body, etc., are not-Self. Lacking discrimination between the Self and the not-Self, a person develops the nominative and the possessive aspects of egoism. A spiritual aspirant must be free from egoism. One who is egoistic is demoniac; and one who is free from it is divine. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* (XVI, 6) that there are two kinds of beings, the divine and the demoniac. He observes (XVI, 5): “The divine nature is deemed for liberation and the demoniac, for bondage ..”

The entire universe belongs to God, for He is the source, support, and the controller of it. While God is the indwelling Self (*śarīrin*), the entire universe is His body (*śarīra*); and so the latter belongs to Him. Nothing in the world belongs to us, the individual souls. So the spiritual aspirants who care for liberation should lead a life of detachment. This idea is conveyed in the opening *mantra* of the *Īśa Upaniṣad* which says: “All this, whatever moves in this moving



world, is enveloped by God. So find your enjoyment in renunciation ; do not covet what belongs to others."

In the hymn stated above, Poygai Ālvār emphasizes the need for overcoming the sense of "I" and "mine" by calling attention to the case of Mahābali, and the way in which the Lord, incarnating as *Vāmana*, dealt with him. Mahābali was full of egoism. He thought of himself as the lord of the entire universe and claimed that it belonged to him, even though God, being the supreme Lord of the universe, is its owner. It is with a view to remove his egoism and thereby to teach a lesson to him as well as to others that God incarnated as *Vāmana* and begged of him three measures of ground, even though the entire world is His.

Though both Hiraṇyakaśipu and Mahābali were egoistic, the Lord dealt with them differently. While the former hated the Lord and treated Him as an inveterate enemy, the latter did not.

## XIX

### *Utterance of the Name of the Lord*

"O, my mind! From this day on, always contemplate on what is spoken about the Lord, who has the beautiful discus in His hand, even though what is uttered is only for the sake of utterance (and not out of love of God). In that case, even if you do wrong as big as a mountain, He will view it as good." [41]

If a devotee thinks of the Lord and utters His name with love, it is the best. What is the next best thing? Poygai Ālvār says that God should be the object of one's thought and utterance, even if genuine love for God is wanting. This too, assures the Ālvār, will be fruitful, thanks to the goodness of the Lord. It does not matter whether the utterance of the name of the Lord is out of genuine love towards Him or not. It is better to think and speak of Him than to think and speak of anything else. God is so good as to view favourably every thought and utterance even though it is wanting in devotion and love.

## XX

### *Fruits of Worship*

"The devotees by their very nature worship, with flower and water, the feet of the Lord who wears the

garland of basil grown luxuriantly in the high-land. Consequently, their minds are free from evil. Sins which cannot be wiped out cannot reach them. Love which is wealth will come of its own accord." [43]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār refers to the fruits that accrue to the devotees who worship the Lord disinterestedly without any concern with the fruits of their action.

## XXI

### *Divine Accessibility Through Many Forms*

"In whatever form the devotee conjures up God who has the discus in His hand, the same form He assumes. Further, whatever name the devotee gives Him, the same name He accepts. With whatever qualities the devotee always thinks of Him, with the same qualities He remains." [44]

The supreme Being manifests itself in different forms and as endowed with different names and qualities, as thought of by the devotees. Lord Kṛṣṇa declares in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (IV, 4): "Howsoever men approach me, even so do I reward them..." It is this idea that is brought out by Poygai Ālvār in the hymn given above. Supremacy and easy accessibility are the two complementary aspects of God. God is not only supreme, but is easily accessible to the devotees as well. As the devotees ascend towards God, God descends towards them, assuming the form, name, and qualities as thought of by them.

The Ālvār stresses the greatness and value of *arcāvatāra* in this hymn.

## XXII

### *The Greatness of Bhakti*

"Even gods do not know the auspicious qualities of the Lord. But, O, good mind! we (because of the divine grace) know the Lord who, making marks by His foot, counted the long ten heads of the wicked demon, Rāvaṇa, who stood worshipping at the feet of Brahmā,



of great austerity, who has his abode at the navel-lotus of the Lord." [45]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār lays emphasis on the greatness of *bhakti* which enables the devotees to attain God-realization. What is not possible even for gods becomes possible for the devotees of the Lord.

The episode that is mentioned in this hymn by Poygai Ālvār is also stated by Peyālvār in hymn (77) in the *Third Tiruvantādi*. Once, Rāvaṇa, without revealing his identity, went to Brahmā and asked a boon. The Lord, assuming the form of a child, lay on the lap of Brahmā and indicated to him by making marks through His foot that the person seeking boon from him was no other than the wicked Rāvaṇa with ten heads.

### XXIII

#### *The Means to Release*

"By withdrawing the five rutting elephants, *viz* the senses, from the water and by efficiently controlling them without allowing them to roam about, those who know Him through true knowledge (or *bhakti*) which is very subtle will realize the feet of the Lord who, once upon a time, protected the Gajendra." [47]

Poygai Ālvār explains the means to liberation in this hymn.

The five senses which are compared to the rutting elephants must first of all be controlled, by withdrawing them from the external objects. They must be turned towards God. The practice of *niṣkāma-karma* helps the spiritual aspirant not only to be God-oriented, but also leads to his purification of the mind (*citta-śuddhi*). Right knowledge will arise only in a mind which is predominated with *sattva-guṇa*. The *Bhagavad-gītā* (XIV, 17) says, "From *sattva* arises knowledge" (*sattvāt sañjāyate jñānam*). This right knowledge of the Supreme is characterized as subtle, because the supreme Being is subtle. So Brahman-realization which is release can be attained, says Poygai Ālvār, only through the right knowledge. The word "*jñānam*" used by the Ālvār in the third line of the hymn is explained as *bhakti* in the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition. According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, knowledge, when deepened through contemplation, becomes *bhakti*. On this interpretation, a devotee through *bhakti* attains Brahman-realization which is release.

In the last line of the hymn, reference is made to the elephant, Gajendra, which was rescued by the Lord from the clutches of the crocodile which caught hold of it when it got into a pond to pluck a flower for worshipping the Lord.

## XXIV

*Efficacy of Bhakti*

“By controlling the five senses which cannot be easily restrained and by worshipping with the choicest flowers in hand and with loving devotion, it is easy to realize the Lord who, with his munificent hand, accepted the pouring of water by Mahābali who was great and who regularly gave gifts to others.” [ 50 ]

Poygai Ālvār brings out the efficacy of *bhakti* as the means to God-realization. God-realization, says the Ālvār, is vouched for those who worship God with *bhakti*, giving up attachment to the objects of the world.

The senses by their very nature are out-going; and they have to be controlled by the mind. Controlling the mind is no doubt difficult. Arjuna gives expression to this difficulty when he says: “The mind verily, is, O Kṛṣṇa, restless, turbulent, strong, and obstinate. Thereof the restraint I deem quite as difficult as that of the wind.” (*Gītā*, VI, 34) However, the mind can be controlled by practice (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*). Practice consists in constantly keeping the idea of God in the mind. Dispassion is giving up the objects of pleasure through constant perception of evil in them. Through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, the thought-stream of the mind which is object-oriented can be canalized towards God. The need for *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* is stressed by Lord Kṛṣṇa for the purpose of controlling the mind as follows: “Doubtless, O mighty-armed, the mind is hard to restrain and restless, but by practice, O son of Kuntī, and by dispassion it may be controlled.” (*Gītā*, VI, 35) A devotee who resorts to *bhakti* after controlling the mind attains God-realization.

In the last two lines of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār refers to the Lord's incarnation as *Vāmana* and His accepting the offering of water poured by Mahābali in token of the gift of three measures of ground by the latter. Mahābali was great as a donor. Indeed, he is ranked first among the donors. Though he knew that the short-statured *Vāmana* was no other than the Lord who came to subjugate him, he



did not hesitate to gift three measures of ground which Vāmana begged of him. Nor did he go back from his word when he saw Vāmana assuming the cosmic form and started measuring the ground. Thus Mahābali was great as a donor.

## XXV

*Beyond Speech and Mind*

“Chattering the names of the Lord apart, who can truly know our supreme Being? Be it so. Brahmā, in spite of having his abode so closely in the fragrant navel-lotus of the Lord, is not able to know the lotus feet of the Lord.” [ 56 ]

Brahman, the supreme Being, is not an object of knowledge ; and so it cannot be known in the way in which empirical things are known. It cannot be comprehended by the mind which is insentient. The insentient mind by itself cannot reveal anything. If we know the things of the world through the mind, it is because of the light of consciousness reflected in the mind. Brahman which is no other than the inward Self of the individual is of the nature of consciousness ; and so it cannot be known through the insentient mind. Further, whatever is known is material (*jaḍa*), something other than consciousness. If Brahman too were to be known, it should be reduced to the status of a material thing ; it would then cease to be of the nature of consciousness. Again, Brahman is self-luminous. While it reveals other things, it is not known through anything else. A text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, ii, 15) says : “He shining, all these shine ; through His lustre, all these are variously illumined.” Brahman, the non-dual reality, which is immutable and which is devoid of qualities, cannot be designated by words. Through words we can denote an object which has a genus (*jāti*), or a quality (*guṇa*), or an act (*karma*), or relation (*sambandha*). But Brahman has none of these. Brahman does not belong to a class. That is why it cannot be designated even by the word “*sat*”. Further, Brahman is *nirguṇa*. If there are qualities in Brahman, it could be denoted by a word such as white, black, etc. implying a quality. Again, Brahman is immutable ; and so it cannot be denoted by a word implying an act. Since it is one and non-dual, there is nothing else to which it is related. So it cannot be referred to by words which imply relation. It means that Brahman, the ultimate reality, cannot be denoted by words. That Brahman is beyond speech and mind is stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, iv, 1) : “Whence all words return, unable to reach it (Brahman), along with the mind.”

What, then, is the means to the realization of Brahman? Poygai Ālvār assures us that Brahman which is beyond speech and thought can nevertheless be realized through uttering the names of the Lord. Like the practice of *niṣkāma-karma*, the utterance of the names of God leads to the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, a person is competent to understand the teaching of Scripture. And Scripture conveys the knowledge of Brahman negatively by stating what Brahman is not, by removing all wrong notions caused by *avidyā*, by negating all specifications and qualities falsely superimposed on Brahman due to *avidyā*. One may or may not know the significance of the names of the Lord. The mere utterance of the names, even without knowing their significance, will be fruitful.

One cannot claim that one knows a thing merely on the score of proximity to it. *Brahmā*, the creator, who is so close to the Lord, does not know, says Poygai Ālvār, even the lotus feet of the Lord who is infinite. How then can others who are less competent know Him?

A spiritual aspirant has to prepare himself for Brahman-realization through the practice of *karma* and *bhakti*. When he thus makes himself competent, he can be the beneficiary of the grace of God when it falls on him. To him He reveals, whom He chooses.

## XXVI

### *Overcoming Sins Through Association with God*

“I was afraid of the atrocious sins which sat tight on me. Thus frightened and with the desire to attain salvation, I worshipped you with delightful and excellent garland of these hymns for reaching your sacred feet, and recited the *mantra* ‘*namo nārāyaṇāya*’.” [ 57 ]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār says that association with the Lord through worshipping Him with flowers and garlands and through reciting *aṣṭākṣara* helps a devotee to overcome his sins. Resorting to these, the Ālvār attained salvation. He gives this information for the benefit of those who are desirous of salvation.

The expression “*nayaninṇa nanmālai*” means the delightful and beautiful garland. In the context, it may be interpreted to mean “the beautiful garland of hymns constituting Scripture”. The hymns of the Ālvār constitute Scripture. Inasmuch as they convey the central teachings of the Upaniṣads which are *Vedānta*, they are also called



*Vedānta*. Scripture gives information about five things (*artha-pañcaka*): (1) the nature of the supreme Being, (2) the nature of the individual soul, (3) the means to the attainment of the supreme Being, (4) the *puruṣārtha* which is to be attained, and (5) the obstacles to be removed. Since Poygai Ālvār's *Tiruvantādi*, like the hymns of the other Ālvārs, deals with all these five things, it is sacred Scripture.

“*Om namo nārāyaṇāya*” is the *aṣṭākṣara-mantra*.

## XXVII

### *A Pure Mind and a Competent Teacher*

“O mind! Let us worship with flower and incense in the hand, and attain salvation. Arise. May you live long. Learning the sacred names without fault is for the purpose of worshipping the feet of the Lord with our hands. There is no time for delay. Hasten to attain Him”. [ 58 ]

The work of the mind counts very much in the life of a spiritual aspirant. It is through the mind that the out-going senses have to be controlled. Again, through the mind alone which is pure, the supreme Being can be known. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 11) says: “This (Brahman) is to be attained through the mind.” Poygai Ālvār feels happy that his mind, being fit for the role it has to play, co-operates with him in his quest of perfection. He conveys his appreciation and good-will to the mind by saying: “May you live long!”

One has to study Scripture under the guidance of a competent teacher. The study of Scripture under the guidance of a teacher is known as *śravaṇa*. Both the teacher and Scripture help to purify the mind of a spiritual aspirant. In the course of his commentary on the text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II, i, 11) quoted above, Śaṅkara says that “Brahman which is homogeneous is to be attained as identical with the Self, there being nothing else existing, through the mind, which is purified by the teacher and Scripture.” There are many *śruti* texts which stress the importance of a teacher for a spiritual aspirant. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI, xiv, 2) says: “A person having a teacher can know Brahman.” The same *Upaniṣad* says in another context (IV, ix, 3), “Knowledge received from a teacher alone helps one to attain the end.” One has to learn the teaching about God without fault; and what is learnt from a competent teacher alone will be



without fault. The discipline called *śravaṇa* must be followed by rational thinking (*manana*) and repeated contemplation (*nididhyāsana*).

## XXVIII

*The Path of Prapatti*

“If the powerful deeds that have already taken possession of us, the afflictions (which follow them), disease and sins, all of which fetter the *jīva*, are to be rooted out along with their latent impressions, the means thereto is surrender to the Lord who at one time incarnating as Rāma held the bow in His beautiful hand in such a way as to destroy once upon a time the strength of Rāvaṇa who held Sītā, having slender waist, a captive in Laṅkā.” [ 59 ]

In this hymn Poygai Ālvār brings out the significance of *prapatti* which is a direct and independent path to release.

The *jīva*, i.e. the individual soul, by its very nature is pure ; and it is of the nature of knowledge and bliss. Since its empirical existence *qua jīva* is beginningless (*anādi*), it is not possible to ascertain the beginning of its suffering. As *jīva*, it is subject to the limitation of *avidyā*, which is also beginningless (*anādi*). Because of *avidyā*, there arises desire ; desire leads to deeds, good as well as bad ; and because of deeds, merit and demerit, i.e. *puṇya* and *pāpa*, accrue to the *jīva* ; and these in their turn lead to further deeds, good and bad. Thus, the empirical existence of the *jīva* involving the cycle of births and deaths is full of suffering.

Poygai Ālvār in the first two lines of the hymn refers to the suffering of the *jīva* in its empirical existence. There are three kinds *karma*—*sañcita*, *prārabdha*, and *āgāmi*. *Sañcita* refers to the accumulated *karma*-in-store which stands to the credit of the *jīva* in its empirical existence. *Āgāmi* is *karma*-yet-to-come. *Prārabdha* is *karma*-in-action. At the appropriate time, a particular *karma* starts functioning, giving rise to various results—the present bodily existence of a *jīva* and the experience of pleasure and pain. The accumulated demerit (*pāpa*) begins to fructify causing mental afflictions, bodily disease, and so on. In the same way, the enjoyment of pleasure is due to merit (*puṇya*). The pleasure which the *jīva* experiences in its empirical condition is ephemeral and



finite. Since it does not give the *jīva* abiding satisfaction, it too becomes a source of pain. So both pleasure and pain which a *jīva* experiences in its empirical condition have to be overcome for attaining release.

In the last two lines of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār refers to God's incarnation as Rāma, the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, and finally the destruction of Rāvaṇa by Rāma. He says that, for the purpose of overcoming the suffering of bondage and attaining salvation, one must surrender to the Lord who incarnated as Rāma.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, *prapatti* is an alternative path to release. The practice of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, paves the way for *bhakti-yoga* which in its turn leads to release. Those who are not competent to tread the path of *bhakti* may resort to *prapatti*, the path of surrender. Just as the practice of *bhakti* leads to release, even so the pursuit of *prapatti* leads to release. As in the case of *bhakti*, here also faith in the saving grace of the Lord is necessary on the part of the spiritual aspirant. It may be stated here that the *Tenkalai* school of Śrīvaiṣṇavism does not consider *prapatti* as *sādhya*. Just as it does not consider *bhakti* as a *yoga* or discipline to be accomplished by the individual, even so it does not treat *prapatti* as a *yoga* to be accomplished by the individual. A spiritual aspirant who resorts to *prapatti* is called a *prapanna*. A *prapanna* is one who is completely free from egoism, who has the feeling of unworthiness and helplessness to do anything — to follow the path of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* — and who totally and unreservedly surrenders to the Lord. Lord Kṛṣṇa sets forth the doctrine of *prapatti* in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (XVIII, 66) as follows: "Renouncing all dharmas, seek me as your sole refuge. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve." The *Tenkalai* school holds the view that divine grace which is spontaneous does not operate in response to the merit of the individual. Since grace is spontaneous and not responsive, it believes in *nirhetuka-kṛpā*. It makes no sense to speak of the merit of the individual in the context of divine grace.

## XXIX

### *God—the Material and Efficient Cause*

"The world, the state of dissolution of the world, the black ocean full of waves and of beautiful colour, the mountains, the red fire, the air, and the ether that are in the world—all these are the creations of the Lord, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, through His volition." [ 61 ]



Brahman, being the source of the entire world, is its material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*). One may think that there must be, besides Brahman, some other entity which is the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of the world, for we find in our experience that the efficient cause is different from the material cause. Clay is the material cause of pot; and potter is its efficient cause. Both of them which are necessary for the production of a thing are different from each other. If so, there must be, one may think, an efficient cause different from Brahman which is the material cause. But this is not true in the case of Brahman. Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause rolled into one. Consider, for example, the *Chāndogya* text (VI, ii, 1) which says: "In the beginning there was Being alone, one only without a second." It is from Being (*sat*), i.e. Brahman, that everything comes into existence; and so Brahman is the material cause. Since it is without a second (*advitīyam*), it is also the efficient cause of the world. The same *Upaniṣad* goes on to say in the sequel: "It thought: may I become many, may I grow forth..." The capacity to think on the part of Being (Brahman) shows that it is not an inert principle, but something conscious or intelligent and that it is, therefore, the efficient cause of the world as well. There are also other *Upaniṣadic* texts which convey this idea. In the hymn given above, Poygai Ālvār states the same idea on the basis of his own authentic experience.

The world to which Poygai Ālvār refers at the commencement of the hymn implies the state of creation (*sṛṣṭi*). Then reference is made by him to the dissolution of the world (*pralaya*). The maintenance (*sthiti*) of the world, though not explicitly stated, is implied in the context. It means that God is not only the source and support of the world, but also is that into which the world is finally dissolved. Compare this with the *Taittirīya* text (III, i, 1) which says: "Desire to know that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman."

In the second and third lines of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār refers to the objects created by God. The ocean and the mountains mentioned by the Ālvār suggest the two elements, viz water and earth. The remaining three elements, viz fire, air, and ether, are also mentioned by him. All the objects of the world are constituted by these five elements. The elements which come into existence from Brahman-Ātman and also their sequence are stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, i, 1) as follows: "From that Brahman which is the Self, was produced ether. From ether emerged air. From air was born fire. From fire was created water. From water sprang up earth." Towards the close of the third line and in the last line of the hymn, the Ālvār says that the



things of the world constituted by the five elements have come out of God, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, and that God Himself is the efficient cause of the world. The expression “*tirumāl tan punṭiyāl āya puṇarppu*” used by the Ālvār can be construed in two ways as “*tirumāl tannāl āya puṇarppu*” and “*tirumāl tan punṭiyāl āya puṇarppu*”. While the former conveys the idea that creation has proceeded from God, the material cause, the latter states that God is the efficient cause of the world. Poygai Ālvār in the hymn given above thus brings out the idea that God is both the material and efficient cause (*abhinna-nimittopādānakāraṇa*) of the world.

## XXX

*Total Absorption in God*

“My hands will not worship anyone but the Lord. My two ears will remain hearing the pleasant names of the Lord who is related to me. Everyday my tongue will be speaking about the feet of the Lord who wears the sounding anklets and who has the mighty Ādiśeṣa as His bed. I will not shamelessly pursue the objects of pleasure.” [63]

When his senses are oriented towards the Lord, who is the *puruṣārtha* to be attained, how is it possible for him, asks Poygai Ālvār, to run after the sensuous objects of pleasure? The ideal that is suggested here by the Ālvār for the guidance of the spiritual aspirant is total absorption in the Lord.

## XXXI

*Vaiṣṇavite Code of Conduct*

“I will not covet the objects of others. With the ignoble I will not make friends. With others excepting the noble, I will not move. Excepting the Lord of Śrī I will not worship anyone as god. (Because of all these) I will not feel elated. If so, how can further *karma* accrue to me?” [64]

Poygai Ālvār sets forth in this hymn the Vaiṣṇavite code of conduct.

In the first half of the first line of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār says that he will not covet the property of someone else. Here is a code of conduct for every one. But there is something more than this which Poygai Ālvār really wants to convey. His words contain a deeper sense of great philosophical significance from the Viśiṣṭādvaita point of view. The supreme Lord who is the support and controller of the entire universe is also its owner. So the things of the world belong to Him. The imperishable self (*cit*), which is superior to other things and highly valuable, also belongs to the Lord. It exists for His sake. God is the whole of which it is a part. He is the soul of which it is the body. To claim as one's own any of the things of the world, or even the self, is wrong, according to Poygai Ālvār.

Another interpretation also is possible. A spiritual aspirant must have the discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral (*nityā-nitya-vastu-viveka*). The supreme Being alone, called Brahman or Ātman, is eternal; all other things are not eternal. A devotee will not long for the things of others which are transient. If he does, it will mean that he lacks the basic qualification to be fulfilled by a spiritual aspirant.

Poygai Ālvār classifies people into two categories—the noble and the ignoble. A spiritual aspirant must seek the company of the noble and avoid that of the ignoble.

To Poygai Ālvār, Śrīyaḥpati is the personal god (*iṣṭa-devatā*). In view of his personal preference of the Lord of Śrī as his *iṣṭa-devatā*, he will not, says the Ālvār, worship any other god.

Further, a spiritual aspirant should not feel elated on any account.

The work of *prārabdha-karma* which has already started functioning cannot be avoided by anyone. But one can avoid the accumulation of further *karma* by adhering to the code of conduct given by the Ālvār. Coveting another person's property, association with bad people, avoiding the company of the good, elation which will lead to egoism, and not worshipping one's *iṣṭa-devatā*—these will result in the accumulation of further *karma*. A Vaiṣṇavite is one who does not fall a victim to these evils.



## XXXII

*Benefit of the Worship of God*

“Those who worship the Lord whose colour is black, whose eyes are red, who has thousand names, who is far away, and who is difficult even to be thought of, will not be afflicted by merit and demerit. They will not (once again) get into the painful bondage of hell. They will not go astray even in little things. [65]

In this hymn Poygai Ālvār states the benefit that accrues to one who worships God.

The thousand names of God are not exhaustive. Thousand names are mentioned only in a representative way.

God is far away to the ignorant; but He is very near to the men of knowledge. This idea is conveyed by the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (5) which says: “That (Brahman) is far off. That is very near...” He cannot be thought of by the mind; nor can He be designated by words, because He is not an empirical entity.

## XXXIII

*The Purport of Scripture*

“The object which the spiritual aspirants, waking up in the early morning, think of, and which the learned Vedāntins wish to realize is the feet of the Lord who lies down in the milky ocean with the incomparable discus in His hand. What is heard and reflected upon is the name of the Lord whose body is like that of the vast ocean.” [66]

Poygai Ālvār says in this hymn that a spiritual aspirant whose mind is purified resorts to the threefold discipline of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*, which is intended to help him attain Brahman-realization.

The *Veda* consists of two parts—the ritual-part (*karma-kāṇḍa*) and the knowledge-part (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*). The Upaniṣads which form the concluding portion of the *Veda* are known as *Vedānta*. They form the

knowledge-part of the *Veda*, and purport to teach Brahman, the supreme Being.

Spiritual aspirants who are qualified to study the Upaniṣads study them in the early morning, a time congenial for study and reflection, under the guidance of competent teachers. They also rationally reflect on what they study. Guided study (*śravaṇa*) and rational reflection (*manana*) must be followed by repeated contemplation (*nididhyāsana*). Brahman can be realized through the discipline of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. When Yajñavalkya tells Maitreyī in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II, iv, 5): "The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon," he calls attention to this threefold discipline.

### XXXIV

#### *God-oriented Knowledge*

"Only towards the turbulent ocean flows the river. Only towards the rising sun the beautiful lotus turns. Only towards the god of death moves the vital principle. Knowledge comprehends only the Lord of Lakṣmī who is seated on the beautiful lotus flower." [67]

Knowledge worth the name has God for its object. Just as it is natural for the rivers to flow towards the ocean, for the lotus to turn towards the sun, for the vital principle to perish, even so, says Poygai Āḷvār, knowledge by its very nature is related to God. That is why a text of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (I, xix, 41) says that that by which the supreme Being which is pure, which is the highest, which is free from imperfection and which is one, is known is knowledge; and that all else is ignorance.

### XXXV

#### *Any Mode of Worship Is Good*

"Worship the Lord of Śrī, while there is enough strength to utter His name. Worship Him while there is the physical body, which may fall off (at any time). It will do good if you worship Him by offering a garland of flowers with lovely petals, or by *yajña*, or by deeds (such as prostration), or by uttering *mantra*, or even by uttering His name." [70]



In this hymn Poygai Ālvār conveys the idea that worship of God, whatever be the mode of worship, is conducive to the attainment of God-realization.

For the practice of several kinds of worship such as offering prostration, visiting temples, performance of *yajña*, etc., the body must be fit. With a decrepit body one cannot practise these modes of worship. Similarly, recitation of *mantra*, uttering the names of the Lord, etc. will be possible only when a devotee is strong enough physically as well as mentally. Taking advantage of the fitness of the body and the soundness of the mind, a devotee, says Poygai Ālvār, must worship God, whatever be the mode of worship. The body, which can be compared to lightning, may disappear at any time. Even if it continues to exist, it may sometimes be totally useless for the purpose of worship. So a devotee has to take advantage of the sound condition of both the body and the mind, and worship the Lord.

Poygai Ālvār refers to different kinds of worship in the last two lines of the hymn. One may worship God, offering a garland of flowers. Or, one may perform *nitya* and *naimittika* karmas, *i.e.* karmas which are obligatory and occasional, as well as other *yajñas*. Worship of this type requires *mantra* as well as deeds. Or, one may worship God by means of prostration which does not require any *mantra*. If the body is not fit enough for any deed, then one may worship God by reciting the sacred *aṣṭākṣara-mantra*. If even this is not possible, one may without any difficulty utter the names of the Lord, as this does not require any qualification or initiation as in the case of learning and reciting a *mantra*. One does not take bath elsewhere for the purpose of purifying the body before taking bath in the Ganges. Similarly, one does not require any preparation or qualification for uttering the names of the Lord.

### XXXVI

#### *Lesser Values and Love of God*

“O my mind, deep-like ocean ! Even though disease and old age have been completely overcome (and thereby *kaivalya* has been attained), and even though lordship over the entire universe lasting through the four *yugas* has been achieved, do not give up love for the Lord who has the discus ready for destroying the evil. I beseech you.” [71]

Poygai Ālvar emphasizes in this hymn that union with God is the highest *puruṣārtha* which a devotee should aim at, and that *puruṣārthas* such as *kaivalya*, *aiśvarya*, etc. are lower values to be shunned by him.

What is desired by a person is called *puruṣārtha*. There are many *puruṣārthas*, i.e. objects or values desired by man. Wealth, pleasure, etc. are *puruṣārthas*. A spiritual aspirant may aim at *kaivalya* which is a state of spiritual solitude and self-realization, by overcoming disease and old age. But *kaivalya*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, is a value inferior to *mokṣa* or God-realization. While the former is finite (*alpa*), the latter is infinite (*bhūman*). A spiritual aspirant may aim at the lordship of the entire universe for as many as four yugas, by attaining the status of *Brahmā*. But this *puruṣārtha*, though lasting for a very long period, is impermanent (*asthira*), whereas *mokṣa* is permanent (*sthira*). Poygai Ālvār remarks that, even if one can achieve these *puruṣārthas*, one should not give up devotion and love to the Lord, who is armed with the discus. *Mokṣa* is the highest value which one can attain through the love of God. It may even be said that love of God itself is the highest value which a spiritual aspirant should pursue.

### XXXVII

#### *God-oriented Senses*

“The mind filled with love says, ‘Go to the Lord who has the discus.’ The tongue says, ‘Praise His strong and beautiful shoulders.’ The visual sense says, ‘See the Lord who transcends the beginningless time (without noting our faults).’ The auditory sense says, ‘Listen to the glory of the Lord who wears the garland of pearls as an ornament.’” [72]

This hymn shows how the senses of an ideal devotee are oriented towards God.

In the previous hymn, Poygai Ālvār appealed to the mind not to forget the Lord on any account. The mind and the senses which are already absorbed in the Lord are portrayed here as playing the role of a teacher, and advising the Ālvār as to what he should do.



## XXXVIII

*God—the Indwelling Self*

“O my mind ! Speak well or ill of the Lord who wears the beautiful basil garland. Reject Him or respect Him. He is the indwelling Self of the ocean full of water all the time and also of the mountain, of the pervasive *ākāśa* and the air, of the body and the soul.” [73]

Earlier in hymn (61) it was stated that God is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār conveys the idea that God is the indwelling Self (*antaryāmin*) of all things, sentient as well as insentient.

In the first two lines of the hymn, Poygai Ālvār addresses the mind which plays an important role in shaping the life of a spiritual aspirant. It is the mind that discriminates between the good and the bad. It paves the way for release or bondage. The Ālvār tells the mind that it can first listen to the greatness of the Lord who is not only the cause of the world, but also the indwelling Self of everything, and that it can decide thereafter the course of action which it has to pursue—whether to praise or condemn Him, or to speak well or ill of Him. The idea which is sought to be conveyed by the Ālvār here is that if a person comes to know of God, however vague and incomplete his understanding may be, he will be gradually attracted towards God.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, vii, 1-23) explains in detail how Brahman is the indwelling Self (*antaryāmin*) of all beings, sentient and insentient. It says: “He who dwells in the earth, who is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, He is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal.” It gives a similar account with regard to other objects. Brahman dwells in earth and other elements, in the luminaries and in the *jīva*; also, it owns and controls them from within. So Brahman, the supreme Being, is not only the ground (*ādhāra*) of the entire universe, but also its inner controller (*niyantā*). Since Brahman is the inner Self of both *cit* and *acit*, it is characterized as the *śaririn*, while the latter are said to be its *śarīra*, the cosmic body. Just as the *jīva* has a body which it supports and controls, even so Brahman has the entire universe comprising *cit* and *acit* as its cosmic body which it supports and controls. “Just as the body is dependent on the *jīva*, even so the entire universe which is the cosmic body of God is dependent on Him.

Since all the objects of the world have come out of the five elements, viz ether, air, fire, water, and earth, the latter are said to be

the cause of the former. Poygai Ālvār mentions the ocean and the mountain, which are effects, in the third line of the hymn in a suggestive way (*upalakṣaṇa*) to refer to all the things which are effects. In the same line, he refers to two elements, *viz* ether and air, which suggest the remaining three elements, *viz* fire, water, and earth. The body mentioned in the last line will also include the senses. And the soul which is also stated in the last line is *upalakṣaṇa* for *dharmabhūta-jñāna* and *nityavibhūti*, which are *aṣaḍa*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita. God owns, supports, and controls every thing—*līlāvibhūti* as well as *nityavibhūti*.

## XXXIX

*The Shield of Śiva and Viṣṇu*

“May Śiva and Viṣṇu protect us—Śiva who has the bull for His vehicle, who destroyed *Tripura*, who has smeared His body with ashes, who has His consort in one part of His body, who has long hairs, who has the *Gaṅgā* on His head; and Viṣṇu who has the kite for His vehicle, who tore the chest of *Hiraṇya*, whose colour is like that of a cool, blue gem, who has Śrī in His chest, who has a long crown and who has long feet.” [ 74 ]

This hymn, like hymn (5), gives a beautiful description of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. A spiritual aspirant may worship Śiva or Viṣṇu; or he may worship both of them. The earnest prayer of Poygai Ālvār is that Śiva and Viṣṇu may protect their devotees.

## XL

*God Is the Way*

“If we think of you, obstacles will disappear, and the binding evil deeds will loosen their hold and die. Those who meditate on you are free from old age. Those who worship your feet, O the Lord of Śrī, will find the way (to you).” [ 75 ]

Poygai Ālvār says in this hymn that God shows the way to attain union with Him, which is calld *mokṣa*, by overcoming bondage.

The word “*kāppu*” which occurs at the beginning of the first line of the hymn means obstacle. If the word is understood in this sense,



the meaning of the first line of the hymn is that a spiritual aspirant who thinks of God will be free from obstacles. The word "*kāppu*" may also be explained in the sense of protection. A person has to take care of, and protect, his things—his property, his family, his own health, etc. He is thus burdened with a heavy responsibility. But consider the position in the case of a devotee. Since a person who thinks of God and is devoted to Him is taken care of and is protected by God, he will be free from the responsibility of protecting his things. The supreme God alone is, indeed, the protector, and not the *jīva*. The action of a devotee must be based on this belief.

What binds a person is *karma*, which arises because of *kāma*, which again is caused by *avidyā*. The causal chain of bondage consisting of *avidyā*, *kāma*, and *karma* can be cut off by means of devotion (*bhakti*) to the Lord.

The word "*mūppu*" which occurs towards the end of the second line of the hymn means old age. Every object in the world is subject to six changes (*bhāva-vikāra*), viz birth, existence, change, growth, decline, and death. Old age which symbolizes decline stands for the sixfold *bhāva-vikāra*. When Poygai Ālvār says that those who meditate on God will be free from old age, it is to suggest that the devotees of God overcome bondage which involves the cycle of birth and death, and attain *mokṣa*.

God-realization or *mokṣa* is the goal. If so, the question to be answered is: who shows the way to the goal? Poygai Ālvār answers this question by saying that God Himself shows the way to the goal. Since only through the grace of God the practice of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* is possible, God Himself is the way as well as the goal.

## XLI

### *God Is the Goal*

"Those who worship you in the proper way will attain the form as stated in the eternally true *Veda*. The *Veṅkaṭa* mountain of the auspicious Lord who measured the universe will, without any doubt or fault, ensure the attainment of the supreme abode or status." [76]

If God Himself is the way to the goal, what, then, is the nature of the goal to be attained? *Mokṣa* which means release from bondage is the goal to be attained. The nature of *mokṣa* can be explained in



different ways. In this hymn Poygai Ālvār says that release consists in the realization of one's nature.

It is stated in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (VI, v, 6) that the object worthy of attainment through the threefold discipline of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* is Brahman or the supreme Self. Brahman, according to Advaita, is no other than the inward Self of the *jīva*. Owing to *avidyā*, the *jīva* thinks that it is different from Brahman, that it is a finite being possessing limited knowledge and happiness. But the *Upaniṣad* which the Ālvār characterizes as eternal and infallible (*valuvā-moḷi*), declares that the inward Self of the *jīva* is the supreme Brahman. There is, for example, the *Māṇḍūkya* text (2) which says: "All this is verily Brahman; and this Self is Brahman." There is also the celebrated *Chāndogya* declaration (VI, viii, 7), "That thou art," which is repeated several times. The *jīva*, suffering as it does because of *avidyā*, is not able to realize its true nature. When *avidyā* is removed through the right knowledge, the *jīva* realizes its essential nature, and remains in its true form as Brahman. That there takes place the manifestation of one's nature (*svarūpa-āvirbhāva*) at the dawn of the right knowledge and that remaining in one's own form as *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* is release, are stated in the *Chāndogya* text (VIII, xii, 2): "Attaining the supreme light, the *jīva* shines in its true form." For attaining release, *i.e.* for realizing one's true nature, one must pursue the discipline prescribed by Scripture.

The first two lines of the hymn, which refer to the attainment of release, may also be interpreted from the standpoint of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Release is *sāyujya*, attaining union with Brahman. The *jīva* is different from Brahman, though inseparably related to it. Though by its very nature it is endowed with infinite knowledge and unlimited bliss, it suffers in its empirical existence due to *avidyā* and *karma*. When it attains union with Brahman, *i.e.* *sāyujya*, which is release, it shines in its true form, regaining its infinite knowledge and bliss. The released soul intuitively Brahman as its very Self. It has the experience to the effect: "What I am, that is He; and what He is, that I am." The *jīva* even in the state of liberation is, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, essentially different from Brahman, though there is experiential unity between them. Realizing its inseparable relation to Brahman, it overcomes the sense of exclusiveness and externality, and remains as non-different (*avibhāga*) from Brahman. The state of release is such that there is no *svarūpa aikya*, but only *viśiṣṭa aikya*, between the liberated soul and Brahman. The goal can be attained through the practice of *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* or by *prapatti*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita.

Poygai Ālvār brings out the greatness of the *Veṅkaṭa* hill in the last two lines of the hymn. Resort to a holy place like the *Veṅkaṭa* hill



is one way of practising *bhakti*. The *Veṅkaṭa* hill itself, says the Ājvār, can confer the highest good on the devotee.

## XLII

*The Donor and the Receiver*

“ You begged of Mahabali (three measures of) land; and as soon as the sparkling water (poured by him) filled your beautiful palm, did you not grow quickly (into the form of *Trivikrama*) and touch the gods remaining in the expansive *ākāśa* by your shoulders? Without despising the receiver, will any one despise the donor?”  
[ 79 ]

Reference is made in this hymn to God's incarnation as *Vāmana* and *Trivikrama*. It is with a view to help Indra that God incarnated as *Vāmana* and begged of Mahabali three measures of land. The entire universe of which God is the source and support belongs to Him. And so, God alone can be the donor. Forgetting this fact, Mahābali because of his ignorance and egoism claimed that he was the ruler of the world, and that the world belonged to him. He played the role of a donor and gave away anything which was asked by others. Incarnating as *Vāmana*, the Lord begged three measures of ground from Mahābali. Then, assuming the cosmic form of *Trivikrama*, He covered the entire universe in two measures; and when Mahabali offered his own head to be measured as the third one, the Lord placed His foot on his head and sent him down to the netherworld.

The Lord, the real donor, played the role of a receiver. Poygai Ājvār observes that people who do not know the real position despise the Lord for his appearance first as the short-statured *Vāmana* and for his assumption, soon after getting the offer of gift from Mahābali, of the cosmic form of *Trivikrama*. The ignorant do not pay attention to the wrongs committed by Mahābali who claimed as his own what did not belong to him. On the contrary, they blame the Lord as if He has cheated Mahābali, who managed to conceal his wrongs under the cloak of charity.

## XLIII

*Poygai Ājvār's Experience of God*

“ O the virtuous Lord who protected the people from the torrential rain of stones by holding aloft the moun-



tain as an umbrella ! Without going outside the threshold and also without getting into the interior of the house, you just now stationed yourself along with Śrī in the corridor (of the house) situated in the beautiful Tirukkovalūr liked by all. It is, indeed, marvellous.”  
[ 86 ]

This hymn contains the internal evidence for the experience of God which Poygai Ālvār had along with Būtattālvār and Peyālvār when they took shelter in the narrow dark corridor of the house of a sage at Tirukkovalūr.

Poygai Ālvār refers to the episode of Kṛṣṇa protecting the cow-herds and others against the torrential rain of stones by lifting up the *Govardhana* hill as an umbrella.

There is a difference between the experience which the cow-herds had when they witnessed the marvellous act of Kṛṣṇa lifting up the *Govardhana* hill and the experience which the first three Ālvārs had when they witnessed the divine presence in their midst. The cow-herds were convinced that Kṛṣṇa who lifted the hill must be divine. They, however, saw only Kṛṣṇa. But the Ālvārs were lucky enough to see Nārāyaṇa with Śrī. This is, indeed, a marvellous experience.

#### XLIV

##### *God-oriented Organs*

“When I think of anything (through the mind), it will be your feet. When I sing daily in praise of anything, it will be your glory. If I adorn my head (with any ornament), it will be the beautiful feet of the Lord who has the lustrous discus. If so, it does not matter whatever happens to me.” [ 88 ]

Poygai Ālvār feels happy that his mind, speech, and body are completely engrossed in the Lord.

#### XLV

##### *Everything Reveals God*

“The *pūvai* flower that blossoms even as it is seen and also the *kāyā* flower both of which grow in a land



suitable to them through their colour reveal to me clearly the beautiful colour of the Lord. (When I am thus fortunate), is there anyone comparable to me? The supreme Lord who can be compared only with Himself cannot be compared with me." [89]

A mystic that he is, Poygai Ālvār sees the Lord whose colour is black whenever he sees flowers such as *kāyā* and *pūvai* which are also black in colour. The two black flowers mentioned here by the Ālvār are by way of *upalakṣaṇa*. They stand for all black things. Whenever the Ālvār sees anything black, he sees the Lord; and he sees the Lord manifested in all black things and also everywhere. He is, indeed, fortunate in this regard. Is there anyone, the Ālvār asks, who is so lucky as he is? Is there anyone who can be compared with him in this regard? The answer is in the negative. It is not to the point to say that the supreme Lord can be compared with him. The Lord is unique; and He cannot be compared with anyone or with anything.

#### XLVI

##### *The Vātsalya of God*

"O the Lord of Lakṣmī, who has assumed the form of *ākāśa* and the fire, the ocean full of waves and the air, who is sweet like honey and milk (to the eternally free souls)! How could your stomach, from which once upon a time the world (after having been swallowed by you) came out, be filled with the butter that belonged to Yaśodā, the cow-herdess?" [92]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār calls attention to the *vātsalya* of the Lord towards His devotees.

The first line of the hymn refers to *līlāvibhūti* of the Lord. God is the source of the elements such as *ākāśa*, air, fire, etc., and the things of the world which have come out of the elements. The four elements mentioned in the first line of the hymn by Poygai Ālvār stand for everything in *līlāvibhūti*. The relation between the objects, sentient as well as insentient, which constitute *līlāvibhūti* and God must be understood, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, in terms of *śarīra-śarīri* relation, i.e. body-soul relation.

God, whom Poygai Ālvār compares to honey and milk in the second line of the hymn, is the object of enjoyment to the eternally



free souls. He is not merely honey and milk, but is *sarvarasa*, the quint-essence of everything, to the eternally free souls. So the second line of the hymn refers to *nityavibhūti* of the Lord. God is the Lord not only of *ubhaya-vibhūti*, but also of Śrī.

Though God owns Śrī as well as *ubhaya-vibhūti*, it appears as though there is fullness to the Lord only when He has access to the things of His devotees. The Lord swallowed the butter which Yaśodā made by churning the cream, in the same way as He swallowed the world at the time of dissolution. The Ālvār wonders how the Lord's stomach which accommodated the entire universe could be satisfied with a limited quantity of butter. There are two points which Poygai Ālvār wants to convey here. The first is that the world is not only created and supported by God, but is also dissolved in God. Secondly, the perfection of God is such that it includes concern and affection for the devotees.

## XLVII

### *Easy Way to the Goal*

“There is the tongue (the organ necessary for uttering the name of the Lord) in the mouth. There is the *mantra*, “*om namo nārāyaṇāya*”, to be repeated several times. There is the way to the highest goal from which there is no return. How, then, can one resort to bad ways?” [95]

It is easy, says Poygai Ālvār, to attain *mokṣa* or God-realization, for the means thereto is readily available. There is first of all the *mantra*, “*om namo nārāyaṇāya*”, which is to be uttered. This alone will not do. The appropriate organ necessary for reciting the *mantra* is also required. The Ālvār says that the tongue which is required for reciting the *mantra* is available. The tongue can do wonders, if only it is properly used. We do not have to search for it. It is there in the mouth, says the Ālvār in a pointed way. It should be used for giving our thanks to the Lord and for uttering the sacred *aṣṭākṣara-mantra*.

The state of *mokṣa* is eternal. There is no return to the state of bondage from *mokṣa*. *Bhakti* and *prapatti* are the ways to *mokṣa* which is the highest goal to be attained. When the means necessary for the attainment of the goal is available, how is it possible for one, asks the Ālvār, to go astray from the right path?



## XLVIII

*God Is the Controller*

“O my mind ! The red lotus-eyed Lord is the controller of merit and demerit. He is also the controller of this earth, the ocean full of waves, the air, and the *ākāśa* as also the *jīva* and other sentient beings different from these. Hold on to this idea unswervingly till the end.” [96]

In this hymn, Poygai Ālvār conveys the idea that God is the controller of everything, including the *jīva*.

A text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, ii, 13) says : “A person becomes good by good work, and bad by bad work.” The results of *karma*, good or bad, of a person determine his rebirth. God is the giver of fruits according to the merit and demerit of the *jīva*. He cannot be accused of partiality or cruelty on the ground that some are born poor, some others rich, that some are born as men and some others as animals, because the rebirth of a person, the things which he experiences in that life, etc., are determined by the *karma* which he has done. God dispenses according to the merit and demerit of the *jīva*. It does not follow from this that God is not independent. Consider the case of rain which helps different seeds to sprout, each according to its nature, its potentiality. Or, consider the case of a king who rewards his servants according to their action. No one will accuse the rain and the king of partiality in respect of their work. It cannot also be said that the king is not independent just because he takes into consideration the action done by his subordinates when he has to reward them appropriately. While the *karma*, good or bad, of the *jīva* determines its future, God is the operative cause which brings the merit and the demerit, of the *jīva* to fruition. This idea is also conveyed by another text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (IV, iv, 5): “As the *jīva* does and acts, so it becomes. By doing good, it becomes good, and by doing evil, it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts.”

Moreover, God is the controller of all the elements, from ether to earth, and the things constituted by these elements. He is also the controller of all sentient beings.

## XLIX

*Śiva and Viṣṇu in One Body*

“Though Śiva with a body shining like gold, with matted hair, and auspicious qualities, and Viṣṇu who



measured the universe appear in two different forms, one is ever in the body of the other." [98]

Poygai Ālvār lays emphasis in this hymn on the concept of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa. Earlier in hymns (5) and (74) he has given beautiful description of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. Though their appearances, functions, abodes, vehicles, weapons, etc., are different, they are the manifestations of one and the same ultimate reality. This idea is sought to be conveyed by the image of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, the forms of both Śiva and Viṣṇu appearing in the same image. Poygai Ālvār says that for both Śiva and Viṣṇu the body is one. He restates the same idea differently by saying that one is in the body of the other.

## L

### *God, the Indwelling Self*

"O helpful mind! God exists. The good Lord exists always (to protect us). He remains in the minds of those who think of Him. Know that the Lord who is on the (milky) ocean and also on the *Veṅkaṭa* hill is in my mind." [99]

God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. Poygai Ālvār assures us in this hymn that though God is too far away, He is also too near, because He dwells in the minds of those who think of Him.

Does God exist or not? Poygai Ālvār answers this question straightaway by declaring that God exists. Ordinarily no one doubts the existence of an empirical entity like a tree or a table. Empirical entities fall within the scope of our experience. We perceive them through one or more of our senses. We comprehend them through our mind. We denote them through words. But since Brahman or God is not an empirical entity, it cannot be comprehended by the mind and denoted by words. Hence the existence of God becomes problematic. Though one may try to prove the existence of God through reasoning, the nature of God can be known only through Scripture. There are *śruti* texts like "Brahman is real, knowledge, and infinite" which convey the knowledge of Brahman. God who is known through Scripture may be realized through intuition or mystic experience.



It is stated in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II, vi, 1) : " If anyone knows Brahman as non-existing, he himself becomes non-existent. If anyone knows that Brahman does exist, then they consider him as existing by virtue of that (knowledge). " This text may be interpreted in different ways. Brahman, the supreme Being, is no other than the inward Self of the individual. If it exists, the individual exists, and if it does not, the individual too does not exist. The *Taittirīya* text quoted above may be interpreted in another way also. God is the support and protector of the physical universe as well as the *jīva*. If Brahman or God is non-existent, the *jīva* too will be non-existent. There is yet another explanation. If a person thinks that Brahman or God is non-existent, he has no faith in the scheme of discipline comprising *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *prapatti*. Such a person is called unrighteous (*asan*) in this world. If, on the contrary, a person knows that Brahman exists, then he pursues the path of *karma*, *jñāna*, etc. And the wise speak of him as *santam*, i.e. as one who treads the righteous path.

Poygai Ālvār says that God who dwells on the milky ocean and who has also His abode on the sacred *Veṅkaṭa* hill is the indwelling spirit in the minds of those devotees who always meditate on Him. He echoes the teaching of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III, vii, 20) which says : " He who inhabits the mind and is within, whom the mind does not know, whose body is the mind, and who controls the mind from within, is the inner Ruler, your own immortal Self. "

## LI

### *Assurance and Attainment*

" If you keep within you, O my mind, the Lord who measured the world in one step, who destroyed the demon called Keśin, who wears the garland of cool, basil leaves, and who has performed marvellous deeds, then you can see the two feet of the Lord — one foot (through which the Lord measured the world) and the other foot, beautiful and red-coloured like a flower, by which he kicked the cart (i.e. the demon who in the form of a spirit animated a cart). " [100]

Poygai Ālvār offered the garland of hymns at the feet of the Lord and worshipped Him for the purpose of overcoming bondage. This is what is stated in the first hymn. His worship of God was fruitful. Through the grace of God, who is the way as well as the goal, he



attained *mokṣa* or God-realization. In several hymns he speaks of his experience of God. On the basis of his own authentic experience he now tells for the benefit of others in the concluding hymn that anyone who worships God and meditates on Him in the proper way will attain *mokṣa*.

The first two lines of the hymn explain the nature of the *puruṣārtha* to be attained, and the last two lines set forth the means thereto.

Poygai Ālvār speaks of the Lord as “*tāyavan*”, “*keśavan*”, and “*māyavan*”. God is “*oraḍiyil tāyavan*”, one who measured the world by one foot. The expression “*oraḍiyil*” is significant. Though it may be construed in the sense of “*oraḍiyāl*” (*i.e.* by one foot), it may also be taken as it is. The word “*tāyam*” means ownership. So, the expression “*oraḍiyil tāyavan*” means one who claims the ownership of the world which has taken refuge in one foot. Another explanation may also be given for the word “*tāyavan*”. The Lord revealed Himself as mother (*tāy*) by His quality of accessibility (*saṁlabhya*). Just as a mother would embrace her children ignoring their faults, even so the Lord by encompassing the world by one foot, played the role of a mother through His deeds of love and redemption. Keśava is an epithet of Kṛṣṇa. Keśin, a demon who assumed the form of a horse and troubled the cow-herds, was killed by Kṛṣṇa. The two words “*tāyavan*” and “*keśavan*” convey the idea that God plays the dual role of protecting the good and punishing the wicked. The term “*māyavan*” means one who has the power of *māyā*. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (IV, 10) speaks of the great Lord as *māyin*. It says: “Know then that *prakṛti* is *māyā*, and the wielder of *māyā* is the great Lord.” Moreover, the Lord who controls the *līlāvibhūti* and who has manifested Himself through many incarnations is a great wonder, beyond our understanding.

Reference is made in the first line to *Kṛṣṇāvatāra*. A demon who was commissioned by Kāṁsa to kill Kṛṣṇa assumed the form of a spirit and animated a cart for the purpose of crushing the infant Kṛṣṇa sleeping in a cradle. When Kṛṣṇa kicked the cart with one foot as if in sport, the cart broke into pieces, and the demon was killed. Poygai Ālvār says that one who constantly meditates on the Lord, who is endowed with the qualities of *saṁlabhya* (easy accessibility), *saṁśīlya* (goodness), and *vātsalya* (affection), will attain His feet, *i.e.* will attain *mokṣa*.



N. Veezhinathan

## THE LOCUS AND CONTENT OF MODAL IGNORANCE

An analysis of the perceptual cognition of the objects of the world such as pot and the like has led the Advaitins to admit the power of ignorance or *māyā* as the source of the world. Maṇḍana, for example, in his *Brahmasiddhi* maintains the view that perceptual cognition of objects is only illusory. We shall explain his argument in favour of this view.

After the rise of the knowledge of an object (say) pot, through the functioning of the sense of sight which is perception or *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*, there does not arise any doubt whether this is pot or not, or the contrary notion that this is not a pot. This means that the pot which is cognised through the sense of sight is cognised as different from everything else. That is to say, that pot is cognised as associated with difference from everything else. In other words, the cognition of pot cannot be explained without the cognition of the difference of pot from everything else.

Difference is invariably cognised along with its counter-correlate. That is, the perceptual cognition of difference is dependent upon the perceptual cognition of the counter-correlate of difference. In the present case, the objects of the world other than pot constitute the counter-correlate of difference. One, however, cannot have the perceptual cognition of all the objects of the world - the counter-correlate of difference, because some objects such as merit and the like, do not come within the range of perception, while some other objects are remote in space and time and thus cannot be perceived. The perceptual cognition of the counter-correlate of difference is thus impossible. Consequently, the perceptual cognition of difference which depends upon the perceptual cognition of the counter-correlate of difference is impossible. And in the absence of the perceptual cognition of difference, there cannot be the perceptual cognition of



pot, etc., as associated with difference. It is the very impossibility of the perception of objects such as pot and the like that led Maṇḍana to conclude that pot, etc., are presented erroneously.<sup>1</sup>

The erroneous cognition of an object like pot is occasional and hence its material cause must be referred to. The latter must have the same level of reality as pot, etc. And that cause is admitted to be *avidyā* or *māyā* or primal nescience.

According to the *Vivaraṇa* school, primal nescience is one.<sup>2</sup> This raises an important question whether this primal nescience itself can be considered as the material cause of the illusory appearances of shell as silver, rope as snake, etc. The prevalent view in Advaita is that primal nescience cannot be the material cause of the illusory appearances referred to above. If it were admitted to be so, then as illusory silver would be removed only by the removal of its cause, namely, primal nescience (according to the present view), and as primal nescience would be removed only by the direct knowledge of Brahman, illusory silver will be manifested till there arises the direct knowledge of Brahman. But it is not so. In ordinary experience we find that illusory appearances of shell-silver, etc., are removed by the direct knowledge of shell, etc. Hence something other than primal nescience must be admitted as the material cause of the illusory appearances referred to above. And that cause is modal ignorance, or *avasthājñāna* or *tūlājñāna* or *tūlāvidyā*. It is a derivative of primal nescience.<sup>3</sup>

The Bhāmatī school, on the other hand, admits primal nescience to be many.<sup>4</sup> The latter, however, does not constitute the transformative material cause of the world. The world is admitted to be the transfiguration of Brahman which is the content of primal nescience that is located in the individual soul.<sup>5</sup> Now it may be asked whether illusory silver also can be considered as the transfiguration of Brahman which is the content of primal nescience. It cannot be considered to be so; for, the illusory silver would cease to exist only when Brahman - its transfigurative material cause becomes free from its relation to primal nescience. And Brahman would remain so only when primal nescience is removed by the direct knowledge of Brahman. It comes to this: illusory silver would continue to appear till there arises the direct knowledge of Brahman. This is contrary to the experience of the removal of silver, etc., by the direct knowledge of shell, etc. Hence the Bhāmatī school also has to admit modal ignorance as the cause of illusory silver, etc.<sup>6</sup>

It must be noted here that modal ignorance is admitted not only to account for the illusory appearances of shell as silver, etc., but also



to account for the experiences and the corresponding worldly usages such as 'The pot is not manifest', 'The pot does not exist', and the like. It is held that modal ignorance conceals either the consciousness delimited by the object or the object itself directly and hence we have the experiences and usages such as 'The pot is not manifest', 'The pot does not exist', and the like. And when the modal ignorance is removed by the knowledge, that is, the mental state in the form 'This is pot', then we have the experience and the usage in the form 'The pot exists', 'The pot is manifest', etc.

So far we have set forth the need for admitting modal ignorance. We shall now proceed to discuss the locus and content of modal ignorance.

It is well-known that the locus of primal nescience is pure consciousness according to the Vivaraṇa school and individual soul according to the Bhāmatī school. The content of primal nescience, however, is pure consciousness according to both the schools.<sup>7</sup> It is *generally* held that the locus of modal ignorance which is a derivative of primal nescience is the consciousness delimited by an object (say) pot according to the Vivaraṇa school, and the individual soul according to the Bhāmatī school. And, the content of modal ignorance, according to both the schools, is consciousness delimited by an object.<sup>8</sup>

We shall first deal with the locus of modal ignorance. The discussion regarding this is closely related to the discussion regarding the annihilating factor of modal ignorance. Modal ignorance is admitted to be many and beginningless by both the Vivaraṇa and the Bhāmatī school. A modal ignorance conditioning an object (say) pot is removed by the cognition of pot. It is now asked whether the cognition of pot that arises first removes only one modal ignorance or all modal ignorances. If it is held that only one modal ignorance is removed by knowledge and not all ignorances, then it comes to this that other modal ignorances continue to exist and veil the object and so there cannot be the manifestation of the object even after the rise of the knowledge of pot. Since there is the manifestation of the pot after the rise of the knowledge of pot, it must be admitted that all modal ignorances are removed by the knowledge of pot that arises first. The result of this argument is that the knowledge of pot which would arise subsequently would have no ignorance to remove and so the well-known rule that knowledge removes ignorance lacks correspondence.<sup>9</sup>

The objection contained in the foregoing paragraph may be answered by saying that when one cognition arises, it removes one



ignorance and at the same time it subjugates other ignorances. Subjugation here consists in counteracting the concealing power of modal ignorances. This can be explained on the analogy of the fall of a thunder and the medicine that cures fever of a dangerous kind. The thunder falls on someone's head, kills him and drives away others too. The medicine cures not only the fever of a dangerous kind but also the other ailments in the body. In the same manner, the cognition of an object that arises first destroys one ignorance, and counteracts the concealing power of other ignorances as long as it lasts. When the cognition ceases to exist, one among the subjugated modal ignorances conceals the object. And this modal ignorance is removed by another cognition of the object. Thus is explained the manifestation of an object.<sup>10</sup>

It follows from the above discussion that the cognition of pot that arises first necessarily removes one modal ignorance and subjugates other modal ignorances. Now it is argued that this rule does not apply in the case of the second and subsequent cognitions of a continuous stream of cognition (*dhārāvāhika-jñāna*) of an object. The latter, as is well-known, consists of several cognitions. The first cognition removes one modal ignorance and subjugates all the other modal ignorances. But the second and the subsequent cognitions do not have any purpose to serve, as the purpose that would be served, namely, removal of one modal ignorance and subjugation of other modal ignorances has already been effected by the first cognition. Hence the rule that a cognition must remove one modal ignorance and subjugate other modal ignorances lacks correspondence in the case of the second and subsequent cognitions of a continuous stream of cognition.<sup>11</sup>

The above objection is answered by saying that in a continuous stream of cognition, the first cognition alone is valid and not the second and the subsequent cognitions. A valid cognition is defined as that which makes known an object that is unknown hitherto, by removing the modal ignorance. When viewed in the light of this definition, the first cognition alone is valid, because it alone, by removing the modal ignorance, makes known the object that is unknown hitherto. The second and the subsequent cognitions refer to the object, but the object is not unknown, as it is made known by the first cognition itself. Hence the second and subsequent cognitions are not valid. It is admitted that only valid cognition removes modal ignorance. Since the second and subsequent cognitions are not valid, there is no harm even if they do not remove modal ignorance. It comes to this: valid cognition alone removes ignorance.<sup>12</sup>



The above conclusion can, however, be objected on the ground that mediate cognition is valid, but it does not remove the modal ignorance present in the consciousness delimited by the object, as it does not go out through sense organs to the place where the object is located. It follows that the invariable rule that valid cognition removes ignorance lacks correspondence in the case of mediate cognition which is valid.<sup>13</sup>

Some Advaitins answer the above objection by admitting two kinds of modal ignorance. Of these, one is present in the consciousness delimited by the object (say) rope and it serves as the material cause of the illusory presentation of the rope as snake. The other kind of ignorance is located in the consciousness delimited by or reflected in the mind, namely, the individual soul.<sup>14</sup>

Having set forth the distinction between two kinds of ignorance, they proceed to explain the necessity for maintaining them. If it were admitted that modal ignorance is present only in the individual soul, then it cannot have any relation with the consciousness delimited by rope and hence it cannot serve as the material cause of the illusory presentation of rope as snake. If, on the other hand, it were admitted that the modal ignorance is located only in the consciousness delimited by the object, then it cannot have any relation with the witness-self and hence the experience 'I do not know this' which involves reference to the relation of the witness-self to the modal ignorance cannot be explained. Hence to account for the illusory presentation of rope as snake we have to admit that one kind of modal ignorance is present in the consciousness delimited by the object. And in order to account for the manifestation of modal ignorance by the witness-self in the form 'I do not know this' we have to maintain another kind of modal ignorance as present in the individual soul.

Now the mediate cognition removes only the modal ignorance that is located in the individual soul and not the one that is present in the consciousness delimited by the object. It is because the modal ignorance present in the consciousness delimited by the object would be removed by the mental state only when the latter is in contact with the consciousness delimited by the object. Since the mental state that is mediate in character does not go out through the sense organs to the place where the object is located, it is not in contact with the consciousness delimited by the object; and, hence it does not remove it. It, however, removes the modal ignorance which is present in the individual soul.<sup>15</sup>

Advaitins next proceed to explain the above position by citing an example which is as follows: in respect of a tree at a distance one gets



the mediate cognition of a particular size from the testimony of a reliable person. This means that the mediate cognition here removes the ignorance present in the person regarding the size of the tree. But the person sees the projection of a size contrary to the one he has known from a reliable person. This shows that the mediate cognition has not removed the modal ignorance present in the consciousness delimited by the tree. If the mediate cognition could remove the latter, then there would not be the projection of a size contrary to the one known from a reliable person. It follows from this that the mediate cognition removes the ignorance present in the individual soul, although it does not remove the ignorance present in the consciousness delimited by the object. Hence the rule that mediate cognition removes ignorance holds good.<sup>16</sup>

The followers of the Bhāmatī school would argue that the rule that valid knowledge removes ignorance can be held to be sound even without admitting two kinds of ignorance, one as present in the consciousness delimited by the object and another as present in the individual soul.<sup>17</sup>

It might be said that the existence of ignorance which is present in the consciousness delimited by the object and which is different from the ignorance that is located in the individual soul has been proved on two grounds:

1. the ignorance present in the individual soul cannot serve as the material cause of illusory silver which arises over and above the shell; and,

2. if the ignorance present in the individual soul serves as the material cause of error, then it must be admitted that it serves as the material cause of error that consists in the perception of a size contrary to the correct one of a tree at a distance. The result of this argument is that ignorance - the material cause, since it is located in the individual soul, would be removed by the mediate cognition regarding the correct size of the tree and hence there is no possibility of the projection of a contrary size after the rise of a mediate cognition. There is, however, the projection of a contrary size which could be explained only by admitting a different kind of modal ignorance which is present in the object and which is not removable by the mediate cognition.

The two grounds set forth above would be rejected by the followers of the Bhāmatī school. It is argued that, only according to the view that illusory silver is the transformation of modal ignorance, it is



to be admitted that one kind of modal ignorance is present in the consciousness delimited by the object and it serves as the material cause of the illusory silver. But it is not so. The phenomenal world is the transfiguration of Brahman which is the content of primal ignorance that is present in the individual soul. In the same way, silver also is the transfiguration of Brahman which, being conditioned by the shell, is the content of modal ignorance present in the individual soul. Hence it is not necessary to maintain another kind of modal ignorance as present in the consciousness delimited by the object.<sup>18</sup>

The second ground too does not suggest the necessity for admitting two kinds of ignorance. We can explain the projection of a contrary size of a tree after the rise of the mediate cognition of the correct size of the tree by admitting only one kind of modal ignorance that is present in the individual soul. It can be said that the mediate cognition of the correct size of the tree removes only a part of the modal ignorance present in the individual soul and another part of it continues to exist giving rise to the appearance of a size contrary to the one known mediately. This is admitted on the basis of the experience of the removal of the false notion regarding the correct size of the tree and also of the appearance of a size contrary to the one known mediately. And the appearance of a size contrary to the one known mediately is due to the defect, namely, distance. The implication of this argument is that mediate cognition although valid cannot remove modal ignorance present in the individual soul if it is associated with any impediment. The rule, therefore, would be this: valid cognition would remove modal ignorance only when it is free from all impediments. Thus, according to the Bhāmātī school, the locus of modal ignorance is the individual soul.<sup>19</sup>

Now the followers of the Vivaraṇa school would argue that on the analogy of pot which is the transformation of a lump of clay, silver that appears on a shell also must be admitted to be the transformation of some principle. And that principle is modal ignorance. The latter, in order that it may serve as the material cause of shell-silver, must be present in the consciousness delimited by shell, and not in the individual soul.<sup>20</sup>

It might be objected that since modal ignorance, according to the above view, is present in the consciousness delimited by the object, it cannot have any relation to the witness-self, and hence the experience 'I do not know this (say) shell or pot' which involves reference to the relation of the witness-self to the modal ignorance cannot be explained. Further, since modal ignorance is located in the con-

consciousness delimited by the object, and since mediate cognition relating to the object, does not go through the sense organs to the place where the object is located, the latter cannot remove the former.<sup>2 1</sup>

The above two objections are answered thus :

1. The primal nescience and modal ignorances are non-different. And, since the primal nescience is always related to the witness-self, its modes, namely, modal ignorances also are related to the witness-self. Hence there is the experience 'I do not know this' which involves reference to the relation between witness-self and the modal ignorance.

2. The second objection that ignorance cannot be removed by mediate cognition is also not sound; for, it is admitted that only immediate cognition which is free from all impediments removes the modal ignorance.

It would be clear from the foregoing discussion that the locus of modal ignorance is the individual soul according to the Bhāmatī school and the consciousness delimited by objects according to the Vivaraṇa school. So far the discussion regarding the locus of modal ignorance. We shall now deal with the content of modal ignorance.

The discussion regarding the content of modal ignorance centres around the discussion regarding the annihilating factor of primal nescience or *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is removed by the direct knowledge of Brahman. The latter is not pure consciousness or Brahman, but is only pure consciousness reflected in the mental state arising from the major texts of the Upaniṣads or mind.<sup>2 3</sup> It is also viewed as the mental state inspired by the reflection of Brahman in it.<sup>2 4</sup>

The knowledge of Brahman removes *avidyā* because their content is the same, namely, pure consciousness. Now it is argued that the knowledge of pot also could remove *avidyā* because it has also for its content the pure consciousness. This argument is set forth in a syllogistic form: 'the knowledge of pot removes *avidyā*, because it has pure consciousness as its content, like the knowledge of Brahman.'<sup>2 5</sup>

The above view that the content of the knowledge of pot is pure consciousness is explained on the following ground: in ordinary experience it is found that the knowledge of pot removes modal ignorance relating to pot. The modal ignorance, it is held by both the Bhāmatī and the Vivaraṇa school, has consciousness delimited by pot as its content. Since knowledge of pot removes modal ignorance which has consciousness delimited by the pot as its content, and since knowledge



and ignorance to be opposed, their content must be the same, the content of the knowledge of pot also is consciousness delimited by pot.

It must be noted here that in the complex factor, that is, the consciousness delimited by pot, the limiting adjunct, namely, pot is posited (*kalpita*); and, what is delimited is of the nature of non-positing (*akalpita*) consciousness. The content of modal ignorance is only the non-positing consciousness and not the limiting adjunct-pot, as only self-luminous consciousness could be the content of ignorance. The result of this view is that the content of the knowledge of pot which removes ignorance must also be self-luminous consciousness which is non-positing. The point that is of importance here is that the non-positing consciousness is identical with or non-different from pure consciousness, that is, Brahman. The content of the knowledge of pot is thus pure consciousness or Brahman. Hence it is argued that it could remove *avidyā* whose content also is pure consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

The above contention, however, is wrong. The content of the knowledge of pot is only pot and not consciousness. Hence there arises no question of the removal of *avidyā* by the knowledge of pot. The modal ignorance present in the consciousness delimited by pot conceals the consciousness and consequently there results the concealment of pot. This means that pot becomes the content of empirical usages such as 'The pot does not exist,' 'The pot is not manifest', etc. Thus pot is indirectly the content of modal ignorance although it is not directly the content of the latter. And, for knowledge to be opposed to ignorance, it is enough if ignorance has for its content the content of knowledge either directly or indirectly. In the present case, the modal ignorance has for its content - pot, indirectly. And pot is the content of knowledge of pot. Hence there is the removal of modal ignorance by the knowledge of pot.

The point that is to be noted here is that the content of the knowledge of pot is pot only and not consciousness and hence there arises no question of the removal of *avidyā* by it.<sup>27</sup>

So far it has been said that modal ignorance has pot for its content indirectly and knowledge of pot has for its content pot, and the latter removes the former. Since the content of the knowledge of pot is pot only and not consciousness, it cannot remove *avidyā*.

Now it is argued that inert object cannot be the content of primal nescience only; it could very well be the content of modal ignorance directly. And this modal ignorance is removed by knowledge which also has inert object for its content.<sup>28</sup>



The above view that the modal ignorance has for its content directly the inert object must be preferred to the earlier view that modal ignorance has only the consciousness delimited by the inert object for its content. The following arguments can be set forth in favour of this position: if it is admitted that modal ignorance has for its content the consciousness delimited by the object (say) sandal wood, then it means that it conceals the consciousness delimited by the sandal wood. In that case, by the mental state which arises through the functioning of the sense of sight, the modal ignorance would be removed and the consciousness would be manifested. And the manifested consciousness would manifest not only the colour and the configuration of the sandal wood but also its smell. For, like colour and configuration, the smell also is superimposed on the consciousness delimited by the sandal wood.<sup>29</sup>

It might be said that by the mental state which arises through the functioning of the sense of sight what is manifested is only the consciousness delimited by the colour and the configuration of the sandal wood. Hence there is the manifestation of the colour and the configuration of sandal wood only. Since there is the absence of the mental state of the nature of smell, there is the non-manifestation of the consciousness delimited by smell and hence there is non-manifestation or absence of direct knowledge of smell. It follows from this that the consciousness is delimited in one way by the smell of the sandal wood, in another way by its colour, and in a third way, by its configuration.<sup>30</sup>

It is argued that the above contention would hold good if qualities like smell, colour, etc., exist in the specified parts of sandal wood, and not in the whole of it. But qualities pervade the entire substance and hence there is no valid reason to suppose that the consciousness becomes different on account of the different properties of the substance conditioning it.<sup>31</sup>

It might be argued that by the mental state which arises through the functioning of sense of sight, the consciousness delimited by the sandal wood is manifested; and, the smell of sandal wood also, like the colour and the configuration of the sandal wood, is in direct contact with the manifested consciousness. But smell is not manifested or is not the object of direct knowledge because there is the absence of the mental state in the form of smell. The implication of this argument is that the criterion for the manifestation of an object is that that object must be in direct contact with the manifested consciousness which must be associated with the mental state in the form of that object.<sup>32</sup>



The above contention is answered thus: in order that an object may become manifested, what is required is the direct contact of that object with the manifested consciousness. It is not necessary that that consciousness must be associated with the mental state in the form of that object. In the case of direct knowledge of pleasure, etc., we have only the direct contact of pleasure, etc., with the witness-self which is always manifested. And, witness-self is not associated with the mental state in the form of pleasure, etc. Since pleasure, etc., are only mental states, we do not admit another mental state in the form of pleasure, etc. Hence there is no question of witness-self being associated with the mental state in the form of pleasure, etc. The matter that is of importance here is that without being associated with the mental state in the form of pleasure, etc., the witness-self - the consciousness which is always manifested - manifests pleasure, etc. In the same manner, without being associated with the mental state in the form of smell, the manifested consciousness will manifest smell also.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up this part of the discussion: if modal ignorance were admitted to be having the consciousness delimited by the object - sandal wood, then, when the modal ignorance is removed by the mental state which arises through the functioning of the sense of sight, there will be the manifestation of the smell of the sandal wood too along with the colour and the configuration of the sandal wood.

The above difficulty would not arise if we admit that inert object is directly the content of modal ignorance. It is argued that just as we admit many modal ignorances as concealing the nature of an object (say) pot from different cognizers, or from one cognizer at different times, so also we have to admit many modal ignorances as concealing respectively the colour, the configuration, the taste, the smell, etc. of a particular object. It follows from this that when there arises the mental state through the functioning of the sense of sight there is the removal of that modal ignorance only which conceals the colour of an object. Consequently there results the manifestation of non-difference between the colour and the consciousness delimited by colour. Thus there is the manifestation or direct knowledge of colour. But since the modal ignorance concealing smell is not removed by the above mental state, there is not the manifestation of non-difference between smell and the consciousness delimited by smell. Consequently there is no manifestation or direct knowledge of smell when there arises a mental state through the functioning of the sense of sight.<sup>34</sup>

It follows that the content of modal ignorance is the object itself. The cognition also has the object as its content. Thus since know

ledge and ignorance have the same object as their content, the former removes the latter. And, since the content of modal ignorance is not the consciousness delimited by the object (say) pot, the content of cognition also need not be admitted to be consciousness. Hence the objection that since the mental state in the form of pot has consciousness for its content, it could very well remove primal nescience too whose content also is consciousness does not arise.<sup>95</sup>

The foregoing discussion can be summed up by saying that the locus of modal ignorance is the individual soul according to the Bhāmatī school and the consciousness delimited by object according to the Vivaraṇa school. But according to both the schools, its content is the mere object and not the consciousness delimited by the object.

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