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# SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

No. 9

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ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE  
78th BIRTHDAY OF SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO PATHAMANDIR  
CALCUTTA

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# *Savitri*

## BOOK VI

### THE BOOK OF FATE

#### CANTO I

#### THE WORD OF FATE

**I**N silent bounds bordering the mortal's plane  
Crossing a wide expanse of brilliant peace  
Narad the heavenly sage from Paradise  
Came chanting through the large and lustrous air.  
Attracted by the golden summer-earth  
That lay beneath him like a glowing bowl  
Tilted upon a table of the Gods,  
Turning as if moved round by an unseen hand  
To catch the warmth and blaze of a small sun,  
He passed from the immortals' happy paths  
To a world of toil and quest and grief and hope,  
To these rooms of a see-saw game of death and life.  
Across an intangible border of soul-space  
He passed from Mind into material things  
Amid the inventions of the inconscient Self  
And the workings of a blind somnambulist Force.  
Below him circling burned the myriad suns:  
He bore the ripples of the etheric sea;  
A primal Air brought the first joy of touch,  
Contracting and expanding this huge world

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

In its formidable circuit through the Void;  
He who has conquered the immortals' seats,  
Came down to men on earth the Man divine.  
As might a lightning streak, a glory fell  
Nearing until the rapt eyes of the sage  
Looked out from luminous cloud and strangely limned  
His face, a beautiful mask of antique joy,  
Appearing in light descended where arose  
King Aswapathy's palace to the winds  
In Madra, flowering up in delicate stone.  
There welcomed him the sage and thoughtful king,  
At his side a creature beautiful, passionate, wise  
Aspiring like a sacrificial flame,  
Skyward from its earth-seat through luminous air,  
Queen-browed, the human mother of Savitri.  
There for an hour untouched by the earth's siege  
They ceased from common life and care and sat  
Inclining to the high and rhythmic voice,  
While in his measured chant the heavenly seer  
Spoke of the toils of men and what the gods  
Strive for on earth, and joy that throbs behind  
The marvel and the mystery of pain.  
He sang to them of the lotus-heart of love  
With all its thousand luminous buds of truth,  
Which quivering sleeps veiled by apparent things.  
It trembles at each touch, it strives to wake  
And one day it shall hear a blissful voice  
And in the garden of the Spouse shall bloom  
When she is seized by her discovered lord.  
A mighty shuddering coil of ecstasy  
Crept through the deep heart of the universe.  
Out of her Matter's stupor, her mind's dreams,  
She woke, she looked upon God's unveiled face.  
Even as he sang and rapture stole through earth-time  
And caught the heavens, came with a call of hooves,  
As of her swift heart hastening, Savitri;  
Her radiant tread glimmered across the floor.  
A happy wonder in her fathomless gaze,  
Changed by the halo of her love she came;  
Her eyes rich with a shining mist of joy

## SAVITRI

As one who comes from a heavenly embassy  
Discharging the proud mission of her heart,  
One carrying the sanction of the gods  
To her love and its luminous eternity  
She stood before her mighty father's throne  
And, eager for beauty on discovered earth  
Transformed and new in her heart's miracle-light,  
Saw like a rose of marvel, worshipping,  
The fiery sweetness of the son of Heaven.  
He flung on her his vast immortal look;  
His inner gaze surrounded her with its light  
And reining back knowledge from his immortal lips  
He cried to her, "Who is this that comes, the bride,  
The flame-born, and round her illumined head  
Pouring their lights her hymeneal pomps  
Move flashing about her ? From what green glimmer of glades  
Retreating into dewy silences  
Or half-seen verge of waters moon-betrayed  
Bringst thou this glory of enchanted eyes ?  
Earth has gold-hued expanses, shadowy hills  
That cowl their dreaming phantom heads in night,  
And guarded in a cloistral joy of woods,  
Screened banks sink down into felicity  
Seized by the curved incessant yearning hands  
And ripple-passion of the up-gazing stream:  
Amid cool-lipped murmurs of its pure embrace  
They lose their souls on beds of trembling reeds.  
And all these are mysterious presences  
In which some spirit's immortal bliss is felt,  
And they betray the earth-born heart to joy.  
There hast thou paused, and marvelling borne eyes  
Unknown, or heard a voice that forced thy life  
To strain its rapture through thy listening soul ?  
Or, if my thought could trust this shimmering gaze,  
It would say: thou hast not drunk from an earthly cup,  
But stepping through azure curtains of the morn  
Thou wast surrounded on a magic verge  
In brighter countries than man's eyes can bear.  
Assailed by trooping voices of delight  
And seized mid a sunlit glamour of the boughs

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

In faery woods, led down the gleaming slopes  
Of Gundhamadan where the Apsaras roam,  
Thy limbs have shared the sports which none has seen,  
And in god-haunts thy human footsteps strayed,  
Thy mortal bosom quivered with god-speech  
And thy soul answered to a Word unknown.  
What feet of gods, what ravishing flutes of heaven  
Have thrilled high melodies round, from near and far  
Approaching through the soft and revelling air,  
Which still surprised thou hearest ? They have fed  
Thy silence on some red strange-ecstasied fruit  
And thou hast trod the dim moon-peaks of bliss.  
Reveal, O winged with light, whence thou hast flown  
Hastening bright-hued through the green-tangled earth,  
Thy body rhythmical with the spring-bird's call.  
The empty roses of thy hands are filled  
Only with their own beauty and the thrill  
Of a remembered clasp, and in thee glows  
A heavenly jar, thy firm deep-honied heart,  
New-brimming with a sweet and nectarous wine.  
Thou hast not spoken with the kings of pain.  
Life's perilous music rings yet to thy ear  
Far-melodied, rapid, grand, a Centaur's song,  
Or soft as water plashing mid the hills,  
Or mighty as a great chant of many winds.  
Moon-bright thou livest in thy inner bliss.  
Thou comest like a silver deer through groves  
Of coral flowers and buds of glowing dreams,  
Or fleest like a wind-goddess through leaves,  
Or roamest, O ruby-eyed and snow-winged dove,  
Flitting through thickets of thy pure desires  
In the unwounded beauty of thy soul.  
These things are only images to thy earth,  
But truest truth of that which in thee sleeps.  
For such is thy spirit, a sister of the gods,  
Thy earthly body lovely to the eyes,  
And thou art kin in joy to heaven's sons.  
O thou who hast come to this great perilous world  
Now only seen through the splendour of thy dreams,  
Where hardly love and beauty can live safe,

## SAVITRI

Thyself a being dangerously great,  
A soul alone in a golden house of thought  
Has lived walled in by the safety of thy dreams.  
On heights of happiness leaving doom asleep  
Who hunts unseen the unconscious lives of men,  
If thy heart could live locked in the ideal's gold,  
As high, as happy might thy waking be!  
If for all time doom could be left to sleep!"

He spoke but held his knowledge back from words.  
As a cloud plays with lightning's vivid laugh,  
But still holds back the thunder in its heart,  
Only he let bright images escape.  
His speech like glimmering music veiled his thoughts;  
Pitiful to mortals, only to them it spoke,  
As a wind flatters the bright summer air,  
Of living beauty and of present bliss:  
He hid in his all-knowing mind the rest.  
To those who hearkened to his celestial voice,  
The veil heaven's pity throws on future pain  
The Immortals' sanction seemed of endless joy.  
But Aswapathy answered to the seer;  
His listening mind had marked the dubious close,  
An ominous shadow felt behind the words,  
But calm like one who ever sits facing Fate  
Here mid the dangerous contours of earth's life,  
He answered covert thought with guarded speech:  
"O deathless sage who knowest all things here,  
If I could read by the ray of my own wish  
Through the carved shield of symbol images  
Which thou hast thrown before thy heavenly mind  
I might see the steps of a young godlike life  
Happily beginning luminous-eyed on earth;  
Between the Unknowable and the Unseen  
Born on the borders of two wonder-worlds,  
It flames out symbols of the Infinite  
And lives in a great light of inner suns.  
For it has read and broken the hidden seals;  
It has drunk of the Immortal's wells of joy,  
It has looked across the jewel bars of heaven,  
It has entered the aspiring Secrecy,

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

It sees beyond terrestrial common things  
And communes with the Powers that build the worlds,  
Till through the shining gates and mystic streets  
Of the city of lapis lazuli and pearl  
Proud deeds step forth a rank and march of gods.  
Although in pauses of our human lives  
Earth keeps for man some short and perfect hours  
When the unconscious tread of Time can seem  
The eternal moment which the deathless live,  
Yet rare that touch upon the mortal's world:  
Hardly a soul and body here are born  
In the fierce difficult movement of the stars,  
Whose life can keep the paradisaal note,  
Its rhythm repeat the many-toned melody  
Tirelessly throbbing through the rapturous air  
Caught in the song that sways the Apsara's limbs  
When she floats gleaming like a cloud of light,  
A wave of joy on heaven's moon-stone floor.  
Behold this image cast by light and love,  
A stanza of the ardour of the gods  
Perfectly rhymed, a pillared ripple of gold!  
Her body like a brimmed pitcher of delight  
Shaped in a splendour of gold-coloured bronze  
As if to seize earth's truth of hidden bliss.  
Dream-made illumined mirrors are her eyes  
Draped subtly in a slumberous fringe of jet,  
Retaining heaven's reflections in their depths.  
Even as her body, such is she within,  
Heaven's lustrous mornings gloriously recur,  
Like drops of fire upon a silver page,  
In her young spirit yet untouched with tears.  
All beautiful things eternal seem and new  
To virgin wonder in her crystal soul.  
The unchanging blue reveals its spacious thought;  
Marvellous the moon floats on through wondering skies;  
Earth's flowers spring up and laugh at time and death;  
The charmed mutations of the enchanter life  
Race like bright children past the smiling hours.  
If but this joy of life could last, nor pain  
Throw its bronze note into her rhythm'd days!

## SAVITRI

Behold her, singer with the prescient gaze,  
And let thy blessing chant that this fair child  
Shall pour the nectar of a sorrowless life  
Around her from her lucid heart of love,  
Heal with her bliss the tired breast of earth  
And cast like a happy snare felicity.  
As grows the great and golden bounteous tree  
Flowering by Alacananda's murmuring waves,  
Where with enamoured speed the waters run  
Lisping and babbling to the splendour of morn  
And cling with lyric laughter round the knees  
Of heaven's daughters dripping magic rain  
Pearl-bright from moon-gold limbs and cloudy hair,  
So are her dawns like jewelled leaves of light.  
So casts she her felicity on men.  
A flame of radiant happiness she was born,  
And surely will that flame set earth alight:  
Doom surely will see her pass and say no word,  
But too often here the careless Mother leaves  
Her chosen in the envious hands of Fate:  
The harp of God falls mute, its call to bliss  
Discouraged fails mid earth's unhappy sounds;  
The strings of the siren Ecstasy cry not here  
Or sooner silenced in the human heart.  
Of sorrow's songs we have enough: bid once  
Her glad and griefless days ring heaven here.  
Or must fire always test the great of soul?  
Along the dreadful causeway of the gods  
Armoured with love and faith and sacred joy,  
A traveller to the Eternal's house  
Once let unwounded pass a mortal life."  
But Narad answered not; silent he sat,  
Knowing that words are vain and Fate is lord.  
He looked into the unseen with seeing eyes,  
Then, dallying with the mortal's ignorance  
Like one who knows not, questioning, he cried:  
"On what high mission went her hastening wheels?  
Whence came she with this glory in her heart  
And Paradise made visible in her eyes?  
What sudden God has met, what face supreme?"

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

To whom the king, "The red asoca watched  
Her going forth which now sees her return.  
Arisen into an air of flaming dawn  
Like a bright bird tired of her lonely branch  
To find her own lord, since to her on earth  
He came not yet, this sweetness wandered forth  
Cleaving her way with the beat of her rapid wings.  
Led by a distant call her vague swift flight  
Threaded the summer morns and sunlit lands.  
The happy rest her burdened lashes keep  
And these charmed guardian lips hold treasured still.  
Virgin who comest perfected by joy,  
Reveal the name thy sudden heart beats learned.  
Whom hast thou chosen kingliest among men?"

And Savitri answered with her still calm voice  
As one who speaks beneath the eyes of Fate:  
"Father and king, I have carried out thy will,  
One whom I sought I found in distant lands;  
I have obeyed my heart, I have heard its call.  
On the borders of a dreaming wilderness  
Mid Shalwa's giant hills and brooding woods,  
In his thatched hermitage Dyumathsena dwells,  
Blind, exiled, outcast, once a mighty king.  
The son of Dyumathsena, Satyavan  
I have met on the wild forest's lonely verge.  
My father, I have chosen. This is done."  
Astonished, all sat silent for a space.

Then Aswapathy looked within and saw  
A heavy shadow float above the name  
Chased by a sudden and stupendous light;  
He looked into his daughter's eyes and spoke:  
"Well hast thou done and I approve thy choice.  
If this is all, then all is surely well;  
If there is more, then all can still be well.  
Whether it seem good or evil to men's eyes,  
Only for good the secret Will can work.  
Our destiny is written in double terms:  
Through Nature's contraries we draw near God;  
Out of the darkness we still grow to light.  
Death is our road to immortality.

## SAVITRI

'Cry woe, cry woe' the world's lost voices wail,  
Yet conquers the eternal Good at last."  
Then might the sage have spoken, but the king  
In haste broke out and stayed the dangerous word:  
"O singer of ultimate ecstasy,  
Lend not a dangerous vision to the blind,  
Because by native right thou hast seen clear.  
Impose not on the mortal's tremulous breast  
The dire ordeal that foreknowledge brings;  
Demand not now the godhead in our acts.  
Here are not happy peaks the heaven-nymphs roam,  
Or Coilas or Vaicountha's starry stair,  
Abrupt jagged hills only the mighty climb  
Are here where few dare even think to rise;  
Far voices call down from the dizzy rocks,  
Chill, slippery, precipitous are the paths.  
Too hard the gods are with man's fragile race  
In their large heavens they dwell exempt from Fate  
And they forget the wounded feet of man,  
His limbs that faint beneath the whips of grief,  
His heart that hears the tread of time and death,  
The future's road is hid from mortal sight:  
He moves towards a veiled and secret face.  
To light one step in front is all his hope  
And only for a little strength he asks  
To meet the riddle of his shrouded fate.  
Awaited by a vague and half-seen force,  
Aware of danger to his uncertain hours  
He guards his flickering yearnings from her breath;  
He feels not when the dreadful fingers close  
Around him the grasp none can elude.  
If thou canst loose her grip then only speak,  
Perhaps from the iron snare there is escape:  
Our mind perhaps deceives us with its words  
And gives the name of doom to our own choice;  
Perhaps the blindness of our will is Fate."  
He said and Narad answered not the king.  
But now the queen alarmed lifted her voice:  
"O seer, thy bright arrival has been timed  
To this high moment of a happy life.

## ŚRĪ AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

Then let the speech benign of griefless spheres  
Confirm this blithe conjunction of two stars  
And sanction joy with thy celestial voice.  
Here drag not in the peril of our thoughts,  
Let not our words create the doom they fear.  
Here is no cause for dread, no chance for grief  
To raise her ominous head and stare at love:  
A single spirit in a multitude,  
Happy is Satyavan mid earthly men  
Whom Savitri has chosen for her mate,  
And fortunate the forest hermitage  
Where leaving her palace and riches and a throne  
My Savitri will dwell and bring in heaven.  
Then let thy blessing put the immortals' seal  
On these bright lives' unstained felicity  
Pushing the ominous Shadow from their days.  
Too heavy falls a Shadow on man's heart;  
It dares not be too happy upon earth.  
It dreads the blow dogging too vivid joys,  
A lash unseen in Fate's extended hand,  
The danger lurking in fortune's proud extremes,  
An irony in life's indulgent smile  
And tremble at the laughter of the gods.  
Or if crouches unseen a panther doom,  
If wings of Evil brood above that house,  
Then also speak, that we may turn aside  
And rescue our lives from hazard of wayside doom  
And chance entanglement of an alien fate."  
And Narad slowly answered to the queen:  
"What help is in prevision to the driven?  
Safe doors cry opening near, the doomed pass on.  
A future knowledge is an added pain,  
A torturing burden and a fruitless light  
On the enormous scene that Fate has built.  
The eternal poet, universal Mind,  
Has paged each line of his imperial act;  
Invisible the giant actors tread  
And man lives like some secret player's mask.  
He knows not even what his lips shall speak.  
For a mysterious Power compels his steps

## SAVITRI

And life is stronger than his trembling soul.  
None can refuse what the stark Force demands,  
Her eyes are fixed upon her mighty aim;  
No cry or prayer can turn her from her path,  
She has leaped an arrow from the bow of God.”  
His words were theirs who live unforced to grieve  
And help by calm the swaying wheels of life  
And the long restlessness of transient things  
And the trouble and passion of the unquiet world.  
As though her own bosom were pierced the mother saw  
The ancient human sentence strike her child,  
Her sweetness that deserved another fate  
Only a larger measure given of tears.  
Aspiring to the nature of the gods,  
A mind proof-armoured mailed in mighty thoughts,  
A will entire couchant behind wisdom’s shield,  
Though to still heavens of knowledge she had risen,  
Though calm and wise and Aswapathy’s queen,  
Human was she still and opened her doors to grief;  
The stony-eyed injustice she accused  
Of the marble godhead of inflexible Law;  
Nor sought the strength extreme adversity brings  
To lives that stand erect and front the World-Power:  
Her heart appealed against the impartial judge,  
Taxed with perversity the impersonal One.  
Her tranquil spirit she called not to her aid,  
But as a common man beneath his load  
Grows faint and breathes his pain in ignorant words,  
So now she arraigned the World’s impassive will:  
“What stealthy doom has crept across her path  
Emerging from the dark forest’s sullen heart,  
What evil thing stood smiling by the way  
And wore the beauty of the Shalwa boy?  
Perhaps he came an enemy from her past  
Armed with a hidden force of ancient wrongs,  
Himself unknowing, and seized her unknown.  
Here dreadfully entangled love and hate  
Meet us blind wanderers mid the perils of Time.  
Our days are links of a disastrous chain,  
Necessity avenges casual steps;

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

Old cruelties come back unrecognised,  
The gods make use of our forgotten deeds.  
Yet all in vain the bitter law was made.  
Our own minds are the justicers of doom.  
For nothing have we learned, but still repeat  
Our stark misuse of self and others' selves,  
And fallen from his ethereal element  
Love darkens to the spirit of nether gods.  
The dreadful angel angry with his joys  
Woundingly sweet he cannot yet forego,  
Is pitiless to the soul his gaze disarmed,  
He visits with his own pangs his quivering prey  
Forcing us to cling enamoured to his grip  
As if in love with our own agony.  
This is one poignant misery in the world,  
And grief has other lassoes for our life.  
Our sympathies become our tortures.  
Strength have I my own punishment to bear,  
Knowing it just, but on this earth perplexed,  
Smitten in the sorrow of scourged and helpless things,  
Often it faints to meet other suffering eyes.  
We are not as the gods who know not grief  
And look impassive on a suffering world,  
Calm they gaze down on the little human scene  
And the short-lived passion crossing mortal hearts.  
An ancient tale of woe can move us still,  
We keep the ache of breasts that breathe no more,  
We are shaken by the sight of human pain,  
And share the miseries that others feel.  
Ours not the passionless lids that cannot age.  
Too hard for us is heaven's indifference:  
Our own tragedies are not enough for us,  
All pathos and all sufferings we make ours;  
We have sorrow for a greatness passed away  
And feel the touch of tears in mortal things.  
Even a stranger's anguish rends my heart,  
And this, O Narad, is my well-loved child.  
Hide not from us our doom, if doom is ours.  
This is the worst, an unknown face of Fate,  
A terror ominous mute felt more than seen

## SAVITRI

Behind our seat by day, our couch by night,  
A Fate lurking in the shadow of our hearts,  
The anguish of the unseen that waits to strike.  
To know is best, however hard to bear.”  
Then cried the sage piercing the mother’s heart,  
Forcing to steel the will of Savitri  
His words set free the spring of cosmic Fate.  
The great Gods use the pain of human hearts  
As a sharp axe to hew their cosmic road:  
They squander lavishly men’s blood and tears  
For a moment’s purpose in their fateful work.  
This cosmic Nature’s balance is not ours  
Nor the mystic measure of her need and use.  
A single word lets loose vast agencies,  
A casual act determines the world’s fate.  
So now he set free destiny in that hour:  
“The truth thou hast claimed; I give to thee the truth.  
A marvel of the meeting earth and heavens  
Is he whom Savitri has chosen mid men,  
His figure is the front of Nature’s march,  
His single being excels the works of Time.  
A sapphire cutting from the sleep of heaven,  
Delightful is the soul of Satyavan,  
A ray out of the rapturous infinite,  
A silence waking to a hymn of joy.  
A divinity and kingliness gird his brow;  
His eyes keep a memory from a world of bliss.  
As brilliant as a lonely moon in heaven,  
Gentle like the sweet bud that spring desires,  
Pure like a stream that kisses silent banks,  
He takes with bright surprise spirit and sense.  
A living knot of golden Paradise,  
A blue Immense he leans to the longing world,  
Time’s joy borrowed out of eternity,  
A star of splendour or a rose of bliss.  
In him Soul and Nature, equal Presences,  
Balance and fuse in a wide harmony.  
The Happy in their bright ether have not hearts  
More sweet and true than this of mortal make  
That takes all joy as the world’s native gift

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

And to all gives joy as the world's natural right.  
His speech carries a light of inner truth,  
And a large-eyed communion with the Power  
In common things has made veilless his mind,  
A seer in earth-shapes of garbless deity.  
A tranquil breadth of sky windless and still  
Watching the world like a mind of unplumbed thought,  
A silent space musing and luminous  
Uncovered by the morning to delight,  
A green tangle of trees upon a happy hill  
Made into a murmuring nest by southern winds,  
These are his images and parallels,  
His kin in beauty and in depth his peers.  
A will to climb lifts a delight to live  
Heaven's height companion of earth-beauty's charm,  
An aspiration to the immortals' air  
Lain on the lap of mortal ecstasy.  
His sweetness and his joy attract all hearts  
To live with his own in a glad tenancy,  
His strength is like a tower built to reach heaven,  
A godhead quarried from the stones of life.  
O loss, if death into its elements  
Of which his gracious envelope was built  
Shatter this vase before it breathes its sweets,  
As if earth could not keep too long from heaven  
A treasure thus unique loaned by the gods,  
A being so rare, of so divine a make!  
In one brief year when this bright hour flies back  
And perches careless on a branch of Time,  
This sovereign glory ends heaven lent to earth,  
This splendour vanishes from the mortal's sky:  
Heaven's greatness came, but was too great to stay.  
Twelve swift-winged months are given to him and her;  
This day returning Satyavan must die."  
A lightning bright and nude the sentence fell.  
But the queen cried: "Vain then can be Heaven's grace!  
Heaven mocks us with the brilliance of its gifts,  
For Death is a cupbearer of the wine  
Of too brief joy held up to mortal lips  
For a passionate moment by the careless gods.

## SAVITRI

But I reject the grace and the mockery.  
Mounting thy car go forth, O Savitri,  
And travel once more through the peopled lands.  
Alas, in the green gladness of the woods  
Thy heart has stooped to a misleading call.  
Choose once again and leave this fated head,  
Death is the gardener of this wonder-tree;  
Love's sweetness sleeps in his pale marble hand.  
Advancing in a honeyed line, but closed  
A little joy would buy too bitter an end.  
Plead not thy choice, for death has made it vain.  
Thy youth and radiance were not born to lie  
A casket void dropped on a careless soil;  
A choice less rare may call a happier fate."  
But Savitri answered from her violent heart,—  
Her voice was calm, her face was fixed like steel:  
"Once my heart chose and chooses not again.  
The word I have spoken can never be erased,  
It is written in the record book of God.  
The truth once uttered, from the earth's air effaced,  
By mind forgotten, sounds immortally  
For ever in the memory of Time.  
Once the dice fall thrown by the hand of Fate  
In an eternal moment of the gods.  
My heart has sealed its troth to Satyavan:  
Its signature adverse Fate cannot efface,  
Its seal not Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve.  
Those who shall part who have grown one being within ?  
Death's grip can break our bodies, not our souls;  
If death take him, I too know how to die.  
Let Fate do with me what she will or can;  
I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;  
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me  
Helpless against my immortality.  
Fate's law may change, but not my spirit's will."  
An adamant will, she cast her speech like bronze  
But in the queen's mind listening her words  
Rang like the voice of a self-chosen Doom  
Denying every issue of escape.  
To her own despair answer the mother made;

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

As one she cried who in her heavy heart  
Labours amid the sobbing of her hopes  
To wake a note of help from sadder strings;  
"O child, in the magnificence of thy soul  
Dwelling on the border of a greater world,  
And, dazzled by thy superhuman thoughts,  
Thou lendst eternity to a mortal hope.  
Here on this mutable and ignorant earth,  
Who is the lover and who is the friend?  
All passes here, nothing remains the same.  
None is for any on this transient globe.  
He whom thou lovest now, a stranger came  
And into a far strangeness shall depart.  
His moment's part once done upon life's stage  
Which for a time was given him from within,  
To other scenes he moves and other players  
And laughs and weeps mid faces new, unknown.  
The body thou hast loved is cast away  
Amidst the brute unchanging stuff of worlds  
To indifferent mighty Nature and becomes  
Crude matter for the joy of others' lives.  
But for our souls, upon the wheel of God  
For ever turning, they arrive and go,  
Married and sundered in the magic round  
Of the great Dancer of the boundless dance.  
Our emotions are but high and dying notes  
Of his wild music changed compellingly  
By the passionate movements of a seeking Heart  
In the incessant links of hour with hour.  
To call down heaven's distant answering song,  
To cry to an unseized bliss is all we dare;  
Once seized, we lose the heavenly music's sense;  
Too near, the rhythmic cry has fled or failed;  
All sweetnesses are baffling symbols here.  
Love dies before the lover in our breast:  
Our joys are perfumes in a brittle vase.  
O then what wreck is this upon Time's sea  
To spread life's sails to the hurricane desire  
And call for pilot the unseeing heart!  
O child, wilt thou proclaim, wilt thou then follow

## SAVĪTRI

Against the Law that is the eternal will  
The autarchy of the rash titan's mood  
To whom his own fierce will is the one law  
In a world where Truth is not, nor Light nor God?  
Only the gods can speak what now thou speakst.  
Thou art human, think not like a god.  
For man, below the god, above the brute,  
Is given the calm reason as his guide;  
He is not driven by an unthinking will  
As are the actions of the bird and beast;  
He is not moved by stark Necessity  
Like the senseless motion of inconscient things.  
The giant's and the titan's furious march  
Climbs to usurp the kingdom of the gods  
Or skirts the demon magnitudes of Hell;  
In the unreflecting passion of their hearts  
They dash their lives against the eternal Law  
And fall and break by their own violent mass:  
The middle path is made for thinking man.  
To choose his steps by reason's vigilant light,  
To choose his path among the many paths  
Is given him, for each his difficult goal  
Hewn out of infinite possibility.  
Leave not thy goal to follow a beautiful face.  
Only when thou hast climbed above thy mind  
And livst in the calm vastness of the One  
Can love be eternal in the eternal bliss  
And Love divine replace the human tie.  
There is a shrouded law, an austere force:  
It bids thee strengthen thy undying spirit;  
It offers its severe benignances  
Of work and thought and measured grave delight  
As steps to climb to God's far secret heights.  
Then is our life a tranquil pilgrimage,  
Each year a mile from the heavenly Way,  
Each dawn opens into a larger Light.  
Thy acts are thy helpers, or events are signs,  
Waking and sleep are opportunities  
Given to thee by an immortal Power:  
So canst thou raise thy pure unvanquished spirit

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

Till spread to heaven in a wide vesper calm  
Indifferent and gentle as the sky,  
It greatens slowly into timeless peace.”  
But Savitri replied with steadfast eyes:  
“My will is part of the eternal will,  
My fate is what my spirit’s strength can make,  
My fate is what my spirit’s strength can bear;  
My strength is not the titan’s, it is God’s.  
I have discovered my glad reality  
Beyond my body in another’s being:  
I have found the deep unchanging soul of love.  
Then how shall I desire a lonely good,  
Or slay, aspiring to white vacant peace,  
The endless hope that made my soul spring forth  
Out of its infinite solitude and sleep?  
My spirit has glimpsed the glory for which it came,  
Beating of one vast heart in the flame of things,  
My eternity clasped by his eternity  
And, tireless of the sweet abysses of Time,  
Deep possibility always to love.  
This, this is first, last joy and to its throb  
The riches of a thousand fortunate years  
Are a poverty. Nothing to me are death and grief  
Or ordinary lives and happy days.  
And what to me are common souls of men  
Or eyes and lips that are not Satyavan’s?  
I have no need to draw back from his arms  
And the discovered paradise of his love  
And journey into a still infinity.  
Only now for my soul in Satyavan  
I treasure the rich occasion of my birth:  
In sunlight and a dream of emerald ways  
I shall walk with him like gods in Paradise.  
If for a year, that year is all my life  
And yet I know this is not all my fate  
Only to live and love awhile and die.  
For I know now why my spirit came on earth  
And who I am and who he is I love.  
I have looked at him from my immortal Self,  
I have seen God smile at me in Satyavan;

## SAVITRI

I have seen the Eternal in a human face."  
Then none could answer to her words. Silent  
They sat and looked into the eyes of Fate.

END OF CANTO ONE

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sri Aurobindo". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end of the word "Aurobindo".

# *Old Writing*\*

SRI AUROBINDO

## I

### ART

**A**LL Art is interpretation. Creation is a misnomer; nothing in this world is created, all is manifested. All exists previously in the mind of the Knower. Art may interpret that which is already manifest or was manifest at one time, or it may interpret what will be manifest hereafter. It may even be used as one of the agencies in the manifestation. A particular type of face and figure may be manifested in the work of a popular artist and in a single generation the existing type of face and figure in the country may change and mould itself to the new conception. These things are there in the type in the causal world with which our superconscious selves are perpetually in touch; they manifest in the psychical and become part of our thought. That thought we put out into the material world and there it takes shape and body as movements, as institutions, as poetry, Art and knowledge, as living men and women. Man creates his world because he is the psychic instrument through whom God manifests that which He had previously arranged in Himself. In this sense Art can create the past, the present and the future. It can re-manifest that which was and has passed away, it can fix for us that which is, it can prophesy that which will be.

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Its normal sphere, however, is interpretation of a less pregnant and forceful kind. Here too, there are three things which it can interpret in the object it selects, the causal part or thing in itself, the psychical part, or its passing imaginations, phases, emotions; or the physical part, the outward appear-

\* Written in 1910 (for the "Karmayogin"). Unpublished.

## OLD WRITING

ance, incident or movement as our eyes see them. Indian Art attaches itself to the two higher interpretations, European to the two lower. They meet in the middle term of Art, the imaginative and emotional; but each brings with it the habits of vision, the conventions, the mastering movement and tendency of the soul downward to earth or upward to heaven, born of their main pre-occupation so that even here, though they meet on common ground, they remain diverse and unreconciled.

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In dealing with the form the question between them is: shall I reproduce what the eye sees or shall I reproduce what the soul sees? The lower type of European Art is content with reproducing what the eye sees. This it calls realism and fidelity to Nature—narrowing Nature to the limited confines of the materially sensible. The reproduction, of course, is not a real reproduction but only an approximation within the limitations imposed by the canvas, the brush and the paint box. It is really as close an imitation as our instruments will allow, absolute fidelity being rarely possible. This style of Art had perhaps its utility, but now that we have photographs and can put colour into the photographs, its separate field is in danger of being taken from it.

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A higher European Art takes imitation of the form as its basis, but its nobler objective is not the imitation of form, but the imitation of emotion. The artist tries to see and recover on canvas not only the body, but so much of the feeling as the body can for the moment express. This may often be a great deal. In certain moments of powerful feeling or critical action a great deal of our psychical selves may come out in the eyes, the face, the gesture, the pose. This the artist imitates. He not only shows us an object or an incident, but he fixes on the canvas a moment in the soul-life of the object. The habitual mood also stamps itself to a great extent on the face and certain traits of character betray themselves in expression and feature. These too the imitative artist transfers to the canvas. When not exaggerated or theatrical, this kind of art can be strong, effective and dramatic. But it has serious limitations. So much of the inner truth as the outward form interprets, this Art interprets. Its interpretation is second-hand, its vision derived and unable to go beyond its authority.

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## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

A still higher reach is attained by imaginative European Art. Imagination, according to the European idea, is creative, not interpretative. What is really meant is that the imaginative artist transfers something that belongs to himself into the object of his study, some fancy that has flashed across or some idea that has mastered his mind. Either he reads it into his subject by unconscious transference or he deliberately uses his subject as a mere excuse for putting his fancy or his idea into line and colour. The artist is interpreting himself, not his subject. This egoistic Art has often a very high value and some of the best European work has been done in this kind. More rarely his imaginative sympathy enables him to catch a glimpse of the thing itself hidden in the form. His imagination usually plays with it and prevents the vision from being true in all its parts, but he is able to do work of the highest attractiveness, vigour or artistic beauty.

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In all these kinds the European binds himself by the necessity of reproducing the actual outward form imposed by material Nature. He is a bondsman to form and such do not attain to that spiritual freedom which is the first condition of the sight spiritual. When he tries to interpret the thing in itself, he degenerates usually into allegory. Recently the Impressionist School in Europe have tried to break the fetters of the form; they have insisted that what one really sees in an object is not the rounded, solid material form but something rarer and different. In reality, they are groping their way towards an attempt at seeing and interpreting something hidden in the object, something the soul sees before the eye can catch it. Ignorant of the way, they seldom rise beyond a striking and fantastic imagination, but sometimes an inspired eye catches the true vision.

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The Indian begins at the other end. He sees the thing itself either by *sukshma-drishti*, the soul-sight, or by *dhyāna*, a spiritual union with the object studied in which the truth it expresses dawns on the mind by the process of revelation. This he transfers to canvas by letting his inspired and informed Will guide the pencil and the brush instead of using his intellect or merely technical means to find the best way of expression. He uses technique with power, but does not rely on it chiefly. The body he paints is the one which will in every part of it express the thing itself, not the actual material body which largely conceals it. When he descends into

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the psychical part and seeks to express imaginations, emotions, or passing phases, he carries his method with him. Not content with expressing as much of the feeling as the actual body reveals, he sees the emotion in its fullness by *dhyāna* or soul-sight and forces the body into a mould fit for its absolute expression. He sees the soul and paints it or he sees the heart or mind and paints it. He sees and, can, if he will, paint the body merely. But usually he does not will it.

## II

### THINGS SEEN IN SYMBOLS

What is *dhyāna*? Ordinarily, when a man is absorbed in thought and dead to all that is going on around him, he is supposed to be in *dhyāna*. Or concentration of the whole thought on a single object to the exclusion of every other, is called *dhyāna*. But neither of these ideas corresponds exactly with the whole truth; they represent only particular stages of the process of meditation. *Dhyāna* is a wide term covering a number of processes which rise from ordinary attention to *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

The distinguishing feature of *dhyāna* is that it puts out a steady force of knowledge on the object of knowledge. When this process is successful, when there is a steady demand on the object to give up its secret, it is called by Patañjali *sanyama*. Even when it is only partially successful, it is called *dhyāna*.

Ordinary thought is not *dhyāna*. Ordinary thought is simply the restlessness of the mind playing with associations, speculations, trains of reasoning. In order to have *dhyāna*, the restlessness of the mind must be utterly settled, the intellect must become like a calm and waveless sea, not a ripple on its surface.

The principle is that all knowledge is in oneself, in the knower. The knower is in myself; he is also in the object of knowledge, e.g., a stone or a tree. By *dhyāna* the veil of ignorance, the chaos of misunderstandings which interfere between the knower in me and the knower in the tree or the stone is removed; we enter into relation with each other; we are in Yoga. All knowledge about the stone is in the stone itself; in *dhyāna* it comes into my mind. When it comes into my mind, the knower in me says: "It is true, the knowledge is in me also and I see it there." Or, if there is a mistake, he says, "There is a mistake, the mind is interfering; the knowledge is in me and I see it otherwise."

## SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR ANNUAL

The whole world is one. The knower in the stone and the knower in myself are one; I am He. It is God in me, God in the stone. The knowledge in me and the knowledge in the stone are one; I am that. It is God in me, God in the stone. The stone is an object of knowledge, I am also an object of knowledge. These two also are one, God as myself, God as the stone. God is the only object of knowledge, there is no other. God is the only knower, there is no other. God is the knowledge also. *Jñātā, jñānam, jneyam*, they are one.

The mind creates difference. When there is disturbance on the waters, there are many waves, and each wave cries, "I am I, I am I; you are you; we are different." When the sea sinks to rest, the waves as they go inward, no longer cry, "I am I", but "I am He." The still and waveless sea, that is a delightful and beautiful condition. The stormy, myriad-crested ocean, that also is a very beautiful and delightful condition. Only let the waves have the knowledge, let them say, "I am I for the sake of delight; you are you for the sake of delight. But also you are I, I am you. And both you and I are He." That is *jñānam*, that is Yoga.

The still sea is a condition, and the thousand waves are a condition. He who is the sea, is more than disturbance, more than stillness. He contains All. He is All. Even the infinite sea is only one of His manifestations.

### III

#### THE REAL DIFFICULTY

The real difficulty is always in ourselves, not in our surroundings. There are three things necessary in order to make men invincible, Will, Disinterestedness and Faith. We may have a will to emancipate ourselves, but sufficient faith may be lacking. We may have a faith in our ultimate emancipation, but the will to use the necessary means may be wanting. And even if there are will and faith, we may use them with a violent attachment to the fruit of our work or with passions of hatred, blind excitement or hasty forcefulness which may produce evil reactions. For this reason it is necessary, in a work of such magnitude, to have resort to a higher Power than that of mind and body in order to overcome unprecedented obstacles. This is the need of *sādhana*.

God is within us, an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient Power; we and He are of one nature and, if we get into touch with Him and put ourselves in His hands, He will pour into us His own force and we shall

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realise that we too have our share of godhead, our portion of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. The path is long, but self-surrender makes it short; the way is difficult, but perfect trust makes it easy.

Will is omnipotent, but it must be divine will, selfless, tranquil, at ease about results. "If you had faith even as a grain of mustard-seed," said Jesus, "you would say to this mountain, Come, and it would come to you." What was meant by the word Faith, was really Will accompanied with perfect *sraddhā*. *Sraddhā* does not reason, it knows; for it commands sight and sees what God wills, and it knows that what is God's will, must happen. *Sraddhā*, not blind but using sight spiritual, can become omniscient.

Will is also omnipresent. It can throw itself into all in whom it comes into contact and give them temporarily or permanently a portion of its power, its thought, its enthusiasms. The thought of a solitary man can become, by exercise of selfless and undoubting will, the thought of a nation. The will of a single hero can breathe courage into the hearts of a million cowards.

This is the *sadhana* that we have to accomplish. This is the condition of our emancipation. We have been using an imperfect will with imperfect faith and imperfect disinterestedness. Yet the task we have before us is not less difficult than to move a mountain.

The force that can do it, exists. But it is hidden in a secret chamber within us and of that chamber God holds the key. Let us find Him and claim it.

## *Conversations with the Mother*

“*WHAT is the distinction between peace and silence? How are they differentiated from equanimity?*”

Equanimity is a condition of your being which is more or less in reference to external things, to the environment and circumstances in the midst of which you happen to be. It is the quality of unshakableness in the being which nothing touches, nothing affects, which is not subject to reaction to any impact from outside upon it. Equanimity fills you with a sense of solidity, of absolute security and firmness: it is, indeed, the foundation, the bed-rock on which your Yoga and your new life are to be based.

Peace and silence are in and of our being and are not related to anything outside it. Both of them mean stillness of the being; but silence gives one the impression of something deep or high, while peace is something that is vast and wide—one is, as it were, a vertical and the other a horizontal consciousness. Silence opens the way upward, it is the passage to other ranges of consciousness beyond; and the more perfect the silence, the higher you rise. Peace, on the other hand, gives you a sense of something spherical, that is to say, it is a widening of the consciousness to its extreme limits, containing and enveloping everything within its embrace. Silence is more of the nature of aspiration, while peace is that of poise. Peace is like when in climbing up you have reached a definite stage and established yourself there; it is something static. But in silence there is something that looks forward and awaits. Peace gives you the feeling of an achievement, of having accomplished something and being contented with it; silence is big with a promise of yet more.

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“*How does the vibration of intense ecstasy affect one's peace and silence?*”

True ecstasy, even of the intensest kind, does not affect either in the

## CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MOTHER

least. In fact, peace and silence carry in them the very basis of Delight. And the more perfect the peace and the silence, the greater the possibility of a more intense delight. There is nothing excited about true ecstasy; on the contrary, all excitement serves only to disturb and destroy it. Peace and silence are indispensable conditions of real ecstasy. The movement first begins with a sense of perfect ease and this sense of ease, as it deepens and becomes more and more intense, develops into ecstasy. Ecstasy is always something very deep and very calm; it is not a movement belonging to the surface consciousness, that brings great excitement or restlessness.

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*“Still there is a difference between ecstasy and peace?”*

It is not the same experience that you have in both; but they can go together. Peace or silence represents the motionless condition; whatever their difference, they come and meet at this point. When you go to the extreme limit in both you arrive at this immobility. Peace and silence meet and fuse at the farthest borderland of the manifested universe, where you are on the point of stepping over to the other side. Now, when to this immobility is added the quality of intensity, you have what is called ecstasy. Ecstasy is born out of the perfectly balanced union of a high and profound and vast calmness with a concentrated intensity. These two movements, of calmness and intensity, usually alternate each other and do not appear simultaneously in your consciousness. You have a period of wide calmness and another of gathered intensity; you do not have them together. But there is a stage where you can make them join and unite in something higher and more complete—and that is ecstasy. Ecstasy is not a movement of the vital being; it is far removed from the turmoil and agitation proper to the vital nature, it is founded on peace and silence and equanimity.

# God's Labour

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

## I

SRI AUROBINDO'S Yoga, it has been said, begins where other yogas end. Other yogas end by the attainment of the Brahman or some form or mode of it or something akin to it, which means the transcendent Reality, the supreme status of the Spirit beyond name and form, beyond all particular manifestation. It is the final realisation of the soul in its upward ascent, the *nec plus ultra*. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga takes that poise for granted and upon it bases its own development and structure. In other words, it works for the descent of the Spirit upon the level from which the Spirit worked up. The Mystery of the descent is the whole characteristic secret of this Yoga.

The general idea of a descent of the Spirit, that is to say, the Divine, the conception of *avatara* and *avatarana* is, of course, not new. But here there is a difference. Avatara or Avatarana in the older disciplines was more or less an intervention of God as God, the working of a Force come specifically in the midst of the world circumstances, maintaining still its divine transcendental character, to work out a given problem, accomplish a special mission and then, when the work is done, retire to its own status. It is, as it were, a weapon of flame and light hurled into the earthly fray—even like the discus of Vishnu—and having accomplished its mission, going back into the hand of the thrower, its fount and origin. The task of the Avatara was usually *bhubhara-harana*, lightening earth's load: it means removing the sinful and preserving the virtuous, re-establishing the reign of Law. Esoterically, he also embodied the Way to spiritual fulfilment. There was no question of saving humanity—it was more serving than saving—by transfiguring it, giving it a new body and life and mind, nor was there any idea of raising the level of earth-consciousness.

The Divine acts in three different ways in his three well-known aspects.

## GOD'S LABOUR

As the transcendent Reality he is above and beyond creation, he is the Unmanifest, although he may hold within either involved or dissolved the entire manifestation. Next, he is the manifestation, the cosmic or the universal; he is one with creation, immanent in it, still its master and lord. Finally, he has an individual aspect: he is a Person with whom human beings can enter into relations of love and service. The Divine incarnate as a human being, is a special manifestation of the Individual Divine. Even then, as an embodied earthly person, he may act in a way characteristic of any of the three aspects. The Divine descended upon earth, as viewed by Sri Aurobindo, does not come in his transcendental aspect, fundamentally aloof and away, in his absolute power and consciousness, working miracles here; for transcendence can do nothing but that in the midst of conditions left as they are. Nor does he manifest himself only as his cosmic power and consciousness, embedded in the creation and all-pervading, exercising his influence through the pressure of Universal Law, perhaps in a concentrated form, still working gradually, step by step, as though through a logical process, for the maintenance of the natural order and harmony, *lokasamgraha*. God can be more than that, individualised in a special, even a human sense. His individual being can and does hold within itself his cosmic and transcendental self covertly in a way but overtly too in a singular manner at the same time. The humanised personality of the Divine with his special role and function is at the very centre of Sri Aurobindo's solution of the world enigma. The little poem "God's Labour" in its short compass outlines and explains beautifully the grand Mystery.

The usual idea of God (as the theists hold, for example) is that he is an infinite eternal impassible being, aloof from human toils and earthly turmoils, himself untouched by these and yet, in and through them, directing the world for an inscrutable purpose, unless it is for leaning towards it and stretching out the hand of Grace to those of the mortals who wish to come out of the nightmare of life, sever the coils of earthly existence. But the Divine in order to be and remain divine need not hold to his seat above and outside the creation, severely separated from his creatures. He can, on the contrary, become truly the ordinary man and labour as all others, yet maintaining his divinity and being conscious of it. After all, is not man, every human being, built in the same pattern, a composite of the earthly human element supported and infused by a secret divine element? However, God, the individual Divine, does become man, one of them and one with them. Only, his labour thereby increases manifold, hard and heavy, although for that very reason full of a bright rich multiple promise. The Divine's self-humanisation has for it a double purpose: (1) to show

man by example how he can become what he truly is, how he can divinise himself: the Divine as man lives out the life of a *sadhaka* wholly and completely; (2) to help concretely by his own force of consciousness the world and man in their endeavour for progress and evolution, to give the help wholly and completely from the innermost status of the self down to the most external physical body and the material field. This help again is a twofold function. The first is to make available, gather within easy reach, the high realisations, the spiritual treasures that are normally stored in a heaven somewhere else. The Divine Man brings down the divine attributes close to our earth, turns them from mere far possibilities into near probabilities, even imminent realities. They are made part and parcel, constituent elements of the earthly atmosphere, so that one has only to open one's mouth to breathe in, extend one's arms to seize and possess them: even to this opening and this gesture man is helped by the concrete touch and presence of the Divine. Further, the help and succour come in another way which is more intimate, more living and appealing to man.

A great mystery of existence, its central rub is the presence of Evil. All spiritual, generally all human endeavour has to face and answer this Sphinx. As he answers, so will be his fate. He cannot rise up even if he wishes, earth cannot progress even when there is the occasion, because of this besetting obstacle. It has many names and many forms. It is Sin or Satan in Christianity; Buddhism calls it Mara. In India it is generally known as Maya. Grief and sorrow, weakness and want, disease and death are its external and ubiquitous forms. It is a force of gravitation, as graphically named by a modern Christian mystic, that pulls man down, fixes him upon earth with its iron law of mortality, never allowing him to mount high and soar in the spiritual heavens. It has also been called the Wheel of Karma or the cycle of Ignorance. And the aim of all spiritual seekers has been to rise out of it—somehow, by force of tapasya, energy of concentrated will or divine Grace—go through or by-pass and escape into the Beyond. This is the path of ascent I referred to at the outset. In this view it is taken for granted that this creation is transient and empty of happiness—*anityam asukham* (Gita)—it is *anatta*, empty of self or consciousness (Buddha) and it will be always so. The only way to deal with it, the way of the wise, is to discard it and pass over.

Sri Aurobindo's view is different. He says Evil can be and has to be conquered here itself, here upon this earth and in this body—the ancients also said, *ihaiva tairjitah*, they have conquered even here, *prakshariravimokshanat*, before leaving the body. You have to face Evil full-square and conquer it, conquer it not in the sense that you simply rise above it so that

## GOD'S LABOUR

it no longer touches you, but that you remain where you are in the very field of Evil and drive it out from there completely, erase and annihilate it where it was reigning supreme. Hence God has to come down from his heaven and dwell here upon earth and among men and in the conditions of mortality, show thus by his living and labour that this earthly earth can be transformed into a heavenly earth and this human body into a "body divine".

Matter or the physical body is not by itself the centre of gravity of the human consciousness; it is not that that pins the soul or the self to the life of pain and misery and incapacity and death. Matter is not the Evil, nor made up of Evil; it contains or harbours evil under the present circumstances, even as dross is mixed up, inextricably as it appears, with the noble metal in the natural ore; but the dross can be eradicated and the free metal brought out, pure and noble in its own true nature. It is, as Rumi, the Persian mystic, says in his famous imagery, like a piece of iron, dull and dismal to look at, but when put into fire slowly acquires the quality of fire, turning into a glowing and radiant beauty, yet maintaining its original form and individuality and concrete, even material reality. Now, the crust or dross that has to be eliminated in Matter is called by Sri Aurobindo "Inconscience". Matter is inconscient, therefore it is unconscious and ignorant. Make it conscious, it will be radiant and full of knowledge. That is the great transformation needed, the only way to true and total reformation. The Divine descends into Matter precisely to work out that transformation.

It is a long dredging process, tedious and arduous, requiring the utmost patience and perseverance, even to the absolute degree. For Inconscience, in essence, although a contingent reality, local and temporal, and therefore transient, is nonetheless the hardest, most obdurate and resistant reality: it lies thick and heavy upon the human vehicle. It is massed layer upon layer. Its first formation in the higher altitudes of the mind is perhaps like a thin fluid deposit; it begins as an individualised separative consciousness stressing more and more its exclusiveness. Through the lower ranges of the mind and the vitality it crystallises and condenses gradually; in the worlds of thinking and feeling, enjoying and dynamic activity, it has still a malleable and mixed consistency, but when it reaches and possesses the physical being, it becomes the impervious solid obscurity that Matter presents.

The root of the Cosmic Evil is in Matter. From there it shoots up and overshadows the upper layers of our being and consciousness. Even if the mind is cleaned, the vital cleared, still if the physical consciousness is not sufficiently probed into, purified and reclaimed, then nothing permanent is done, one would build upon sand. All efforts, spiritual or other, at the regeneration and reformation of mankind and a good many individual

endeavours too have come to a sorry end, because the foundation was not laid sufficiently deep and secure. One must dig into Matter as far down as possible—like Rishi Agastya in the Veda—even to the other end. For there is another mystery there, perhaps the Mystery of mysteries. The deeper you go down into Matter, as you clear up the jungle and bring in the higher light, you discover and unlock strange and mighty energies of consciousness secreted there, even like the uranium pile in the atomic world. It is revealed to you that Inconscience is not total absence of consciousness, it is simply consciousness asleep, in-gathered, entranced. And this nether consciousness is, after all, one with the supreme Consciousness. It is itself the best weapon to bring about its own transformation. Not only the higher self, but the lower self too must be salvaged and saved by its own self—*atmana atmanam uddharet*.

## II

The Divine brings down with himself his shaft of light, and the light, as it spreads, begins to scatter and dissolve the clouds of ignorance. The Divine comes here below and as he formulates and concentrates his consciousness in or as an individualised channel, the power of the consciousness becomes dynamic and concrete and works out the desired change in the material plane. In the descent the Divine has to assume the lower potentials on the inferior levels and this involves an apparent veiling and lessening of his higher and divine degrees. In other words, the Divine in becoming human accepts and embraces in that embodiment all that humanity normally means, its weaknesses and frailties, its obstacles and difficulties, all the ignorance and inconscience. This sacrifice he has agreed to, has undertaken in order to create out of it a golden body, a radiant matter, a heavenly or divinised earth.

God made man, the spirit become flesh: this is Grace, the benediction of the Holy One upon the sinful earth. The working of Grace in one of its characteristic movements has been beautifully envisaged in esoteric Christianity. The burden of sin—that is to say, of weakness, impurity and ignorance—lies so heavy upon man, the force of gravitation is so absolute, that it is divine intervention alone, and in the most physical sense, which can save him. God takes upon himself man's load and relieves him of it: thus freed he can soar up easily and join the company of the Happy in heaven alongside God. This is the ransom paid by God to His Enemy, the vicarious atonement suffered by the Divine, the cross he has to bear when he comes upon this earth, into this vale of tears. It is said, in terms of human feeling,

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pity so moved him that he left the happy abode of heaven, came down among men and lived like one of them, sharing their sorrow and pain and, what is divine, taking up the evil into himself, drinking, as it were, out of the poisoned bowl, so that man, frail mortal creature, may escape his doom.

This way too, as all other ways, has indeed been the way of escape. God came down in order to take away some men with him. They were the blessed ones, but the normal humanity remains as it is, as it has been, on the whole. The few that pass beyond do not seem to leave any trace here below. There was no regeneration of mankind, no reformation of earthly life.

Sri Aurobindo aims at a power of consciousness, a formulation of the divine being that is integral. It takes up the whole man and it embraces all men: it works on a cosmic scale individually and collectively. That force of consciousness identifies itself with each and every individual being in all its parts and limbs; establishing itself in and working through their normal and habitual functionings, moulds and refashions the earthly vessel. It is a global power, first of all, because it is the supreme creative Power, the original energy of consciousness that brought out this manifested universe, the matrix or the nodus that holds together and in an inviolable unity and harmony the fundamental truth-aspects of the one and indivisible Reality. This luminous source and substance of all created things consists of their basic true truths which assume disguised and deformed appearances under the present conditions of the world. It is therefore, in the second instance, the secret power in created things which manifests in them as the evolutionary urge, which drives them to rediscover their reality and re-form the appearance as the direct expression and embodiment of this inner soul.

The Divine incarnates, as an individual in the concrete material actuality, this double aspect of the utter truth and reality. There are, what may be called, intermediary incarnations, some representing powers—aspects of the Divine—in the higher mental or overmental levels of consciousness, others those of the inner heart, yet others again those of the dynamic vital consciousness. But the integral Divine, he who unites and reconciles in his body the highest height and the lowest depth, who has effectuated in him something like the “marriage of Heaven and Hell” is an event of the future—even perhaps of the immediate future. The descent into hell is an image that has been made very familiar to man, but all its implications have not been sounded. For what we were made familiar with was more or less an image of hell, not hell itself, a region or experience in the vital (may be even in the mental): real hell is not the mass of desires or weaknesses of the flesh, not “living flesh”, but dead Matter whose other name is Inconscience. In the older disciplines the central or key truth, the heart of

reality where the higher and the lower—Brahman and Maya, the Absolute and the Contingency, the One and the Many, God and the World—met and united in harmony was by-passed: one shot from below right into the supreme Absolute; the matrix of truth-creation was ignored. Even so, at the other end, the reality of brute matter was not given sufficient weight, the spiritual light disdained to reach it (*vijigupsate*).

The integral Divine not merely suffers (as in the Christian tradition) a body material, He accepts it in his supernal delight, for it is his own being and substance: it is He in essence and it will become He in actuality. When he comes into the world, it is not as though it were a foreign country; he comes to his own,—only he seeks to rebuild it on another scale, the scale of unity and infinity, instead of the present scale of separativism and finiteness. He comes among men not simply because he is moved by human miseries; he is no extra-terrestrial person, a bigger human being, but is himself this earth, this world, all these miseries; he is woven into the fabric of the universe, he is the warp and woof that constitute creation. It is not a mere movement of sympathy or benevolence that actuates him, it is a total and absolute identification that is the ground and motive of his activity. When he assumes the frame of mortality, it is not that something outside and totally incongruous is entering into him, it is part and parcel of himself, it is himself in one of his functions and phases. Consequently, his work in and upon the material world and life may be viewed as that of self-purification and self-illumination, self-discipline and self-realisation. Also, the horrors of material existence, being part of the cosmic play and portion of his infinity, naturally find shelter in the individual divine incarnation, are encompassed in his human embodiment. It is the energy of his own consciousness that brought out or developed even this erring earth from within it: that same energy is now available, stored up in the individual formation, for the recreation of that earth. The advent and acceptance of material existence meant, as a kind of necessity in a given scheme of divine manifestation, the appearance and play of Evil, the negation of the very divinity. Absolute Consciousness brought forth absolute unconsciousness—the inconscient—because of its own self-pressure, a play of an increasingly exclusive concentration and rigid objectivisation. That same consciousness repeats its story in the individual incarnation: it plunges into the material life and matter and identifies itself with Evil. But it is then like a pressed or tightened spring; it works at its highest potential. In other words, the Divine in the body now works to divinise the body itself, to make of the negation a concrete affirmation. The inconscient will be embodied consciousness.

The humanist said, "Nothing human I reckon foreign to me". In a deeper

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and more absolute sense the divine Mystic of the integral Yoga says the same. He is indeed humanity incarnate, the whole mankind condensed and epitomised in his single body. Mankind as embedded in ignorance and inconscience, the conscious soul lost in the dark depths of dead matter, is he and his whole labour consists in working in and through that obscure "gravitational" mass, to evoke and bring down the totality of the superconscious force, the creative delight which he is essentially in his inmost and topmost being. The labour within himself is conterminous with the cosmic labour, and the change effected in his being and nature means a parallel change in the world outside, at least a ready possibility of the change. All the pains and weaknesses normal humanity suffers from, the heritage of an inconscient earthly existence, the Divine takes into his incarnated body—all and more and to the highest degree—into a crucible as it were, and works out there the alchemy. The natural man individually shares also each other's burden in some way, for all are interconnected in life—action at one point has a reaction at all other points: only the sharing is done unconsciously and is suffered or imposed than accepted and it tends to be at a minimum. An ordinary mortal would break under a greater pressure. It is the Avatar who comes forward and carries on his shoulders the entire burden of earthly inconscience.

Suffering, incapacity and death are, it is said, the wages of earthly life; but they are, in fact, reverse aspects of divine truths. Whatever is here below has its divine counterpart above. What appears as matter, inertia, static existence here below is the devolution of pure existence, being or substance up there. Life-force, vital dynamism here is the energy of consciousness there. The pleasure of the heart and emotions and enjoyment is divine delight. Finally, our mind with its half-lighted thinking power, its groping after knowledge has at its back the plenary light of the Supermind. So the aim is not to reject or withdraw from the material, vital and mental existence upon the earth and in this body, but house in them, make them concrete vehicles, expressions and embodiments of what they really are.

Pain and suffering, disease and incapacity, even age and death are fortuitous auxiliaries; they have come upon us simply because of the small and partial scale of our life to which we agreed. One can live here below, live a full life, upon a larger scale, upon the scale of infinity and eternity. That need not dissolve body and life and mind, the triple ranges that make up our earthly existence. In brief, man himself is not truly man, he is the reverse aspect of God; and when he becomes divine and remains not merely human, he but realises what he is truly and integrally himself.

# *Space, Time and Eternity*

DR. HARIDAS CHAUDHURI

**A** PRECISE determination of the nature of space and time is essential to anything approaching a fairly adequate philosophic vision of Reality. Space and time are inalienable features of the world of our common experience and yet philosophy insists upon the infinity and eternity of knowledge in the strict sense of the term. Philosophy not only aims at transcending the limitations of space and time in respect of its subjective vision, but is also inspired by the conviction that ultimate reality must in its deepest essence be non-spatial and non-temporal,—infinite and eternal. It is therefore only natural that the problems of space and time should figure very prominently in all philosophic discussion. Our knowledge begins with space and time, but it invariably aims at getting beyond the limits of space and time in its search after the Infinite and the Eternal. An attempt has been made in the present paper to show that space and time, viewed in the right perspective, are two inseparably connected media of self-expression, as Sri Aurobindo maintains, of the one non-spatial and non-temporal Spirit (Brahman). A running survey of different representative philosophical theories about space and time considered in their logical development will be found to lead on to this grand synthetic position.

There are a number of interesting questions about space and time. How are space and time related to each other, and how are they related to the observer? Are space and time finite or are they infinite? Are they discrete or continuous? How are they related to matter, or else to the most primordial form of existence, whatever its nature may be? How do the ideas of space and time originate and develop in the human mind? What is the precise metaphysical status of space and time? Are they only modes of apprehension, forms of knowledge, or functions of mental activity? Or else, do they enjoy an independent objective reality of their own? If space and time be subjective or unreal, are they entirely so, or is there anything corresponding to them in the structure of ultimate reality? If space and time be objectively real, how

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are they precisely related to the ultimate metaphysical principle, the Absolute or the supreme Spirit? Between the non-temporal and non-spatial status of the Absolute on the one hand, and the objectively real march of events in space-time on the other, is there not an essential incompatibility?

The psychological question concerning the origin and development of the notions of space and time in our mind is of no decisive importance in a metaphysical determination of their nature. An idea may be original for psychology, but that affords no reason why it should be regarded either as real or as unreal. Again, simply because an idea is psychologically derived from simpler elements, one should have no justification for dismissing it as illusory. If an idea were, as Bradley points out, "a legitimate construction from elements that were true, then it might be derived only for our knowledge, and be original in fact."<sup>1</sup> It requires no extraordinary insight to realise that the psychological history of an idea can have no definitive bearing upon its ontological status. Attempts have been made to derive space from motor experiences or tactuo-muscular sensations, and to derive time from experiences of successive events, or from the deliverances of perception, memory and anticipation. But Kant has exploded the naive supposition that such attempts really amount to a derivation of space and time from elements which are non-spatial and non-temporal. Experiences of movement and succession already presuppose the notions of space and time, and cannot claim to produce them *de novo*. Genetic theories concerning them are at best accounts of their psychological development, accounts of their gradual assumption of a distinct and articulate form in the human mind. The opposite view that space and time are *a priori* forms of perception—the epistemological prius of objective experience—can hardly be accepted as a final pronouncement upon their intrinsic nature. If space and time be entirely subjective, how can they be imposed upon an absolutely alien manifold of intuition which is non-spatial and non-temporal in character? Why should such a manifold of intuition submit to the arbitrary dictation of a foreign authority? The core of truth contained in the above view seems to be that space and time are the most pervasive features of our normal experience. If we want to determine their ontological status, we must institute an independent critical examination of their nature as we perceive them, and we must examine them in their relations to other factors of experience. The metaphysic of space and time would require a balanced consideration of their nature in the context of our total experience,—the experience that embraces the mystic's realisation of the non-temporal on

<sup>1</sup> "Appearance and Reality", p.36.

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the one hand, and the ordinary mortal's entanglement in the temporal on the other.

### SPACE AND TIME IN MODERN PHYSICS

Recent developments in Physics have made some valuable contributions to our conception of space and time. Before the discovery of the theory of Relativity, scientists stood committed to what is known as "the absolute theory of space and time". Space and time were supposed to be two independent variables or disconnected media. Space is one vast medium in which an endless plurality of material objects exist together. Time is another vast medium in which an endless procession of events occur in succession. Space is represented as the absolute locus of all physical objects. Time is pictorially represented as a stream continuously flowing through all the points of space taken together. The movement of the stream of time through all the points of space taken together gives rise to the notion of absolute simultaneity. The vast extension of space conceived as independent of the flow of time gives rise to the notion of instantaneous co-existence. These notions of instantaneous space or co-existence and absolute simultaneity are essential elements in the absolute theory of space and time. The doctrine of relativity has however exploded these notions and exhibited them as but popular fictions. Einstein has demonstrated that events which appear simultaneous to one observer can very well appear successive to another observer. To an observer on earth, for example, a shooting star and an earthquake may seem to be simultaneous, but to an observer in the moon the phenomenon of the shooting star would appear earlier than the phenomenon of earthquake. This shows that time is relative to space, that is, to the position of the observer in space. Then again, there are no fixed static positions in space. The portion of space which a man occupies in the morning is not the same portion of space which he would occupy at noon, even though he remains all the while shut up within his bedroom. This is because the man in question is constantly moving with the earth, however stationary he may appear to be in relation to his room. Now, movement in itself is no absolute quantity. The earth is said to be in motion in relation to the sun and other celestial bodies, just as a running train is said to be in motion in relation to some portion of the earth. Had there been absolute motion, that would have implied fixed positions in absolute space, whatever the practical difficulties in the way of ascertaining such positions. But can we not think of absolute space, and may it not be possible to obtain the measurement of absolute motion of a thing by reference to the

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substance of space, if any? It has really been suggested that there is an eternally fixed and immovable substance pervading the whole of space, namely, ether, and that absolute motion may be determined in relation to ether. Motion through ether—yes, that would at last give us something absolute. The famous Michelson-Morley experiment represents the last desperate attempt to measure the earth's absolute motion through ether. The experiment is unparalleled in the history of scientific measurement in respect of marvellous precision and ingenious design. But every time the experiment was carried through it yielded a nul result. Lorentz and Fitzgerald put forward the hypothesis that every material body contracts in a definite degree in the direction of its line of motion. It was by this hypothesis of contraction that they sought to account for the result of their experiment in conformity with their faith in an all-pervasive immovable ether in space. But this was a line of thinking which soon involved the scientist in a labyrinth of endless self-contradictions. It required the genius of Einstein to expose thoroughly the futility of all such desperate search after absolute motion, and to give the final go-by to the concepts of absolute space and all-pervasive immovable ether. Einstein demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt the epoch-making truth that space is relative to time, and time is relative to space, and that both space and time are relative to the special circumstances of the observer. They are however, relative not to the mind of the observer, but to his body,—to the spatio-temporal position which the observer's body occupies. To quote the words of Whitehead, "It is the observer's body that we want, and not his mind. Even this body is only useful as an example of a familiar form of apparatus."<sup>1</sup> The plain significance of Einstein's theory of relativity is that all physical concepts including space, time, motion, velocity, mass, energy, etc. are relative quantities; they are relative to the physical apparatuses of instruments of measurement. We are, however, concerned at the present moment with space and time. The chief contribution of the doctrine of relativity may be put in a word by saying that it substitutes space-time for space and time. Time is often described as the fourth dimension of space. Better still, it may be said that according to relativity-Physics the fundamental thing is one four-dimensional continuum of which space and time are inseparable aspects. Minkowski points out that though space and time taken separately are relative, space-time is absolute. Although different observers inhabit different spaces and times, they all inhabit the same space-time. Different observers may disagree as to the space separating two particulars, or as to

<sup>1</sup> "Science and the Modern World", p. 149.

the time separating two events, but they all get the same value for the “interval” separating two events. This interval or spatio-temporal distance between two events is affirmed to be an *absolute* characteristic of them. If the universe is regarded as a four-dimensional continuum, then the spaces and times of different observers are nothing more than different sections, as it were, of this continuum. The interval, on whose value all observers are agreed, is split up, owing to their different motions, into different space and time components.<sup>1</sup>

It is a perverse misconception of the theory of relativity to discover in it scientific corroboration of the subjectivist interpretation of the universe. In order to guard against misunderstandings of this nature, it has been suggested that the theory of relativity should be characterised, paradoxical though it may sound, as the theory of absolutes. Having discarded the “absolutes” of pre-relativity physics, it shows the way how to isolate those absolute features of the world which are entirely independent of the observer’s mind. Einstein has succeeded, as Sullivan points out, “in expressing the laws of nature in a form which is the same for all observers, whatever their motions, and whatever their systems of measurement.”<sup>2</sup> It has been seen in the preceding paragraph how the notions of spatial distance and temporal gap have been replaced in relativity physics by the concept of spatio-temporal ‘interval’ which is accepted as an absolute characteristic of events. But though physical characteristics of events may be expressed in a form which is the same for all observers, that does not entail that they are intrinsic characteristics of things in themselves. All physical concepts are in the last analysis relative to physical apparatuses or instruments of measurement in general. That is why Eddington contends that they are in the last analysis “schedules of pointer-readings”. For a thorough grasp of the implications of the theory of relativity, one must steer clear of the opposite extremes of subjectivist construction on the one hand and realistic exaltation on the other.

### THE CURVATURE OF SPACE-TIME

There are some other important truths about space-time which have been brought out by modern physics. We hear today of the “curvature” of space-time. Einstein believes space to be governed not by Euclidean geometry, but by Reimannian geometry. The space-time continuum is

<sup>1</sup> “Sullivan’s Bases of Modern Science”, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 180.

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said to be a curved continuum, though it may not be uniformly curved everywhere. There are different degrees of curvature in different parts of space-time. The curvature of space-time is most prominent around large masses, for there the gravitational effects are most marked. Gravitational effects are indeed entirely due to the curvature of space, and must not be attributed, as Newton did, to any mysterious force of gravity. According to one school of thought, and this is supported by Einstein, matter is fundamental, and it is the presence of matter that causes the curvature of space-time. Without matter the whole universe would have shrunk to a single point. But according to a second school of thought, it is the space-time continuum which is fundamental. The local peculiarities of space-time manifest themselves to our senses in the form we call matter. Curvature is not the effect of matter.

### SPACE-TIME CONCEIVED AS AN EVER-EXPANDING BOUNDLESS FINITE

The idea of the curvature of space-time brings us to Einstein's theory of "spherical space." We know that by its regular curvature the earth is able to close itself, and so avoid any "end" or "edge" of the world. Similar is the case with the whole of space. Just as every straight line that is started upon the surface of the earth returns upon itself, so also every light-ray that fares forth into space must eventually return upon itself. "Just as the earth contrives in two dimensions to close itself again by regular curvature, so space contrives to avoid any "end of space, and the universe to enclose a finite content. The diameter of the universe amounts—or rather, at one time amounted—to 2000 million light years."<sup>1</sup> Now, space being spherical, it follows that it is not infinite but rather a "boundless finite". Space is boundless in as much as it is capable of closing itself and thus avoiding any end or edge; it is finite because every ray of light that fares forth in space must eventually return upon itself. The supreme paradox of modern physics is reached when it is held that the sphere or supersphere of space is not a stable equilibrium but is ever growing and expanding. It is an admitted fact of astronomical observation that the spiral nebulae are unanimously running away from us. Every nebula is indeed fleeing from every other: And the further they are away from each other, the faster they travel! But it is difficult to understand why the nebulae should go tearing through space at such a terrific rate. The remotest of the nebulae are said

<sup>1</sup> "You and the Universe", by Paul Karison, p. 218.

to increase the distance between us by 16000 miles per hour. Moreover, if the space is really a closed system, where are the nebulae madly trying to go? The theory that is advanced today to meet the situation is that nebulae are not racing through space at all—space itself is running away with them.<sup>1</sup> Just as a soap-bubble or a great toy balloon can grow ever larger and larger, so also the whole spatio-temporal system is awlays expanding.

But is the concept of a finite expanding universe or space-time structure comprehensible to our reason? If space is finite, it must be possible to go out beyond this finite space, and what can we possibly find beyond it except more space, and so on *ad infinitum*?—which proves that space cannot be finite. Again if space is expanding, what can it possibly expand into, if not into more space?—which again proves that what is expanding can only be a part of space, so that the whole of space cannot expand.<sup>2</sup> Considerations like the above are of crucial importance in determining the precise significance of the physical concepts we are dealing with. The aforesaid objections proceed from the assumption that the universe admits of material or pictorial representation. They derive their force from the nineteenth-century way of thinking. Had the concept of a finite and expanding universe been a faithful pictorial representation of the internal structure of an objective reality, then the objections would have been simply irrefutable. But, most of the scientific theories are, it is realised today, no more than conventional formulae or pragmatic devices. Space-time conceived as finite, curved and expanding, is, as Jeans puts it, just a mental concept. It is found pragmatically valid or useful for the explanation of observed phenomena, and that is the end of the matter. It is by no means to be treated as a sensuous representation of the nature of the objective world. Nor should it be so construed as to suggest that modern physics had idealised space-time. The truth is that modern physics leaves open the metaphysical question about the intrinsic nature of space-time. The laws of physics are in point of fact laws about the *behaviour* of events in space-time, and not expressions of the *essence* of space-time. They do not constitute, nor do they entail, any idealistic theory of space and time, although an idealistic theory would not be incompatible with them.

A determination of the type of reality that belongs to space and time would depend, as we have remarked, upon a critical examination of their nature in the context of our total experience. It is not possible to enter here into a detailed consideration of the various arguments that have given

<sup>1</sup> "You and the Universe", by Paul Karison, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> "The Mysterious Universe", by Sir James Jeans, p.168. (Pelican Books).

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logical shape to the different philosophic theories about space and time. We propose therefore to make, first of all, a rapid survey of the attitudes of some important schools of thought, and then to indicate the position of Integral Idealism,—the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo,—in regard to the matter.

### SPACE AND TIME AS SUBJECTIVE

Empirical thinkers such as Berkeley, Hume, Mill and others maintain that space and time are abstract concepts generalised from concrete and particular experiences. The notion of space is generalised from the ideas of co-existence derived from tactuo-muscular sensations. The notion of empty space is a derivative of the sensations of unresisted movement, and the notion of filled space is a derivative of the sensations of resisted movement. Similarly, the notion of time is generalised from the experiences of 'before' and 'after', the experiences of successive and simultaneous events. But a little reflection will show that space and time cannot be merely generalised concepts. Space cannot be a mere generalisation from the outwardness of things and their movement, because both outwardness and movement already involve or presuppose the idea of space. Similarly, time cannot be a mere generalisation from the experiences of simultaneous and successive events, because the latter type of experience, i.e., apprehension of events as occurring together or in the order of before and after, already presupposes the notion of time.

Leibnitz looks upon space as an accident of our confused perception of the non-spatial objective reality. In his view, the ultimate constituents of the universe are absolutely non-extended spiritual atoms which he calls monads. Space is not an objective entity, but just a phenomenal appearance arising from our confused perception of the co-existence of monads owing to the inherent limitations of our nature. Now, if there is an endless plurality of monads existing outside of my perception, and existing one outside of another, that means that there is some sort of objective extension, some sort of medium for reciprocal exclusion of co-existent objective realities. And such objective extension or reciprocal extension is indeed the essence of space. True, we usually associate space with matter. But close reflection upon the nature of space will reveal that there can hardly be any valid objection to the reality of non-material space or to a spiritual exclusion of consciousness. It may be said that even though there may be spiritual extension of consciousness reciprocal exclusion in respect of existence is the distinctive and exclusive characteristic of matter, and cannot belong to the spirit. But in that case, the whole Leibnitzian theory of a plurality of mutually

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exclusive and "windowless" monads falls to the ground. We may sum up the situation as follows. If space is in its essence extension, then it is not necessarily material, but may quite possibly be in its ultimate truth some spiritual extension of consciousness. If, however, the essence of space be not extension, but *reciprocal* exclusion of existence, as some philosophers maintain, then the non-spatial spirit cannot be an assemblage of mutually exclusive units like monads.

### SPACE AND TIME AS A PRIORI FORMS OF INTUITION

Kant is the most celebrated exponent of the theory of space and time as subjective. They are, in his judgment, subjective not in the sense of being arbitrary, private or illusory. They are subjective in so far as they have no independent existence of their own apart from human perception. They cannot be proclaimed to be intrinsic features of reality in itself. They are regarded by Kant as necessary forms of human perception; they, are, in Kant's words, *à priori* forms of intuition. This means that our sensibility is so constituted that we are under the inescapable necessity of perceiving all things in space and time, just as a jaundiced person or a person with blue spectacles on is under the necessity of perceiving all things as yellow or blue. That which is immediately given to us or presented to our sensibility is what Kant calls a "manifold of intuition". The manifold of intuition is first unified in space and time. This unification or initial ordering of the chaotic mass of sensations is effected by means of space and time so that they may be further arranged and unified by the categories of the understanding. Since space and time are necessary forms of our intuition, and not arbitrary concepts generalised from sensations, it is but natural that they should enjoy objective validity so far as human experience extends. They are public and not private; they may be said to be elements in the framework of the world of our experience despite the fact that they are subjective. In Kant's terminology, they are empirically real, but transcendently ideal. Kant's reasons for regarding space and time as subjective are briefly as follows. First, space and time cannot be treated as empirical concepts derived from experiences of outwardness and juxtaposition, and those of simultaneity and successiveness, because the latter forms of experience are themselves impossible without the presuppositions of space and time. Secondly, we can think of space and time as empty of all phenomena, but we cannot think of phenomena apart from space and time. This clearly shows that space and time are necessary representations *à priori*. Thirdly, space and time are infinite and continuous wholes. Now,

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since whatever is an object of perception or experience is finite and limited, they cannot be objects of perception, but must rather be *a priori* forms of the act of perception. Infinity is more a function of mental activity than a datum of mental apprehension. Then again, the relation between the finite spaces and the one infinite space, or the relation between the finite times and the one infinite time, is not identically the same as the relation between component parts and their integral whole, because no amount of addition of finite terms can produce a genuine infinity. Nor can the relation in question be analogous to that between a general concept and its particular instances because finite spaces and times do not contain infinite space and infinite time, and cannot therefore be regarded as their particular exemplifications. So space and time, infinite and unlimited wholes that they are, can be posited only as modes of apprehension or as functions of the faculty of sensibility, and not as objects of perception. Fourthly, it is only if space and time be *a priori* forms of intuition that the truths of geometry, which deals with the properties of space, and the truths of arithmetic which deals with the properties of time, or of number which arises from successive movements in time, can be universal and necessary. Had space and time been objects of perception, the truths of geometry and arithmetic would have been contingent and probable only.

The foundations of Kant's arguments for the subjectivity of space and time have however been rudely shaken by the remarkable advance of scientific knowledge in the subsequent period. With regard to Kant's first argument it is now pointed out that we can apprehend sense-data along with spatial and temporal characters. Perception of extended surfaces and enduring events does not, it is now argued, presuppose the notions of infinite space and infinite time functioning as antecedent media. The latter can very well be exhibited as constructions obtained by the unconscious correlation of perceptual spaces and times which are all finite. The second Kantian argument has been refuted by a flat contradiction of the facts of experience to which it makes an appeal. Kant says that we can think of space or extension as empty of all sensible objects or as eviscerated of all secondary qualities. But modern psychology points out that extension without some sensuous content which is extended is a psychological monstrosity. Extension cannot be thought of, says Bradley, "without thinking at the same time of a 'what' that is extended. And not only is this so, but particular differences, such as 'up and down', 'right and left', are necessary to the terms of the spatial relation. But these differences clearly are not merely spatial."<sup>1</sup> When we visualise space, we must think of it as coloured; when

<sup>1</sup> "Appearance and Reality", p. 17.

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we try to feel space we cannot separate it from tactuo-muscular sensations. Some psychologists even go to the length of asserting that extension is nothing but a growth or construction from wholly non-extended secondary qualities, though that is perhaps going too far in the opposite direction. In regard to Kant's third argument, it has been maintained that infinite space and infinite time are neither wholes composed of finite spaces and finite times, not empirical concepts generalised from them, but logical constructions built out of the latter. In regard to Kant's fourth argument, it is held that the apodictic certainty which appears to characterise the truths of geometry and arithmetic is due to the fact that the absolute simplicity of mathematical phenomena admits of the undiluted application of the deductive method. The truths of geometry and arithmetic are universal and necessary only because they are analytical deductions from certain fundamental assumptions. But the discovery of different kinds of non-Euclidean geometry has today clearly brought into relief the conventional character of the fundamental premises of even mathematical sciences. Such premises are not really axioms, but postulates: they are pragmatically useful, and relative to the standpoints and purposes of special sciences.

### SPACE AND TIME AS MODES OF MULTIPLICATION

Before taking up a review of the objectivist theories of space and time, let us see what further developments Kant's doctrine of the subjectivity of space and time did undergo. Gentile agrees with Kant that space and time are *a priori* forms of perception, but such forms of perception are to be understood in Gentile's opinion, not as static moulds, but as active functions of the mind. Gentile lays indeed the greatest emphasis upon their character as functions or spiritual acts. In his view, there can be no multiplicity apart from the multiplying activity of the mind. "It is the mind's spatialising activity", says Gentile, "which generates multiplicity. It does not presuppose it. Multiplication is the concrete reality which gives place to multiplicity. It is only abstractly that multiplicity can be thought of as something which subsists, withdrawn from the movement which belongs to, and is, the presupposition of thought."<sup>1</sup> Space and time which appear as forms of multiplicity are in their essence modes of multiplication which is a mental act. From this it follows that the reality of space is spatialisation, and the reality of time is temporalization. Now, if space and time be modes of multiplication, there can be no manifold of

<sup>1</sup> "The Theory of Mind as Pure Act", p. 124.

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intuition, as Kant supposes, antecedent to the spatialising and temporalizing activity of the mind. Absolute multiplicity is the character of the positive in so far as it is posited, and the multiple positive is posited by the multiplying act of the mind.

If we reflect upon the nature of space, we find that its essence lies in reciprocal exclusion of all the terms of actual or possible experience. Exactly the same is also true of the essential nature of time. So Gentile holds that time may be described as "the spatialization of the unity of space".<sup>1</sup> It is the multiplication of a point of space or of the totality of space in another dimension. Kant insists on the unifying and order-imposing function of space and time, because he presupposes the manifold of intuition as an antecedent datum. But Gentile contends that they are not so much in the nature of order and synthesis as in the nature of differentiation and multiplication. While the multiple points of space are characterised by *co-existence*, the multiple instants of time are characterised by *compresence*. Co-existence is convergence of all the points of space in a point which is outside them all, and which is, in consequence, the negation of their multiplicity. It is this transcendental point (i.e., the transcendental ego) which is the intelligibility of space. Similarly, compresence is the convergence of all the moments of time, past, present, and future, in a *present* which is not the present situated between a past and a future, but is rather the negation of all multiplicity and successiveness. It is the transcendental or eternal present, on which all the rays of time converge and from which all irradiate, that is the intelligibility of time. Thus space and time are intelligible only as modes of activity of a non-spatial and non-temporal principle of consciousness.

Gentile utters no doubt a profound truth when he says that space and time are unintelligible except as modes of activity of a transcendental principle of consciousness. But he seems to us definitely mistaken in identifying that principle of consciousness with the mental act. The mind as we know it is a power of ignorance groping towards knowledge, and is not the ultimate creative principle. Space and time conceived as principles of division or reciprocal exclusion are indeed correlative to the mind, but the same is not true when they are viewed in their essential character. Space-time is in its deepest essence an extensive continuum, a self-extension of the dynamic spirit, an objective medium for the unfoldment of the infinite possibilities inherent in it. It is a grievous mistake to assume, as Gentile does assume, that all multiplicity must necessarily be reciprocally

<sup>1</sup> "The Theory of Mind as Pure Act", p. 118.

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exclusive. Mystics testify to the reality of interpenetrating multiplicity in some spiritual extension; different souls are in their view closely bound together by a bond of mutuality rooted in essential identity. Bradley and Bergson affirm the existence of undifferentiated diversity; the former posits it in immediate experience, and the latter glimpses it in the creative flow of time. Such interpenetrating diversities are surely objectively real apart from mental activity. Space-time, spiritual self-extension that it is in its essential character, is the medium of such interpenetrating multiplicity.

### SPACE AND TIME AS OBJECTIVE

The popular attitude in regard to space and time is embodied in what is known as the receptacle theory. Space is popularly imagined as a vast endless receptacle in which material objects exist; time is imagined as a vast beginningless and endless receptacle in which events occur. The implications of the receptacle theory are followed out to their logical extreme by the great physicist Newton who emphasises the absoluteness of space and time as receptacles. According to Newton's absolute theory, portions of space and time are as actual as anything else, and they are 'occupied' by other actualities such as particles of matter. The order and interrelations of the moments of time as well as the order and interrelations of the points of space are eternally fixed. Absolute time, of itself, and from its absolute nature, flows equably without regard to anything external. It is to be sharply distinguished from the relative, apparent and common time which is some sensible and external measure of duration by means of motion such as an hour, a day, a month, a year. Similarly, absolute space, in its own nature and without regard to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. It is to be sharply distinguished from the relative and apparent space which is some movable dimension or measure of the absolute space, and which our senses can determine with reference to material objects. It follows from the absolute theory as sketched above that both space and time may be empty, i.e., they may exist as eviscerated of all objects and happenings.

### THE ADJECTIVAL THEORY

It was Descartes who first impugned the receptacle theory of space and time. He repudiated the view that space and time are receptacles or substantial media such as can exist in themselves. He reduced space to an attribute of matter. Space is in his view extension, and that which is extended is matter, which means that space is an essential attribute of matter. By

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reason of analogous considerations, it may be held that the essence of time is duration, and that duration is a character of events that endure. Since in Descartes's opinion space is an essential attribute of matter, it follows that there can be no empty space, and no non-extended material particle or indivisible atom. Spinoza supports Descartes in his view that space is an attribute. But Spinoza maintains that space is an attribute, not of matter, but of one infinite substance which people call God. Substantiality, the essence of which lies in independence of being, can strictly speaking belong to nothing short of the one infinite and all-comprehensive creative principle. Matter is not therefore an independent substance of which space is an essential attribute; it is rather a modification of space. Material objects are modes of infinite extension, or of God in so far as He is extended.

### TIME AS THE SUPREME CREATIVE PRINCIPLE

While Spinoza holds that all material objects are modes of space or extension, Bergson contends that all the objects of our experience are deposits of the movement of time. For Spinoza, space is something basic, it is some sort of stuff,—a view from which, as we shall see later on, Alexander takes his clue,—though space conceived as a stuff is undoubtedly in his opinion an attribute of one infinite substance. For Bergson it is time which is fundamental, and all phenomena are precipitated within the flux of time. Time is not only objectively and independently real, it is the one ultimately real creative principle. And this time, the essence of which is duration and free creation, is to be conceived as absolutely free from spatiality. Bergson agrees with Gentile that reciprocal exclusion of the elements of the manifold is of the essence of space. Space which is thus envisaged as a principle of reciprocal exclusion is a shadow of the intellect; it is said to be correlative to our thought which is weighted with geometry. Bergson disagrees with Gentile with regard to the nature of multiplicity. While, according to Gentile, all objective multiplicity is necessarily mutually exclusive and spatial, according to Bergson, there may be non-spatial multiplicity. Time is, in Bergson's view, an interfused and interpenetrating multiplicity involved in one creative urge; it is an indivisible creative act or movement. It is our intellectual habit of employing spatial metaphors that prevents an undistorted vision of the nature of time. That same habit is responsible for our conception of physical space-time or of equable and homogeneous mathematical time. The intellect, by virtue of its cinematographic mechanism, finds it practically necessary or useful to take static snapshot views of the continuous mobility of time. These immobile snapshots are then placed in juxtaposition in space.

It is thus the pragmatic functioning of the intellect which gives rise to the notions of mathematical time and physical space. But it should be evident to all that mathematical time and physical space must be as real or as unreal as the intellectual snapshots of which they function as the objective locus.

By stressing the importance of time Bergson brings to light the reality of absolutely free creation, and by disparaging the concept of static space he affirms the reality of interpenetrating plurality. And both these—unfettered creativity and non-exclusive plurality—are undoubtedly very deep features of reality. But that surely gives no warrant for enthroning time as the Ultimate of philosophy, as Bergson does. To take time as the supreme creative principle is to embrace the miracle of absolute novelties emerging from absolute non-being. The presence of genuine change and free creation in the world can very well be explained as a real self-manifestation in the temporal order of an unmanifest Eternal endowed with a free will. Similarly, the existence of non-exclusive menifoldness is proof positive of some kind of spiritual extension corresponding to the phenomenal space of division. On such a view, neither space nor time would be a mere phenomenon having no objective counterpart in ultimate reality. Both of them would rather be *phenomena bene fundata*, in so far as they would be expressions, at our human level, of the self-extension and objective self-unfoldment of the fundamental spiritual reality.

### THE RELATIONAL THEORY OF SPACE AND TIME

Russell maintains that time, far from being the supreme creative principle, is in some sense an unimportant and superficial characteristic of the real. He acknowledges no doubt the reality of time, the reality of the past and the future as also of the present, but still a certain emancipation from slavery to time is, in his opinion, essential to philosophic thought. "Both in thought and in feeling", says Russell, "to realise the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom".<sup>1</sup> Russell is a chief exponent of the relational theory of space and time. There is, in his judgement, no reason to postulate such mysterious metaphysical entities as "points" and "instants" apart from sense-data. There are spatial relations such as "above", "below", "near", "distant," etc. and temporal relations such as "simultaneous", "earlier and later", etc. obtaining amongst various sense-data. These spatio-temporal relations are perceived along with sense-data, and can by no means be regarded as features contributed by our mental subjective apparatus. They

<sup>1</sup> "Our Knowledge of the External World", p. 166-7.

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are as much immediately given to us as sense-data are. Points and instants which are ultimate constituents in the absolute theory of space-time are but logical functions constructed of our sense-data and other structurally analogous particulars. A "point" for example has been defined as a set of spatial objects or "volumes which would naturally be said to contain the point"; and an instant has been defined as "a group of events simultaneous with each other and not all simultaneous with any event outside the group".<sup>1</sup>

The space and time of physics i.e., the one all-embracing space and the one all-embracing time, are also no better than logical constructions. They are logical functions of private spaces and private times. In the very beginning, we have the space of sight, the space of touch, and the spaces of other senses. These are without difficulty correlated into one private space such as embraces all sense-data, and each person, so far as his sense-data are concerned, lives in a private world characterised by his own private space. The place at which a sense-datum is is a place in private space. This place is therefore different from any place in the private space of another percipient. Now, the multiplicity of private spaces directly experienced by different persons are correlated into one all-embracing space by means of the correlated "sensibilia" which are normally regarded as the appearances, in different perspectives, of one and the same thing. This one space is called by Russell "perspective-space", in which one whole private world counts as a point, or at least as a spatial unit. Each private world may be regarded as the appearance which the universe presents from a certain point of view. Since perspective-space is a three-dimensional series of perspectives each of which is itself three-dimensional, it is natural that perspective-space should be a space of six dimensions. But we notice correlations between the perspective space and the various private spaces contained within the various perspectives severally. It is on the basis of such correlations that perspective space is constructed by physics as one three-dimensional whole. Russell says that 'it is because of the unconscious performance of this correlation that the distinction between perspective space and the percipient's private space has been blurred, with disastrous results for the philosophy of physics'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the one all-embracing time is, in his view, a construction from private times. Between two perspectives which both belong to one person's experience there will be a direct time-relation of before and after. This gives us the time that belongs to a private biography, which is a series of events earlier or later than, or

<sup>1</sup> "Our Knowledge of the External World", p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> "Mysticism and Logic", p. 162.

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simultaneous with, a given sensible. It is by correlating the times in different biographies by means of correlated events that one all-embracing time is constructed. Relativity physics has shown that time functions as an essential factor in the construction of one space, and also that space functions as an essential factor in the construction of one time.

### THE EPOCHAL THEORY OF TIME

Like Russell, Whitehead also subscribes to the relational theory of space and time. According to Whitehead, the fundamental fact is the passing of nature, its development, its creative advance. "Actual entities", "actual occasions", or "events", which are involved in the creative advance of Nature, are also extensive one in relation to another. Time and space originate as abstractions from these two basic facts, namely, the passage of events and the extension of events over each other. Space, however, differentiates itself from time, in Whitehead's opinion, at a somewhat developed stage of the abstractive process. Space and time are not, of course, abstractions in the sense that they do not express real facts for us. When Whitehead calls them abstractions, he means to assert that there are no spatial facts or temporal facts or even spatio-temporal facts apart from physical nature. Space and time are, in his opinion, merely ways of expressing certain truths about the relations between events. Moreover, what we mean by space or time under one set of circumstances is not what we mean by space or time under another set of circumstances.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental and more general scheme of relations of which space and time are specialisations is what Whitehead calls "the extensive continuum". This extensive continuum is not a fact prior to the world; it is the first determination of order—that is, of real potentiality—arising out of the genral character of the world.<sup>2</sup> This continuum is itself the mere potentiality for division or atomization, because, according to Whitehead, while continuity is a feature of potentiality, actuality is incurably atomic. It is therefore actual entities which atomize or divide the extensive continuum. In respect to space, this atomization means that every actual entity in the temporal world is to be credited with a spatial volume for its perspective standpoint. In respect to time, this atomization takes the special form of "the epochal theory of time". Time is, in Whitehead's view, atomic, i.e. it is sheer succession of epochal durations. The "duration" is the observational present

<sup>1</sup> "Concept of Nature", p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> "Process and Reality," p. 92.

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i.e. the whole of nature apprehended in one immediate observation. Nature as extended is simultaneous but not instantaneous; it includes passage of events, it embraces antecedents and consequents. The divisibility and extensiveness falls within the given duration. "The epochal duration is not realised *via* its successive divisible parts, but is given *with* its parts". Time viewed as succession of epochal durations is not to be conceived as another form of extensiveness. Such time has been separated from 'extension' and from the divisibility which arises from the character of spatio-temporal of extension.<sup>1</sup> The essence of epochal time is realisation. Every epochal whole is the realisation of some pattern in events. The temporal process of realisation is not necessarily one single series of linear succession, but can be analysed into a group of linear serial processes. Each of these linear series is a space-time system.<sup>2</sup>

### SPACE AND TIME AS RELATIVE, BUT NOT RELATIONAL

Professor Alexander, who is in dead earnest with the reality of space and time, repudiates the relational theory as expounded by Russell and Whitehead. Space and time are without doubt relative to each other, but still, in his opinion, they can hardly be treated as relational schemes abstracted from a concrete stuff of sense-data or actual occasions of experience. Nor is space-time a form of matter, as Einstein suggests. Alexander is emphatic in his assertion that space-time is the fundamental stuff of all things; it is, in his picturesque pharaseology, "the matrix of all existence and the nurse of all becoming." Space-Time is the fundamental stuff, not of course in the traditional sense of substance, but in so far as it is the world in its simplest form of expression; it is the primordial form of existence within which all empirical things are differentiated as finite complexes of motion. An empirical thing, say an orange or even a patch of colour, not only occupies a definite portion of space-time, but is itself extended and enduring. Space-time may be said to penetrate into its very essence and being. So, the question is forced into our mind. What would be the relation between the spatio-temporal essence of a thing and the portion of space-time which it externally occupies? A very embarrassing question this! Alexander holds that the relation between space-time and empirical existents is not, to be sure, an external one. Taking his clue from Spinoza, he maintains that all material objects are modes of space or extension, or, to be more

<sup>1</sup> "Science and the Modern World", Chap. VII.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

accurate and in keeping with modern ways of thinking, they are spatio-temporal configurations differentiated by some empirical emergent quality. Material objects are believed in the last analysis to be complexes of motion deposited within one all-comprehensive system of motion. But the authority of Spinoza can, it seems to us, hardly be quoted in support of Alexander's view in the matter. Material things are believed by Spinoza to be modes not of space or extension as such—not of extension conceived as an independent stuff—but of extension *qua* an attribute of God. In other words, material objects are believed to be modes of one infinite substance, God, in so far as He is extended. God *qua* extended is one infinite and universal matter, and finite material things are in Spinoza's view modifications of that material stuff. Indeed the more one reflects upon the essential nature of space and time, the more is one sure to be convinced that space-time can be conceived neither as an empty medium nor as an independent stuff. Space and time essentially presuppose some concrete reality, as Russell and Whitehead contend. Space or extension presupposes a 'what' that is extended, and time or duration presupposes a 'what' that endures. They are in their deepest essence modes of self-extension of ultimate reality. Alexander is right when he says that the world is in its simplest expression space-time, but he turns a blind eye to the supreme truth that the world in its simplest expression means ultimate reality in its earliest self-manifestation. Space and time may appear as the fundamental stuff in relation to the infinite diversity of empirical objects, but in their inmost essence they are modes of self-extension of the supreme reality.

With regard to the relation between space and time Alexander claims to go much deeper than the doctrine of relativity. He maintains that the relation in question is much more intimate than is supposed in relativity physics. Einstein, Minkowski and others hold that time is a fourth additional dimension of space. In other words, every point has four co-ordinates, the time co-ordinate being the fourth. Time as an additional dimension is treated as a further order in which three-dimensional spaces are arranged. But Alexander says that though the above view may be a useful means of mathematical manipulation, or a legitimate way of mathematical representation of the nature of space and time, the relation between them, as empirically revealed to our inspection, is much closer and much more intimate still. He points out that time does with its one-dimensional order cover and embrace the three dimensions of space, and is not additional to them. "It is not a fourth dimension in the universe, but repeats the other three".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Space, Time and Deity", Vol. I, p. 59.

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Metaphorically speaking, Time is the soul of Space, and Space is the body of Time. Space, even in order to be space, must be temporal. Similarly, time, even in order to be time, must be spatial. But how? Let us briefly consider how Alexander shows space and time to be vital one to the very existence of the other.

Time as experienced by us is succession in duration. It is a one-dimensional continuous series of successive instants or durations. Now it is space which supplies the element of continuity to time. Apart from space, time would have been reduced to a series of perishing moments. Not only that. In the absence of such a bond of connection as is supplied by space, time would shrink to a bare now, a now which was perpetually being renewed, —a now, which had neither an earlier nor a later moment. It is the continuum of space which makes the moments of time into a continuous series. Similarly, looking at space it is found that space as experienced by us is a continuous whole of distinguishable positions. Now, it is time which supplies space with its element of differentiation. It is by a temporal process of movement that one position is distinguished from another position in space. So space is said to be full of time, and different points are said to exist in different instants, just as different instants occur at different points. Apart from time, space would sink into a blank continuum. As Alexander puts it, "without space there would be no connection in Time. Without Time there would be no points to connect."<sup>1</sup> But even this is not quite sufficient to convey a full idea of the kind of intimacy that characterises the relation between Space and Time. Space and Time are not only vital each to the existence of the other. The empirical characteristics of time exactly correspond to the dimensions of space, and the dimensions of space exactly correspond to the empirical characteristics of time. There are three empirical characteristics of time such as successiveness, irreversibility, and uniform direction. In so far as time is irreversible in direction, the moments of time form an asymmetrical series, which means that an instant which is before another cannot be after it. In so far as time is uniform in direction, the moments of time form a transitive series, which means that if an instant A is before an instant B and B before an instant C, then A is before C. Alexander takes great pains to show that the characteristics of time as a transitive asymmetrical series of succession owe themselves to the fact that space has three dimensions, and conversely that space has three dimensions because time is successive, irreversible, and uniform in direction. Considered apart from time, the three dimensions of space are independent of

<sup>1</sup> "Space, Time and Deity", Vol. I, p. 44.

one another. "To say that space is a three-dimensional form of externality is the same thing as to say there are three independent one-dimensional forms of externality."<sup>1</sup> Space is a unity of three dimensions because of the three empirical features of time.

It must be admitted that Alexander has brought to light some very important truths about the relationship between space and time. But howsoever vital to each other they might be, they can by no means be posited as the concrete and ultimate stuff of existence. Space and time may be inseparable and interlocked aspects of one infinite and continuous whole, but with all that they are in the last analysis no better than abstractions from a more concrete reality. As we have already remarked, even though space-time may be the world in its simplest expression, yet viewed from the ultimate standpoint, it is the earliest self-manifestation of a much deeper reality. Even though it may appear to be the basic stuff when viewed from the empirical standpoint, it is a medium for self-manifestation of some infinitely rich and concrete reality when viewed from the transcendental standpoint. Space-time is in its essence an extensive continuum. But extension is inconceivable without some reality that is extended. Of what then is space-time an extension? If ultimate reality is, as integral spiritual experience and philosophic speculation combine to testify, one ineffable spirit, endowed with a truth-consciousness and an absolutely free will, then space-time must be the self-extension of that Spirit for the unfoldment of the infinite possibilities inherent therein.

### SPACE AND TIME AS BOTH SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE

To a balanced judgement, the view that space and time are objective entities independent of consciousness is likely to appear an opposite extreme to the view that they are merely subjective modes of apprehension. The conflict between the subjectivist and objectivist theories regarding space and time leads by an immanent dialectic to the emergence of a synthetic standpoint which seeks to reconcile the two extreme positions, and maintains that space and time are at once subjective and objective. Hegel agrees with Kant that space and time are *a priori* forms of sensuous intuition, but he goes a step further and holds that they are also elements in the framework of external nature. This is because the finite percipients are in essence reproductions of the same absolute Spirit of which external Nature is an objective self-manifestation. The same Absolute manifests itself in and through

<sup>1</sup> "Space, Time and Deity", Vol. I, p. 51.

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finite spirits, and also externalises or objectifies itself in and through space and time. It is the unity of Mind and Nature in the Absolute which guarantees the synthetic character of space and time as at once *a priori* forms of intuition and primordial features of the realm of externality. Space and time are features of the realm of externality in so far as they are the basic forms of self-externalisation of the Absolute. Now, implicit in the assertion that space and time are objective as well as subjective is the implication that Reality is at once a Unity and a co-existent Plurality, at once an eternally self-realised Fact and an eternally self-realising Act or Process. To admit sincerely the objective reality of space and time is tantamount to the admission of an element of manifoldness and also an element of dynamic will or creative urge in the heart of ultimate reality.

It is, however, extremely difficult to reconcile the two terms of the antithesis. How can that which is a Unity can at the same time be a co-existent Plurality? Then again, how can an eternally self-accomplished Fact be at the same time a self-realising Process? Space and time, taken even in their deepest spiritual signification, seem to contradict the very essence of the Absolute Spirit. That is why we find that those who take space seriously have a tendency towards materialism and pluralism and those who take time seriously show a marked tendency towards evolutionism. Those on the contrary who profess loyalty to the Absolute Spirit generally turn out advocates of a "block-universe", or of a blank featureless principle of unity. Hegel recognises the necessity of reconciling plurality with unity, and process with reality, but he does not quite succeed in unravelling the mystery of their reconciliation. Among the followers of Hegel those who take seriously one term of the antithesis are unconsciously led to compromise the reality and minimise the importance of the other term. Bradley, for example, takes seriously the aspects of unity and eternity of the supreme Reality, and we find, in consequence, that he proceeds to exhibit space and time as incomprehensible appearances. True, when Bradley calls space and time appearances, he does not mean to relegate them to the sphere of the purely subjective. Space and time are, in his view, appearances in the sense that they are not ultimately real, and in the sense that they are in the nature of abstractions from the concrete fullness of experience. Bradley's reason for this view is that they are found to be shot through and through with logical contradictions when they are submitted to philosophical scrutiny. They are discrete and yet continuous. They evidently come to us as relations between some units or ultimate constituents. Now, if these units be non-spatial or non-temporal, relational schemes involving such units cannot be space and time. If, on the contrary, these units be spatial and temporal, then they must

dissolve into relations between smaller terms, which again would dissolve into further relations, and so on *ad infinitum*. This shows that space and time are not ultimately real. But still they are real in so far as they fall within the Absolute, and function as elements in the permanent structure of reality. In taking their place in the Absolute in conjunction with other factors of experience, they are, to be sure, substantially modified and transformed beyond recognition. They are somehow preserved in reality, but precisely how and in what shape they are preserved is more than Bradley can tell us. It is thus evident that what space and time are in their intrinsic essence Bradley cannot tell. Now, can he show any organic relation of space and time to the Absolute? Space and time as we know them are, in his view, unreal abstractions or self-contradictory appearances, incomprehensible as to how they appear, and incomprehensible also as to how they disappear into Reality. But such a view is, to say the least, anything but satisfactory. It provides no indication as to the sort of thing that constitutes the real essence of space and time. Unless we get an idea of the objective counterpart in reality of the appearances of space and time, and also an idea as to their *raison d'être* in the world of manifestation, we can hardly feel inclined to accept them as real appearances i.e., as both subjective and objective.

In McTaggart's philosophy we find that a serious attempt is made to demonstrate the synthetic character of space and time as both subjective and objective. He calls them *phenomena bene fundata* in as much as they are not mere phenomena in Kant's sense of the term, but are such phenomena as correspond to some indisputable features of ultimate reality. Space is characterised by co-existence of a plurality of reciprocally exclusive parts and by infinite divisibility of these parts. Now, the features of co-existence, reciprocal exclusion, and infinite divisibility are ultimately real, because according to McTaggart reality consists of an impersonal unity of a plurality self-subsistent spiritual substances or selves, which are mutually exclusive in respect of their existence. The nature of each of these self-subsistent selves is infinitely divisible, the terms in the process of such division being perceptions of other selves and their perceptions. What is erroneous or illusory about space is its appearance as an attribute of matter or as locus of the existence of matter. McTaggart advances an array of close-knit arguments to demonstrate the unreality of matter.<sup>1</sup> The central point in his reasoning is that in the case of an unconscious substance like matter infinite divisibility involves self-contradiction in so far as every material object is composed of parts, and yet there are no parts of which it is composed,

<sup>1</sup> "The Nature of Existence", Vol. II, Chap. XXXIV.

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because every part is composed of further parts. The same is not however true of the conscious self, because though such a self contains perceptions within perceptions *ad infinitum*, yet such a series of perceptions are all determined by the nature of different selves which are related to each other in different ways.

Like space, time also is a *phenomenon bene fundatum*. The phenomenon of time is a transitive asymmetrical series of successive moments. According to McTaggart, the character of time as a transitive asymmetrical series must be admitted to be ultimately real. Corresponding to the distinctions of earlier and later, there exist in reality distinctions of being included and being inclusive. Earlier perceptions are included in perceptions which appear to come later. Such an enclosure series of perceptions is also governed by transitive and asymmetrical relations. But though time is objectively real in so far as its serial character is concerned, it is entirely subjective in respect of its successiveness. McTaggart adduces a unique set of considerations to demonstrate the illusory character of time as succession.<sup>1</sup> Succession is, he points out, entirely meaningless apart from change. When terms are arranged as earlier and later in serial form, they do not admit of any change whatsoever. If, for example, A is earlier than B, then it is eternally earlier than B, there being no room for any change in this relationship. Deprived of changeableness, distinctions of earlier and later lose their temporal significance. But the series of terms arranged as earlier and later is in fact what it is only because it presents another aspect or is indissolubly bound up with another series,—the series of terms arranged as past, present and future. It is the properties of being past, present and future which are constantly changing. Every event is first future in relation to some present, it then becomes present, and finally it is relegated to the past, first to the immediate past, and gradually more and more to the remote past. Apart from the fact that the members of the series 'past-present-future' presuppose their relation to something which is placed outside the whole series, almost every member possesses the properties of past, present and future which are quite incompatible determinations. It is this possession of self-contradictory properties which makes the time series unreal. It would be unavailing to say that an event is past, present and future not at the same time, but that it *was* future it *is* present, and it *will be* past. This means that the event was future at some past moment, it is present at some moment of present, and it will be past at some future moment. In other words, in order to escape contradiction an event must be said to be past, present and future only at moments specified

<sup>1</sup> "The Nature of Existence", Vol. II, p. 9-29.

as future, present and past. But the moments future, present and past would again require, in order to avoid contradiction, other moments specified as past, present and future, and so on ad infinitum. Thus the contradiction is never avoided; it penetrates the very essence of the time series, and reveals it in its illusory character.

We may observe here by way of criticism that while McTaggart goes too far in his vindication of the objective reality of space, his theory of time amounts to its reduction to a mere illusion, all his assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. He rejects space as an attribute or locus of matter, because, an uncompromising critic of materialism that he is, nothing material can find favour with him. But he accepts as ultimately real all such phenomenal characteristics of space as infinite divisibility, co-existence of plurality and reciprocal exclusion of being. His conception of reality as a plurality of eternally self-subsistent selves is the outcome of this acceptance. With regard to time, however, he spares no pains to repudiate its very distinctive essence of successiveness. Succession is, in his view, a shadow of misperception. The reality behind it is an eternally fixed transitive asymmetrical series of perceptions related to each other as included and inclusive. McTaggart's theory of time thus exemplifies the notion of the 'block-universe' in its most undiluted form.

McTaggart's chief argument to prove the unreality of time is that the subjective distinctions of past, present and future are vital to the time series, and that the distinctions of earlier and later are meaningless apart from them. But it requires no extraordinary insight to see that events are capable of changing in a variety of ways, and that they may change in such a way as to make the distinctions of earlier and later objectively and independently valid. Professor Eddington suggests that the one-way character of time or its successiveness in an irreversible direction arises from the fact that the universe is, as the Second Law of Thermodynamics implies, increasingly running down. According to this Law, the random element or entropy is always increasing in the universe, and it can never decrease. It is the gradual increase of entropy or complexity of organisation which imparts to time its one-way character. As Eddington puts it, "So far as physics is concerned, time's arrow is a property of entropy alone."<sup>1</sup> Distinctions of earlier and later can then very well be understood to have their objective basis in entropy which is the practical measure of the increasing random element in the universe. This is, however, so far as science can go by way of affirming the objective validity of the irreversible successive-

<sup>1</sup> "The Nature of the Physical World", p. 86.

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ness of time. But there are also philosophically more satisfactory means of vindicating this irreversible successiveness. Henri Bergson holds that it is free or unfettered creation which constitutes the essence of time. Genuine creation implies continual emergence of unique forms and fresh novelties. Distinctions of earlier and later presuppose such a process of creative advance. Dr. Broad has formulated his theory of time on closely similar lines. Says Broad, "The sumtotal of existence is always increasing, and it is this which gives the time-series a sense as well as an order. A moment  $t$  is later than a moment  $t^1$  if the sumtotal of existence at  $t$  includes the sumtotal of existence at  $t^1$  together with something more."<sup>1</sup> There is thus little warrant for McTaggart's assertion that time is incomprehensible except with reference to the subjective distinctions of past, present and future. There is without doubt genuine change in the objective world apart from the succession of our perceptions; there is in other words objective succession in addition to subjective succession. That which can reasonably be disputed is the precise nature of the objectively real change. Consistently with his view of the nature of ultimate reality, Sri Aurobindo holds that objective change is in the nature of progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit or its gradual unfoldment in self-created media. Bergson's theory of absolutely novel creation, and Broad's theory of continual increase of the sumtotal of existence, are true only as characteristics of the world of manifestation, and not of ultimate reality. The fundamental import of objective change is the progressive enrichment of the world of manifestation. That there is objectively real change nobody can seriously dispute without running into self-contradictions or flying in the face of obvious facts. And it is objectively real change which functions as the basis of our notion of time. Time conceived as a transitive asymmetrical series of successive moments (i.e., an irreversible order of successive instants) is an abstraction from the concrete change or creative advance of Nature. McTaggart embarks upon an examination of the nature of time with this initial assumption that the moments of time, in order to be temporal, must be capable of changing in respect of their qualities or relations. He finds on examination that the moments of time can change only in respect of being past, present and future. But this is obviously beginning at the wrong end, and starting with unwarrantable assumptions. The conception of a time series of discrete moments with which McTaggart starts is undoubtedly a product of highgrade abstraction, extracted from the concrete flux of existence.

<sup>1</sup> "Scientific Thought", p. 66.

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### SPACE-TIME AS SELF-EXTENSION OF THE SPIRIT

It should be abundantly clear from the foregoing discussion that according to the Integral Idealism of Sri Aurobindo the fundamental reality of space-time is spiritual self-extension of ultimate reality. Reality is, in its original status and intrinsic nature, the spaceless and timeless Spirit. Space and time are the same Reality self-extended to contain the deployment of what is within it.<sup>1</sup> Now, the self-extension of the infinite and eternal Spirit must be infinite and eternal too. So it may be said that the fundamental truth of space is the infinity of the Infinite, whereas the fundamental truth of time is the eternity of the Eternal.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine of the spiritual essence of space-time would not in the least be affected by the diversity of interpretation that might be placed upon the specific relationship between space and time. The spiritual theory of space and time may primarily be understood to mean that Space is Brahman as self-extended status, and Time is Brahman as self-extended movement. This implies that Space is a static extension in which all things stand or move together in a fixed order, and Time is a mobile extension which is measured by movement and flux of events. But such a construction would be based upon our *prima facie* inaccurate impressions about space and time. The truth perhaps is that Space is Brahman as self-extended for the holding together of forms and objects, and Time is Brahman as self-extended for the deployment of the movement of self-power carrying forms and objects. Such a view would make Space and Time not two different kinds of self-extension, but two inseparable aspects of one and the same self-extension of the cosmic Eternal.<sup>3</sup>

Bradley has drawn the attention of the philosophic world to the existence of different spaces and different times. In addition to one all-embracing physical space, there are different dream-spaces, imaginary spaces, and the conceptual space that functions as the habitat of our different concepts. Similarly, in addition to one all-embracing physical time there are dream times and the imaginary times that belong to our different stories. The commonsense method of understanding this multiplicity of different spaces and different times is to affirm the reality of physical space and physical time alone, and to relegate the rest of it to the realm of pure illusion. Prof. Alexander, a neo-realist that he is, cannot but accord reality to mental spaces and mental times, but he takes considerable pains to show that the

<sup>1</sup> "The Life Divine", Vol. II (1), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100.

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latter have spatio-temporal connection with, and consequently fall within, the one all-encompassing physical Space-Time. Mr. Bradley maintains that mental spaces do no doubt possess a type of reality of their own, but still they cannot be said to have any spatial connection with the physical space which is as much a product of ideal construction as they themselves are. In his judgment, the different kinds of space, physical and *mental*, can be united in the Absolute only in some sort of non-spatial unity. Similarly, mental times such as belong to dreams and stories cannot be said to have any temporal connection with the physical time which is as much an ideal construction as the former. So, the different kinds of time, physical and mental, can be united in the Absolute only in some sort of non-temporal unity. Integral Idealism holds that different spaces and different times which are relative to different states of consciousness do surely enjoy each a specific type of reality of its own. But, according to Integral Idealism, the fundamental truth and essential basis of the wide diversity of spaces and times is neither one physical space-time as Alexander holds, nor one mysterious all-engulfing Whole that swallows them up beyond recognition as Bradley suggests, but the self-extension of the creative Spirit. All times and spaces are, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, "renderings of a fundamental spiritual reality of Time-Space."<sup>1</sup>

Those who have any acquaintance with direct spiritual experience bear witness to what they call "chidakasa" which means the space or limitless expanse of consciousness. It is a fact of direct experience that when one draws back from the physical space, one becomes aware of a subjective space-extension in which the mind lives and moves about. This immaterial extension is not less real than physical space, but rather belongs to a higher level of reality. It would also be wrong to suggest that mental space was quite unrelated to physical space. There is in fact a relation of constant interpenetration between the two. As Sri Aurobindo testifies 'our mind can move in its own space in such a way as to effectuate a movement also in space of Matter or act upon something distant in space of Matter!<sup>2</sup> But behind this mental extension, there is a still higher kind of extension, a pure spiritual space, which contains within itself the secret essence of physical space. A man can step back into this higher kind of extension by a mighty effort of concentration. From pure spiritual space which is revealed to the inward eye of the soul time seems to drop away, as there is no perception of any change or movement there. It is this timeless spiritual

<sup>1</sup> "The Life Divine", Vol. II (1), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

extension which manifests itself in the shape of the subjective mind-field at the level of the pure mind, and in the shape of the objective field of senseperception at the level of the sense-mind.

Similarly, by drawing back from the physical time by inward spiritual movement, it is possible to have an increasing insight into the essence of the temporal. Just as the ultimate truth about the nature of space is the infinity of the Infinite, so also the ultimate truth about the nature of time is the eternity of the Eternal. We, human beings, involved as we are in the movement of time, are tied down to the passing moment in respect of immediate experience. Moving along with the movement of time, we can lay hold only of very tiny temporal fragments that go to constitute our ever-shifting specious present. The past and the future alike are to us but ideal constructions. But though we cannot directly perceive the past and the future, we construct the time-process in our imagination as a beginningless and endless series, as an eternal movement, flow or stream. Now, critical reflection can never reconcile itself to such a beginningless and endless movement of time. The infinite time-process, which is for us an ideal construction, must also be capable of being directly experienced in order that it may be said to be concretely real. Royce suggests that just as a definite length of time, however small,—the specious present that contains a rearward and forward-looking end,—is immediately given to the finite span of human consciousness, similarly the whole time-process with its three periods of past, present and future, must be immediately present in a flash of intuition to the “Eternal Now” or the infinite span of consciousness of the Absolute. Royce maintains that it is utter folly to denounce the infinite time-process as a “bad infinite”. Even when considered as a conceptual construction, the time-series, properly understood, is quite self-coherent and satisfactory to the intellect. Modern mathematics has amply demonstrated that the concept of the serial infinite is quite intelligible as a self-imaging or self-representative system (as a “kette”). It is present at a stroke to our thought by means of its defining concept. But in order that the time-process may gain concrete reality, it must also have a place, in Royce’s opinion, in some all-inclusive immediate experience. It must be present indeed as a “totum simul” to the infinite span of consciousness of the Divine. “The eternal insight”, as Royce puts it, “observes the whole of time and all that happens therein, and is eternal only by virtue of the fact that it does know the whole of time”.<sup>1</sup> But the infinite order of time is not only concretely real as an object of immediate con-

<sup>1</sup> “The World and the Individual”, Vol. II, p. 144.

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sciousness of God,—it is not simply a *totum simul*,—it is also, as Pringle Pattison points out<sup>1</sup>, a significant whole embraced in the Divine Consciousness which at the same time transcends it. It is significant as a teleological scheme, the successive moments of time being different stages in the progressive realisation of the Divine Will or Purpose. It is to this fact of being sustained by the Divine Will that the infinite process of time owes its unity and continuity.

If, however, we are to follow the indications of spiritual experience, we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that there is also an aspect of consciousness, a poise of being of the Spirit, to which the category of time is simply inapplicable. The Spirit in its supracosmic transcendence is characterised by timeless eternity. In respect of its immediate status or self-absorbed essentiality, the Absolute is without any development of consciousness in movement or happening. But since supra-cosmic transcendence, cosmic universality, and intra-cosmic individuality are, in the view of Integral Idealism, only different poises of being of the same Supreme Spirit, so timelessness, *totum simul*, and time-movement, are but different statuses or positions taken by consciousness with regard to the same Eternal Reality. While Bradley's conception of eternity as the transmuted essence of time is true of the Spirit in its self-absorption, Royce's view of eternity as a *totum simul* or as the whole-consciousness of an infinite succession is true of the Spirit in its cosmic universality or dynamic creativity, and the ordinary view of eternity as an endless march of time is true of the Spirit in its individual entanglement in the creative flux. It must not be supposed that the different presentations of the Eternal as described above are incapable of existing together, so that they are only successive phases either in our apprehension of reality or in the gradual self-alienation of reality itself. It must not, for example, be supposed that when the timeless experience of the Absolute is attained, the embracing consciousness of time as a *totum simul* or the simultaneous integrality of Time as well as the advancing consciousness of the time-movement must forthwith melt away like vanishing mist. It must not also be supposed that God cannot at the same time have an aspect of timeless experience and an aspect of inclusive consciousness of the entire time-process. Timelessness, eternal now, and endless succession are in fact the same Eternity in its different forms relative to the different poises of being of the Spirit. They form a simultaneous multiplicity of self-presentations of the same Reality; they correspond to different powers of self-awareness of the Supreme,—the power of status and non-manifestation, the power

<sup>1</sup> "The Idea of God", p. 355-57.

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of self-effectuating action, and the power of sportive self-entanglement in the flux of becoming. God in His unmanifest essentiality is ineffably non-temporal; God in His self-manifesting creativity is inclusive of the temporal; and God in His self-alienated embodiment moves long with the movement of the temporal.

*Anjah-Sava*  
*or*  
*The Rapid Rite of a Seer-Priest*

T. V. KAPALI SASTRY

AS we follow in the footsteps of the Master in our studies of the hymns of the Rig Veda, we get more and more convinced not merely of the straightforwardness of the approach that leads us to discover the inner and true sense of the Riks, but of another fact. It is the conviction growing upon us that this is the only true way, that the inner meaning is the substance which is the treasure of spiritual wisdom and Knowledge of the Gods and the Godhead. It is not that there is nothing else, any more or less than this, it may contain within it concealed other knowledge that pertains to the domain of many branches of Science. There may be and is room for other line or lines of approach affording fields of thought, for those interested in Astronomy, Geology, Biology or Ayurveda. But the one inner meaning that runs consistently through the whole body of the hymnal text is the main issue of the Veda and that is the spiritual and occult knowledge and Divine Wisdom which certainly justifies the hoary tradition of India among all religions and sects and saints that the Veda is Revelation and Divine Scripture. It may throw light on other objects of Knowledge, but they are side-issues, not the main spirit and substance which is knowledge of truths about the Godhead and the Gods who are Powers and Personalities of the Godhead and about their status, and manifestation in the Cosmos as well as in man.

Apart from this sacred tradition which is based upon the secret and inner sense of the Veda, there runs a parallel tradition that the Veda is a book of Works, *Karma Kanda*, rituals and sacrifice, and this is true in the external and gross sense, so ably and with great industry and diligence worked out and brought forth in the great commentary of Sayana. Leaving aside the question of discrepancies and quite often the incongruous and poverty-

stricken thought that run through this commentary on a large body of the hymns—and after all this is a matter of detail—Sayana's work is consistent in giving us the external and ritualistic meaning of the hymns. And this is a great asset for us, for those who attempt to get into the inner secret through the outer garb that is provided in this monumental work of extraordinary grossness and crudities often bordering on incoherences; it provokes our thought and invites our attention to seek for the secret behind the apparent. But though Sayana gives us the outer and apparent meanings of Riks, though the Gods are treated as Nature-powers, though very often his interpretation with the occasional help of Yaska lends support to the Naturalistic interpretation of modern scholarship, he does not reject, as Sri Aurobindo points out, the spiritual authority of the Veda or 'deny that there is a higher truth concealed in the Riks.' Nor does he affirm that the Vedic hymns are sacrificial compositions of priests, even though his interpretation constitutes a colossal support for ritualism.

But it may be asked: is it a baseless assumption on the part of scholars that the hymns are compositions of the priests for use in the sacrifices? Such a doubt naturally arises in the absence of a correct understanding of the position of the priest in the Vedic society, as well as the real character of the hymns used and chanted in the public sacrifices. For it is the *seer*, Rishi, who was the priest officiating at the ceremonies and the Riks were used for the rituals. The seers were certainly singers and their chants were sung at public sacrifices referring 'constantly to the customary ritual and seem to call for the outward objects of these ceremonies, wealth, prosperity, victory over enemies.' While the Riks in their inner sense are profoundly spiritual and the exoteric sense was a mask which alone was perceptible to the outward mind, it was not and need not be merely a mask. Again as the Master points out, they were 'words of power. powerful not only for internal but external things.' The ancient mystics were concerned first and foremost with things of the Spirit, but they were also possessed of Knowledge of occult truths and 'believed that by inner means outer as well inner results could be produced, that thought and words could be so used as to bring about realisations of every kind, both the human and the divine'' *daivam manusham*.

But a question may arise. How can we say that the seer of profound spiritual knowledge was also the priest for public worship? Of course in the Puranic legends many Rishis are mentioned as priests, *purohits*, and some of them are Rig Vedic names of renown, Vasishtha for example. Is it safe to build and base such a theory on later stories? This difficulty vanishes, once we study the hymns closely, note the tradition in regard to their outer

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applications also and take the help of the Brahmanas in the context in spite of their obscure symbolism. When we scrutinise, we find not only that the Rishi officiated as the Purohit at the Yajna, but also that the Riks he used are deliberately ritualistic to outward appearance mentioning the implements, external objects, and other things used in the sacrifice, as symbols covering an inner secret known to the Rishi and the initiates. I propose to illustrate this point by citing the example of a well-known Seer who consented to officiate at a Soma sacrifice without the customary goat-immolation. This ritual is entitled *Anjah-Sava* which, Sayana explains, means a rapid direct straight-way offering of libation without the admixture of the sacrificial animal, *anjasā rijunā mārgena ishti-pashu sānkaryam antarena*. The seer-priest is the renowned Shunah-shepa and the hymn for the Anjah-sava is the fifth of the seven Hymns ascribed to him in the First Mandala of the Rik Samhita. It is 1.28, containing nine Riks in which external things like the pressing stones for the extraction of the Soma juice, the platters to receive the juice, the pestle and the mortar, the wooden vessel and other outer things are so plainly mentioned that on the face of it one can conclude that it is a sacrificial composition. When we consider the ideas expressly stated, it is rather childish, devoid of any deep thought, or significance. But when we look deeper into it and ponder over the terms used and the application of the whole hymn in the ritual as explained in the Brahmanas and also take into account the interesting explanation given by the Brahmanas for certain terms used according to themselves as symbolism, we find ourselves no longer studying the babblings of primitive people deceiving themselves and deceived by an avaricious and cunning priestcraft, but enter into the mysteries of the profound Vedic Yoga of which the seer in question was a notable votary and indeed he embodies one of the types of spiritual victories recorded in the Rig Veda that crowned the toil and ascension of the Aryan soul.

Sayana in his commentary on the 28th hymn of the First Mandala refers to Anjah-sava as the title of the rapid rite of Soma libation *seen* by the Rishi Shunahshepa in response to the request of other sages and priests that the former must officiate on that day, the day of sacramental bath that is the close of the ceremony. Here mention is made of Aitareya Brahmana 33-5 which narrates the story in brief. The point to be noted in this connection is this that Shunahshepa was unanimously chosen to officiate because he was recognised as one who was the recipient of the grace of the Gods, *devata-anugraha-sampanna*, whose favours helped him to get released from the bonds to which reference for the first time is made in 1.24.

And these bonds are not fastenings with ropes on three parts of the body—the head and the waist and the feet—in spite of the later stories. There is

nothing in the 24th hymn, in the text itself to support the extraordinarily gross meaning read into the hymn to the effect that he was sold to be immolated in a sacrifice. The legend started slowly with the Aitareya Brahmana in a moderate form, but assumed huge proportions in the Puranas. But a close reading of the hymn itself shows beyond a shadow of doubt that these fastenings refer to the upper, the lower and the middle regions; '*uttama, adhama, madhyama*' are the words used in the Rik. And certainly they point to the parts of the being; the upper is the knowledge part represented by the mind and spirit, the lower the material basis, the physical, while the middle refers to the link between Matter and mind, the vital nexus—the life-principle. The profound sense of the whole hymn reveals the spiritual significance of every line and word in the Riks of that whole hymn. It is not our purpose here to take up the question of Shunahshepa and explain the meaning of the hymn around which so much crust has collected. That has been done elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It is sufficient to note here that such was the seer whom the priests honoured to officiate at the ceremony.

The Rishi readily consented to conduct the rite and *saw*, '*dadarsha*' the method of a rapid rite for the straightway offering of the Soma libation. And the 28th hymn of nine Riks is used for the ritual. We shall first give a close rendering of the Riks which are apparently meant for the rite and make mention of the materials connected with the ceremony and then show how these very things are used as symbols for the inner sacrifice and signify subtle and deep truths pertaining to the Vedic Yoga. And in unveiling the symbols we shall as a matter of course take into account ancient authorities who looked upon these materials as symbols, though not exactly in the way we do, but still were familiar with a general knowledge of symbolism.

Of the nine Riks, in the first four Indra is invoked to come down and drink the Soma; the next four relate to the extraction of the Soma juice and the part of the pestle and mortar, while the last refers to the wooden vessel in which the Soma juice is poured and preserved and the cow-hide in which the dregs are kept.

Here is the English rendering of the hymn, verse by verse.

1. There where the broad-based Stone is high above to press (the Soma juice out), O Indra, drink with eagerness the pourings of the mortar.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This has been discussed in my Sanskrit commentary on the hymn, Rig Veda I-28, and in the article based upon it by M. P. Pandit, that appeared in the Pathamandir Annual No. 8, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> यत्र ग्रावा पृथुबुध्न ऊर्ध्वो भवति सोतवे ।  
उलूखलसुतानामवेद्विन्द्र जलगुलः ॥

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Note. *Yatra* 'where' means 'in the ritual', in this action; it can be applied to the outer rite as well as the inner Yaga. Sayana takes the preposition *ava* in the second half to mean *avagatya*, recognise. This is unwarranted even for the exoteric meaning. The sense of the Rik is this: Indra is above, he is called upon to come *down*, *ava*, to drink *ava jalgulah* the drippings of the Soma juice from the mortar. In the ritualistic interpretation, *grava*, stone is taken to be the pestle. Now there is a discrepancy. It is clearly the pressing stone and not pestle. The scholiast calls it pestle because there is the mortar, *ulukhala* in the second line. Pestle and mortar are of wood and used in the Vedic rites to separate the chaff from the grain, they are not used to extract the Soma juice. *Grava* is stone used to beat the Soma creeper, so that it becomes soft and pressed, yields the juice which is received in the platters. Here in the very first Rik of the hymn the seer significantly refers to the 'stone above' *urdhva*; he does not say it is raised, though for the external rite it can be so interpreted. This stone which is above is Indra's weapon, the *vajra*. Indra is above, his weapon is above; by the blow dealt by the *vajra* even as Vritra, the darkened cloud of adverse forces and ignorance and inertia vanishes, so also the hard matter of body loses its hardness, becomes plastic, free from *tamas*, inertia and its brood of adverse conditions and forces that oppose the release of *Rasa*, the delight of all experiences to be offered to the Gods, the Cosmic powers of the Godhead. Here the *mortar* is the material body, and it must be noted that earth and every product of it such as the tree, and anything made of wood is symbolic of the physical body and even life and mind as products of the body are very often treated symbolically as of earth and earthen material; of this again later on. This then is the gist of the first Rik. Here this body symbolised by the mortar '*ulukhala*' has yielded the Soma, the *rasa*, its sap, the essence and essential delight for the acceptance of Indra, the Divine mind, the God of the luminous mind, the higher consciousness in the pure mind of heaven, the ruler of this triple world of Matter, Life and Mind. The Rishi addresses Indra invoking his presence to come down and drink the *Rasa* whose extraction was possible because of the benign blows of the *grava*, the *Vajra* weapon of Indra himself. Note that this stone is the *Vajra* weapon, not the gross thunderbolt which is meaningless in the inner sacrifice, but the *Vak*, the Word wide-based in the Vast above, *urdhwa-budhna prithu-budhna* as can be gathered from repeated reference to it as such in many lines of the hymns of the Rig Veda, and so explained in the Brahmanas in their moods of symbolic interpretation of the Vedic rituals and Vedic mantras. This *Vak*, the Word or speech whose source is the Vast above is really that of the luminous mind of heaven, of the higher consciousness and when it functions, its vibrations rush forth

and blow off the din and dust of the lower triple body of mind, life and matter, it illumines the mind, energises the life-force, drives out the inertia from the physical body and softens it so that it releases the *rasa* of all the experiences it earned through the life and heart and mind. This, then, is the real character and function of the *grava* that it is the Word of power issuing forth from the higher consciousness which is the domain of Indra, pregnant with the light of knowledge, but dynamic in its vibrant movement that removes all kinds of coverings and effects with the blow it deals out to the being of the worshipper, *yajamana*, the release of the essence of all delight lying latent and hidden in the vessel, *adhar*, of the human being which is indicated by the symbol of the wooden mortar, *ulukhala*.

2. There where the two platters (to hold the juice), like broad-hips, are laid, O Indra, drink with eagerness the effusions of the mortar.<sup>1</sup>

Now in the external rite of Soma extraction pressing stones are used to beat the creeper to squeeze and make it soft and release the sap. This extraction is called *abhishava*. But the juice is received in two platters, called '*adhi-shavana phalaka*'. They are two shallow dishes, one to receive and the other to cover. They are broad and likened to broad hips to denote that they are broad and always two, never one without the other.

In the inner sacrifice, these two platters are symbols of Earth and Heaven according to Brahmanic symbology in which case they are the lower physical consciousness and the higher consciousness of the luminous mind. But we do not follow the Brahmanas in unveiling the symbols as they are very often at variance with the many alternatives they themselves suggest or with other Brahmanic interpretations with the result they become obscure to us. But they shed light on the truth that the stone, platters, mortar, wooden cup or pot, *chamasa* and *kalasha* are all symbolic and should not be taken in their literal sense as unthinking priestcraft would do. The two platters are the mind and life in the body which represent the principles of knowledge and 'activity. These two are together engaged in receiving the *rasa* yielded by the mortar of the material body and are conjointly there to receive and preserve the juice, the substantial element in all experience for offering to the Gods. In fact it is the twin aspect of knowledge and action, mind and life quite in accord and proper adjustment that makes it possible to receive and preserve the extracted *rasa* which is their common aim and true function.

<sup>1</sup>यत्र द्वावि जघनाऽधिषवण्या कृता ।

उलूखलसुतानामवेद्विन्द्र जलुलः ॥

## ANJAH-SAVA

This is in brief the inner meaning of the second verse. It must be noted here that the implements used in the ritual are all mentioned here one by one, at the same time used as symbols which are avowedly said to be symbols, as has been pointed out, and not our invention or the result of ingenious speculation. Now let us pass on to the third Rik.

3. Where (in the rite) the woman learns (or practises) the egress and ingress, O, Indra, drink with eagerness the effusions of the mortar.<sup>1</sup>

This is an interesting Rik. The woman goes out of and comes into the sacrificial hall. The woman is the sacrificer's wife. This is Sayana's explanation of the terms, *Nari*, *apachyava* and *upachyava*. The point to be noted here is that no Vedic rite could be performed by any one without a wife. The idea is that the woman, as the Shakti of man, shares the act and its fruit with him whose Shakti she is. I have given egress and ingress as the English equivalents of *apachyava* and *upachyava*; it is not quite accurate and may even mislead, but it has the advantage of leaning more towards the ritualistic interpretation which is best represented in Sayana's commentary. There are other commentators, for instance, Skandaswami, giving a very ludicrous and vulgar meaning which does not merit notice here. Some modern scholars think that it is *rise* and *fall* of the pestle that the woman, sacrificer's wife marks and learns. But there is no actual mention of pestle at all as has been shown already. In this verse also the words used are significant pointing definitely to the true and inner meaning.

As the action of the Vedic Yoga proceeds, the *rasa* of the whole being of the Yogin the sacrificer, Yajamana, is pressed out and received in the two platters of life and mind in the body and this was stated in the second verse. In the third it is stated that the Shakti of the Purusha, the sacrificer constantly watches and observes and learns the Yogic process in which the higher Force comes down into the being *upachyava* and the force from the being goes up or out, *apachyava* making way for the entry of the higher force into the being. Nari is Nara-Shakti and Nara is either man or God in the Veda denoting one of strength. The power, the Conscious Power of the powerful Soul, *nara*, watches the yogic process of the force of getting in from above and rising up from below, and thus learns *shikshate* the secret of the yogic action which is fulfilled in pressing out the juice, the delight of all experiences

<sup>1</sup> यत्र नार्यपच्यवमुपच्यवं च शिक्षते ।

उलूखलसुतानामवेद्विन्द्र जलगुलः ॥

of the being to be offered to the Higher Powers of the Godhead, the Gods. Thus an intimate knowledge of the secret of the upward and downward movement of the Yoga-force becomes a natural possession under the control of the conscious power of the strong soul that has the strength to give its all to the Gods and receive in return what comes from the Godhead.

4. Where, they fasten the churning staff with a rope as with reins to control (a horse), O, Indra, drink with eagerness the effusions of the mortar.<sup>1</sup>

In the external rite of Soma extraction when the juice is pressed out, it is mixed with milk or curds or *yava*, corn. They are called the three infusions, *gavāshira*, *dadhyāshira* and *yavāshira* respectively. When the Soma juice is to be mixed with this infusion, it is churned; the churning stick is moved by a rope placed round the handle and round a post planted in the ground as a pivot. When the ends of the rope are drawn backwards and forwards, it gives the stick a rotatory motion and the component parts are separated. Thus they tie the churning stick with cords for churning and steadying the vessel, just as with reins one restrains a horse.

In the inner sacrifice, from the play of the Yoga-force of knowledge and action through the concord of mind and life, the *rasa*, the flow of delight that is pressed out has to be retained in the body-vessel and not spilt; and for this purpose, the body must be made firm and strong and steady and this object is achieved by the spinal column, made steady charged with the vibrations of the higher consciousness brought by the favours and workings of the Higher Powers. Thus in the first four verses, the pressing out of Soma in the Yajamana's being and the instruments used in the process are mentioned, and the Rishi calls upon Indra to come down and accept the offering of Soma that has been extracted with so much skill and toil and devotion.

The next four Riks are used in the act of straining the Soma juice received in the platters.

5. O, Mortar, if in truth thou art set in every house, here, give forth thy resplendent sound, like the victor's drum.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> यत्र मन्थां विब्रध्नते रश्मीन्यमितया इव ।  
उलूखलसुतानामवेद्विन्द्र जल्गुलः ॥

<sup>2</sup> यच्चिद्वि त्वं गृहेगृह उलूखलक युज्यसे ।  
इह द्युमत्तमं वद जयतामिव दुन्दुभिः ॥

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Here is a pronounced difficulty in the gross sense. Now, the mortar is addressed and called upon to give a loud sound like the drum of the conquerors. Mortar never makes noise without the rapid rise and fall of the pestle which is nowhere mentioned in the whole hymn though *grava* in the first verse is pressed to yield that meaning in the ritualistic interpretation as it has to be somehow managed. Now in the inner interpretation, the idea is quite clear. Mortar is of course the physical being. In every house, in every man, there is a mortar, there is a material body but every body does not shed the precious juice. But the Rishi says, you are splendid and have given out the essence of all the experiences for offering even though you are *jada* matter, thick with inertia and darkness. You have trained yourself to respond to the touches and influence of the higher Powers that are invoked by the Yajamana and have yielded the *rasa* of your being. Therefore you can loudly proclaim your victory over the tamasic forces that oppose the release of the *rasa*. Hence like the drum of the conqueror you can proclaim; it is not every mortar, the material body of every one, that is so successful as you.

6. O Lord of the Forest, the wind blows fast in front of thee, O Mortar. for Indra that he may drink, press forth the Soma juice.<sup>1</sup>

Vanaspati, literally lord of the forest is used to indicate any tree or plant or part and product of the forest. Mortar being made of wood is addressed here Vanaspati. The mortar is called upon to press out the juice, and the wind blows fiercely *vivāti*! How does the wind blowing fast or fiercely help the mortar to yield the juice? Sayana says the wind blows fast in front of the mortar because of the speed of the pestle's constant blow! Where is the pestle in the Rik? Here again, the Rik is seemingly ritualistic, but really reveals secrets of the action of Yoga-force in the inner sacrifice. Mortar is indeed the material body; Vayu is the life-force which is stimulated and by far strengthened at this stage, thus helping the body to give out the *rasa*. Without a strong life-force awake and active nothing can be done in the body whatever may be the light of knowledge that may fall upon it; the light does not enter a feeble frame, and even if it enters the weak material cannot hold it without a strong vital support. Only when it is endowed with a strong and well-poised life-force in action, can the body be willing to give itself joyfully i.e. the *rasa* for Indra's drink.

<sup>1</sup> उत स्म ते वनस्पते वातो विवात्यग्रमित् ।  
अथो इन्द्राय पातवे सुनु सोममूलखल ॥

7. Implements of sacrifice, best of strength-givers, sport high on like the two bay-horses of Indra munching noisily.<sup>1</sup>

Here again, the dual number is used in the address. Who are addressed is left to be understood and in the ritualist's interpretation, they are the inevitable pestle and mortar and they give food, *vāja*. They are the implements of sacrifice *āyaji*. Because of the movement of the pestle in the mortar, they give loud sound; *uchcha* is thus interpreted without warrant. The straight meaning is *uchchaih vihāra*; they sport high on like the two horses of Indra champing grain.

In the esoteric interpretation, the implements are really the two platters; they are of the forest *vanaspati* as the next verse confirms by stating so expressly. They are the procurers of strength in its plenitude *vājasātama*. They sport high above, like Indra's horses. Because of their conjoint action and movement in the upper regions of the being of the Yogin, the Yajamana, they procure strength increasingly and receive the rasa of the being for offering. Indra's two horses are used as a simile here for their capacity for enjoyment. It is much more than a simile. Life and mind themselves representing force of action and light of knowledge are the twin vehicles of the Divine Mind, the ruler of the triple words and king of the Gods, Indra.

8. O, Lords of the forest, mighty with the mighty pressors, press out today the most sweet soma juice for Indra's drink.<sup>2</sup>

*Rishwa* means great or mighty; to press out the juice strength is necessary; hence with the help of other preists present in the sacrifice the juice is to be pressed out of the platters.

But in the inner ritual, the Rishi calls upon the platters of Life and Mind to press out the Rasa with the help of the mighty Powers of Knowledge and Power who are ever ready to render assistance to the aspiring soul that has consecrated itself for the Godward life; and this demands the giving up of all one is and has for the acceptance and enjoyment of the higher Powers of the Universal Purusha to whom all that one is and has really belongs.

<sup>1</sup> आयजी वाजसातमा ता ह्युच्चैः विजर्भतः ।  
हरी इवान्धांसि बप्सता ॥

<sup>2</sup> ता नो अद्य वनस्पती ऋष्ववृष्वेभिः सोतृभिः ।  
इन्द्राय मधुमत्सुतम् ॥

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9. What remains, hold in the two chamasa vessels; pour the Soma on the filter and set the residue on the cow-hide.<sup>1</sup>

In the ritual we know the juice is purified and strained and then poured into a large wooden cup or vessel called the *drona-kalasha*. The dregs are set in the cow-hide.

Thus the outer rite was rapidly performed straightway offering the beverage to Indra who is invoked to come down to drink in the first four Riks.

In the inner sacrifice, when we take into consideration the context, the *chamu* or the *chamasa* is a bowl and the two bowls are nothing else but the cups of the vital body and the mental body which were referred to by the symbolic *platters*, when they were used for the extraction of the *Rasa*. But now, when the process is complete they are referred to as separate vessels to signify the yogic secret that though life and mind function in the body as part of it, they really are separate entities and are separated by the Yoga-force for readjustment in the new set-up for the consummation of the Yoga. Those who have studied Sri Aurobindo on the Ribhus can not fail to appreciate the Yogic fact that out of the one bowl, four bowls are made for the Yogin by the Ribhus, who were once human beings, but have become gods by dint of their *tapasya* and help Indra in a variety of ways; they are indeed 'artisans of Immortality'. Thus the juice of delight is taken up in the two bowls of Life and Mind. They are then poured into the Kalasha which is the material body. The residue is kept in the hide of cow which is the covering and protection of the Ray of Light in the physical frame of man.

★ ★ ★

We have stated that symbolism is the key to unlock the secret of the Veda; but the device of symbolism dating back from the age of the Rig Veda has been used in the latter scriptures also, closing with the Epics, Puranas and Tantric works. But it is the Brahmanas following the Vedas that openly gave symbolic explanations of the rituals and necessarily of the hymns used in them and this fact was recognised by later authors in their commentaries on the Brahmanas and on the Upanishads which form

<sup>1</sup> उच्छिष्टं चम्बोर्भर सोमं पवित्र आ सृज ।

नि धेहि गोरधि त्वन्नि ॥

parts of them. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad forms the close of the 14th chapter of the Shatapatha Brahmana. Out of a number of examples we shall choose one to show how symbols were interpreted by Acharyas like Shankara, though that does not mean they recognised the close-knit symbolism of the hymns of the Rig Veda rich with deep meaning and profound truths of spiritual wisdom. But it undoubtedly shows that these later teachers of Vedanta know that there are many passages in the Upanishads and the Veda Samhitas which are symbolic, while some others are riddles and puzzles and the like. The passage occurs in Br. Up. 2.2.3. It refers to a bowl *chamasa* with its base or bottom above and opening below. 'The Glory that is the universe of forms or the All-form is laid in it', says the text.<sup>1</sup> The Upanishad, rather the Brahmana itself proceeds to give the explanation on which Shankara remarks: 'What is this *chamasa* with hole below and base above? It is the head which is above like a *chamasa* bowl, and the mouth is the aperture below. In that bowl is laid the All-form. Just as Soma is kept in the bowl, the universe of forms or the All-form is set in the head etc.'<sup>2</sup> This is just an instance to show that the symbolic meaning was recognised and quoted by philosophers of later times even though they were immured with the idea and spirit of their age when the tradition that the Veda was a book for rituals, *karmakanda*, had long firmly settled itself in the minds of scholars and leaders of thought with great repute for originality. We may note in passing that when a meaning is not directly conveyed by the word, when it is not evident, but indirect and concealed, it is called *paroksha-vachana* which term is used in the Brahmana-Upanishads whenever there is symbolism or riddle or something apparently incongruous or even repulsive. When we meet with such passages, it is a sure indication that the sense is concealed and that it is a hint to find out the secret behind the apparent language.

Now in unveiling the symbols of the Riks used in the rapid rite of Soma, we have taken the help of other passages of the Rig Veda and taken into account the Yajurveda, the Veda most important for the ritualist as well as some Brahmana passages that have bearing on the question. We have already spoken of the two platters—*adhishavaniya*—as symbolic and

<sup>1</sup> अर्वाग्विलः चमस ऊर्ध्वबुध्नः तस्मिन् यशो निहितं विश्वरूपम् ।

<sup>2</sup> कः पुनरसावर्वाग्विलश्चमस ऊर्ध्वबुध्नः ? इदं तत् ; शिरः चमसाकारं हि तत् ; कथम् ? एवं हि अर्वाग्विलः मुखस्य विलरूपत्वात्, शिरसो बुध्नाकारत्वात् ऊर्ध्वबुध्नः । तस्मिन् यशो निहितं विश्वरूपमिति—यथा सोमः चमसे, एवं तस्मिन् शिरसि विश्वरूपं नानारूपं निहितं स्थितं भवति . . . . .

explained it in a way that fits in with the rest of the symbols in the rite. And the White Yajurveda and the Shatapatha Brahmana (2.9.4) proclaim them to be so, stating that the two platters are symbols of Earth and Heaven. With reference to *grava* this Brahmana says it is *vajra* and the blow it gives destroys what it calls *papma*, evil (or sin), the dark and opposing block of forces that prevents the release of the juice of delight, the flow of Soma; it is not the Soma that is destroyed, but the *papma*, *papma hatah, na somah*. The *grava* is above, its base is broad, the Vast above; it is the weapon of Indra who is above, it is Vajra in the outer world, but its character in the inner sense is Vak, speech, the Word from the higher heights coming from the region of the Indra. This is clear from many passages of the Rig Veda. The Gods are above and Indra is certainly above, he is invoked to come down to man and to accept his offering. He is there above, and lifts us, mortals that we may live above. We shall cite a few passages here.

1. O, Indra of hundred activities, stay on above for our growth (or protection) in this our toil for plenitude.....(I.30.6)

2. Stay on above like the God Savitr for our growth (or protection); Thou, above, bestower of plenitude.....(I.36.13).

3. Thou above, guard us from evil, with thy flame of Intuitive vision burn every devouring demon..... (I.36.14).

*Urdhva-budhna*, *uru-budhna*, *prithu-budhna* are in frequent use in the hymns e.g. IV.2.5; I.169.6; X.47.3. This *budhna* is the base or foundation which is said to be above, *urdhva*, extensive and vast, *uru*, broad and wide, expansive *prithu*. It is used as an adjective to *grava* and to some other things that are to come from above, related to the Gods. In a verse Indra is called upon to bestow upon the Rishi the wealth which is at once deep *gabhira*, wide and vast *uru*, based in the vast *prithu-budhna*. It is an interesting Rik which reveals the real nature of the wealth above for which the Rishis prayed and toiled. "Riches,—full of powerful Mantras (*su-brahmanam*) God-possessing, high above, wide and based on vast foundations above, virile with the Rishi's inspiration, conquering the enemy (that is the opposing force)—such riches, mighty and colourful, vouchsafe to us" (X.47.3). Similar is the Stone, Indra's *grava* of the lofty heights. It is the Heaven's bolt of thunder which is indeed a symbol of the voice of Indra above which is invoked to drop down for the destruction of the enemy(II.30.5). The 'Stone' voices with the sound of the singer's chant (I.83.6). The 'Stone' attracts with its voice the mind of Indra (I.84.3). "Go you both (Indra and Vayu) there where the stone voices forth" (I.135.17). Again the stones of the lofty heights (III.53.12), 'the voiceful stone laid on the altar' (V.31.4), a variegated stone set in the midst of Heaven (V.47.3). These 'stones' are of

Heaven and from the heights of being; they are not of earth, not the common stones used to press the creeper Soma. For the Soma is of Heaven and pressed by the symbolic stones for offering to the Gods, *tam twam devebhyo gravabhih sutah* (IX. 80.4), 'pressed by the Stone, O, Soma, you enter the sieve strainer bestowing valiant strength on the chanter' (IX.67.19). These are a few lines out of the hundreds one frequently comes across in the hymns that go to show that the 'Stone' and other objects used in the ritual are symbolic and reveal the inner truths of the Vedic Yoga of which the *seers* were adepts. We shall close this short study with one last reference to a Rik in Vamadeva's hymns (IV.27.5) where the *kalasha* though outwardly a beaker, refers certainly to the body. It is a famous hymn quoted in the Upanishads and as such is admittedly, even according to the ritualistic commentaries, rich with spiritual truths and therefore of inner significance.

'Let Indra accept the white beaker, annointed with the cow's yield, filled with the luminous liquid etc.' Here the beaker *kalasha*, is the *drona-kalasha* used in the rite. But it is symbolic and indicates the body which is annointed with the Ray of Light, it is 'white' i.e. it is pure and filled with the shining *rasa*, the liquid of Soma, Delight. Here is a fine specimen of a hymn which openly proclaims the spiritual truth of Vamadeva in the womb for Divine birth and his experience in the iron-gated cities etc; it uses plainly, in the last verse quoted above, ritualistic objects. This would be incongruous in the extreme, if something deeper were not meant, deeper than the beaker and milk and the juice of a creeper.

Such is the character of the Vedic ritual meant for outward worship; such is the nature of the symbolic objects prayed for and the materials used in the sacrificial rite; such also is the nature of the deeper truths of the hymns which keep to the inner sense quite closely and yet maintain to a large extent the outward form and meaning suitable to the understanding and use of the un-initiate. The salient feature that must be noted is this that while the hymns occasionally throw the exoteric sense overboard when so warranted by a necessity for the esoteric pressing overtly for prominence, still in most hymns the outer meaning leaps to the eye and the hymn 1.28 used in the rite of Anjah-sava is a typical example to show that the ritual is no ordinary rite and that the hymn is not an off-hand or laboured composition of the priestcraft, that it has a revelatory significance and meaning deeper than what strikes the mind at first thought. And Shunah-shepa is a seer of renown, a seer whose victorious release from the triple bond of mind and life and body has given rise to allegories and impossible legends, whose other hymns, and many Riks in them, rank high among the plainly spiritual passages of lofty ideas and occult truths in the hymnal text. Thus when we study the

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hymns with the necessary background the secret of the Veda becomes apparent, the inner truth becomes lucid and transparent and we begin to appreciate more fully and intelligently the Master's words that the Vedic Seer was also a priest who officiated at public sacrifices and chanted the hymns whose real purport, the inner truth of Divine Wisdom was known to him and the initiate.

# *Theories of Human Progress and Sri Aurobindo*

M. P. PANDIT

## I

THE growth of man in society is a fascinating subject for study and research. Thinkers have looked at the question from various angles and have formulated different theories regarding the social development of man through the ages. We will attempt to present some of the more important of these in their large lines, evaluate them *inter alia* in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought, bearing in mind contemporary advanced opinion, and give a brief outline of the Master's own exposition of the subject.

An alternating rhythm of repose and activity, movement and cessation of movement characterises the life of the universe. Discussing this feature with reference to human civilisations Prof. Toynbee draws attention to the interesting concept of YIN and YANG in the Sinic imagery. Yin is the static and Yang the dynamic. 'The nucleus of the sinic character which stands for Yin seems to represent dark coiling clouds overshadowing the Sun, while the nucleus of the character which stands for Yang seems to represent the unclouded sun-disk emitting its rays. In the Chinese formula Yin is always mentioned first.' And this is in keeping with the Eastern tradition which has always regarded activity posterior to and consequent upon an antecedent state of repose. Brahma the creator is born out of and rests for support on the recumbent figure of Vishnu lying on the folds of Sesha. The creative Power of Dynamis—Kali—performs her whirl of dance on the immobile body of Shiva. Proceeding out of a state of repose, activity has perforce to come to halt in repose, though only to set out on a further career of movement. This fundamental trait of swing between the Yin-static and Yang-dynamic has governed all the manifestations in the universe, particularly human effort at a mastery and governance of life, within and

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without, which is what we usually describe as civilisation. Many have been such endeavours by human societies—more than twenty of them have been listed—but all of them have been subject, more or less in a uniform manner, to the eternal laws of Yin and Yang. The process is the same. A society content to rest in its primitive state is provoked out of its Yin stage to meet a certain difficulty—challenge thrown by Nature—and in acting responsively to it the society passes into a Yang stage and the period of growth commences. In the very process of responding to the challenge a further challenge is provoked and so on. The society continues to grow till it successfully meets the challenges; but the moment it flags, the Yang stage begins to end, the society begins to lapse back into the Yin. But it will be a mistake to assume that all the human societies have been simply engaged in a mechanical repetitive movement. The wheel turns round its own axle, again and again in a tireless way, true. But in performing its revolutions the wheel moves forward also. The movement of human society taken collectively does show such a forward march. In what direction does the progress tend? Does a detached study of the past civilisations give us any clue as to the decisive factors influencing their career?

Systematic attempts have been made by serious students of history to study this vast saga of the rise and fall of human societies from the beginnings of recorded time with a view to find out the prime or the predominant factor which influences, governs and shapes their movement. There is what is called the Theological Interpretation of History. It looks upon history as the Drama of the Will of God. All events are determined by Him. Systematised as it was in Europe, it was inevitable that the theory should have been woven round the figure of Christ. 'Its earliest apologists sought to show how the world had followed a divine plan in its long preparation for the life of Christ. From this central fact of all history, mankind should continue through war and suffering until the Divine plan was completed at the judgement day. The fate of nations is in God's hands; history is the revelation of His wisdom and power. Whether He intervenes directly by miracle or merely sets his laws in operation, he is the master of men's fate.' (*Encyclopaedia of Britannica*). Bishop Bossuet worked out this theory in great detail (in his famous *Histoire Universelle*) and sought to prove that the key to the understanding of History was in the Will of God. But the Will does not work, in the very nature of things, openly and palpably; it works, he said, through secondary and natural causes. And it is to these latter that we have to turn for guidance in our study. Logically pursued, this theory led one to these 'secondary and natural causes' for explanations of history rather than to an inferential Will of God.

In India we have the theory of the Time-Cycle which though it may not correspond fully with the aforesaid Theological theory, yet has something in common with it based as it is on Puranic theology. According to this tradition, the movement of the universe is entirely dependent upon the character of the particular period of cycle, the age through which it is passing. There are four periods in the Cycles of Time through which creation is ceaselessly revolving. Each Age has its own governing motif—the Yuga-Dharma. Thus in the first Age, the Krita Yuga, man is perfect; society is ideal. Each lives by his own effort, realisation and achievement—*krita*. The second Age is the Treta Yuga, the Age of Laws and Rituals. Treta refers to Treta Agni—the fire to be worshipped, symbolising the ritualist character of the time. This is followed by the Dvapara Yuga—the Age of scepticism, Doubt, result of intellectual efflorescence. Dvapara is that which has two Yugas preceeding it. Dvapara is also a synonym for *doubt*. And doubt once entered leads irresistibly to the fall, the Age of Kali, when Dharma, virtue ebbs. That is the last age of the Cycle when things are irremediably wrong and mankind rushes headlong to perdition. At the end of this Cycle the creation once more passes round into the first Age and so the procession goes on. All is the working-out of the Time-Cycle, *Kalachakra*, and the central fact which governs everything is the Yuga-Dharma, the Dharma of the Age which in the last analysis is indeed the Will of the Lord.

The limitations of such theories are obvious. They belittle human personality and shift the onus of responsibility wholly on an entity beyond the cosmos. Man sinks into an insignificant creature tied helplessly to the workings of an extra-cosmic Will or Law. Whatever the occult tradition embodied in this way, clearly it is not accepted as a rational explanation of the workings of human societies.

The next theory we take up for consideration seeks to find the all-sufficing explanation not in God's Will but in God's chosen race. It is the character of the Race which is produced that decides the nature and quality of the civilisation. There is a race which has been specially designed by Nature to rule and govern; the rest are to accept its domination. Wherever this scheme of Providence has been fully accepted and worked, there you see the most brilliant results. This theory was developed at length during the early years of the last century by M. Comte de Gobineau who held that the Nordic Man equipped with special spiritual and mental superiority, possessed the key of civilisation in his hands. He was the 'blond beast' of Nietzsche. The Nordic blood it was that shaped the destinies of the early Romans and the Greeks. The connotation of the superior race was

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rendered elastic so as to include the whole of the Teutonic peoples and later the Aryan race from whom originally the great civilisation-pioneers had branched out. 'It formed a special breed of men, whose various branches have dominated every civilised region of the world'. A civilisation founded by such a race, they said, is the highest; it maintains its quality and achievement as long as the race maintains its purity. But with the deterioration in race purity, the debasement and decline of the civilisation commences. It was with a view to stop such a downward movement that Madison Grant sounded the alarm in America when he called for severe restriction of immigration of Southern Europeans so that the element of Nordic blood in the American race may not get reduced, thereby impairing the quality of their civilisation.

Now it is a question that is open to more than one answer whether race intermixture is productive of beneficial results or the contrary. History is strewn with instances of civilisations springing up with abundant vitality when fresh blood was infused in the older peoples. Besides, is there anything like *pure race*? We are afraid there is none. Even assuming for a moment that civilisation is synonymous with the White or Aryan or Nordic race, what about the contributions of the Yellow race who have one of the oldest of civilisations to their credit? What about the Red race in the Americas who have fathered at least four important civilisations viz. Andean, Mayan, Yucatec and the Mexic? We have no historical record of the contributions of the Black race. But such bits of their customs and culture as survive in their music and dance do point to a past heritage now sunk into the sands of time.

Besides, it is a fact to be noted that environmental differences do make for differences even among peoples of the same race-stock. The descendants of the Anglo-saxon emigrants populating the continent of Australasia today could hardly be said to have kept their racial characteristics uninfluenced by the southern environment they have inhabited for generations now. The changes in the lives of the descendants of the Dutch and English settlers in South Africa are another instance to the point.

That brings us to the claim of the Geographical Interpretation of History to give the correct clue to the rise and decadence of societies. According to this theory of which Montesquieu is a noted protagonist, it is the nature of the physical environment and the climatic conditions that go to determine the very character and temperament of the men inhabiting the country and consequently the shape of the society that ensues. In the colder climates, men are energetic and industrious; in the tropics they are enervated and prize idleness and sloth over everything else. (Non-activity is for them

the highest conceivable good and therefore a special feature of Heaven; heat with which they are oppressed constantly is the dominating feature of Hell.) Hence it is that all empires have been founded by the vigorous invader from the cold North. The climatic factor has tipped the scale in favour of the invigorating northerner. Apart from climate, purely physical factors like coast-lines, deltas, rivers play a large part in the founding of kingdoms and societies. How many civilisations sprang up on the coasts of the Mediterranean? And how many have disappeared from the face of the earth with the desication of the vegetation or with the advent of more violent physical disturbances?

To these questions posed by the champions of the theory, the opponents put a counter-question. Have not great nations appeared everywhere on earth in totally different climates? Have environments of the same nature given birth to identical or at least similar outbursts of activity? Why is it that we do not find nomadic societies of the kind found in Eurasian and Afrasian Steppes in the parallel environments 'of the prairies of North America, the Llanos of Venezuela, the Pampas of Argentina' until they were developed by western emigrants? They point, for instance, to the Andean civilisation on a high plateau as contrasted with the primitive state prevailing in the Amazonian forests below. 'Was then', one asks, 'the plateau the reason why the Andean society forged ahead of its savage neighbours? Before we admit the idea we ought to glance at the same equatorial latitudes in Africa where the East African highlands fringe the forests of the Congo Basin. We shall find then in Africa the plateau was no more productive of a civilised society than the tropical forests of a great river valley.'

We need not proceed with the question further but only observe that climatic and geographical factors could at best operate as incentives or restricting factors and that too only as long as man has not acquired sufficient means to control, conquer and use his environments to his best advantage. They cannot be said to have decisive or even predominant say in the birth and growth of human societies.

And then we have the Economic Interpretation of History. According to this Historical Materialism or Economic Determinism, propounded with such devastating effect by Karl Marx who is its high priest, the economic is the fundamental factor in the progress of society. It is the economic pressure that effected the transition of humanity from its primitive hunting and pastoral stage into the agricultural and handicraft age—a transition that was marked with momentous consequences. No less was the economic factor determinant of the next changeover to the Industrial and Machine Age. Political, social and other structures stand on the solid

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foundation of economic realities. Nations fight and die, not for idealistic and altruistic purposes, but for economic advantages. Behind the façade of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the slogans of the French Revolution, lay the brutal fact that a new bourgeois class had arisen in France which wanted to wrest control and power from the older feudal classes. It is the economic staying power that determines the life and strength of a society. Egypt was powerful once because of its iron, England because of her tin mines in former days and of coal in the modern. Sheer economic pressure and necessity will force the vast proletariats of the world to unite and ride rough-shod over the bourgeois classes and assert themselves so as to usher in a new era of classless, stateless society.

Such an explosive doctrine as this has naturally vehement adherents and equally determined opponents. Suffice it to say the economic motive has indeed an important role in the development of human communities; but that could not be by any means the sole determining factor. Man—and after all it is aggregates of men that constitute societies—is much more than an economic animal, in spite of Karl Marx. The physical necessities of life do not exhaust his requirements though we must admit, they have so far occupied a disproportionately large part of his attention. Once a certain minimum of physical comfort and leisure is attained he turns his attention increasingly to the other parts of himself, viz. his emotions, his heart, his aesthetic and intellectual demands, the mind and even his soul. In fact man feels he is most himself when he is freed from obligations of economic nature and is allowed to freely develop his other sides. A civilisation or culture is thus measured for its contribution to the sum-total of human progress by the effort it puts in towards the cultivation and culture of the non-physical, the mental, vital and psychic side of man. Man is essentially a mental being and the search for the key to his movements can be conducted most fruitfully along the mental—the psychological route charted by the human spirit from the beginnings of time. Thus considered, the theories we have taken note of convict themselves of narrow limitation and one-sidedness. They explain, each of them, partial processes of one, although important, side of social progress. They account for contributory factors, not the decisive influences. They emphasise the physical basis of man to the exclusion of the workings of his mind and soul. Their attention is concentrated, as Sri Aurobindo observes, 'on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have been very much neglected.'

## II

It is only a psychological theory of history that can give us a true insight into human social development, in which a specific line of progress is unmistakably discernible. Historians have piled up an imposing array of statistics of the number of arrested civilisations, effete civilisations and dead civilisations as an illustration of the utter futility of man's effort in the face of the Nemesis of decay and disintegration to which all that is born of Nature is inescapably subject. Some authorities seriously believe that man is steadily deteriorating, that he cannot, try however he might, touch again the heights reached by those fathers of Grecian and Roman cultures, which stand 'apparented' to the modern Christian Civilisation of Europe, or the sublime heights lived in by the Rishis of the Vedic Age who were the progenitors of the Indic civilisations. There may be something to be said in support of this reading of the present state of human affairs. But the line of human progress is not rectilinear. Human evolution proceeds in a cyclic manner. 'The cycles of evolution tend always upward, but they are cycles and do not ascend in a straight line. The process therefore gives the impression of a series of ascents and descents, but what is essential in the gains of the evolution is kept or, even if eclipsed for a time, reemerges in new forms suitable to the new ages.' (Sri Aurobindo) Thus when the evolutionary movement in its spiral rotation turns round and round, it seems to come back to the same old point, relapse from the height previously attained; but that is only an appearance. The direction of the move continues to be upward. Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the Psychological Stages through which Human sociological evolution has proceeded opens a fresh vista peering into the rich future towards which humanity is being determined by the cumulative action of its meaningful past and labouring present.

Human society passes through certain distinct periods, each with its special stress on a particular faculty of the human being—the whole movement tending towards a well-planned integral cultivation and development of the entire complex personality. Thus beginning with what may be called the Symbolic age, humanity passes successively into the Typal, the Conventional, the age of Individualism and Reason, followed by the Subjective age which ultimately opens out in the consummative Spiritual Age.

Societies, in their early periods, are always governed by a strong symbolic mentality. They are highly imaginative and religious and are readily prone to read into things more than what meets the physical eye. Objects and phenomena in external nature provide for them images for things and facts

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in their own personal life. Thus for instance in the early age of the Vedic Rishis in India, the hill with its rising plateaus recalled to their mind an image of human life with its ever-soaring heights. The flowing rivers image the ever current flow of life-energies. Not merely that. To their religious imagination, everything in the physical universe was instinct with Something else that stood behind. And with a daring natural to the uninhibited, intuitively guided mind of the age, attempts were made to break through the veils and live out the higher truths, first in the inner life and then in the outer with the appropriate use of symbolic forms. It goes without saying that the highest achievements of such a period were always confined to the select of the society who took care to guard the Mysteries; but the impress of this symbolic structure of life was left on the entire society. Such were the societies in Early Egypt, Greece, Chaldea and India. The whole of life, its customs, institutions came to be so formed as to be the symbols constantly pointing to the existence and active participation of God or Gods from above and around. In this Symbolic age religion and spiritual practice were not parts of life; they were indeed the whole of it. The Spiritual Idea standing at the centre was all-dominating. It is only with the passage of time that a shift of emphasis is discernible, a shift from the activating spiritual truth around which the entire symbolic institutions were built up to the organisation of the psychological and ethical framework to stabilise the working of the Idea. Attention is now rivetted on the formulation of Types. That is the Typal Age when Ideals come to be set up and pursued for their own sake. It is the Dharma that is paramount. The spiritual truth behind the institutions is not completely forgotten but tends to be relegated progressively into the background. But a time does come in the life of the society when its attention is so much absorbed in the external machinery, external rituals and ceremonies that the Truth which they are supposed to serve is altogether lost to sight. That is the Conventional Age of which Medieval Europe and pre-Buddhist India provide striking examples. 'The conventional stage of human society is born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the idea become more important than the idea, the body or even the clothes more important than the person.' (Sri Aurobindo)

The climax of this tendency is the establishment and even enforcement of the rule of rigid hierarchies, traditional forms and authorities to the utter exclusion of the spirit of the Truth which has in fact departed. It is the 'petrified typal figure' that rules; the old truths have been lost, the conventions and practices that aped them have also lost all significance. They survive by sheer force of custom and habit. This chasm between the conven-

tional form and the original truth cannot continue to last without rendering the position intolerable and provoking challenges to this rule of the sham. Men can no longer tolerate the tyranny of forms and they set about with such aids as Reason, Doubt, Secpticism, to storm and demolish the ramparts of the whole brood of forms, conventions, types and symbols and seek to refine the lost truth. That is the end of the conventional age and the commencement of the Age of Individualism and Reason. The stifling reign of the Yajnikas and the Pundits can only be ended by the relentless logic of Nirvana.

If the Symbolic Age sees the blossoming and exercise of the intuitive and spiritual faculties of man and if the Typal Age marks the culture and development of the psychological and ethical side, the Individualist Age is predominantly the reign of Reason. Man begins to doubt everything, question everything and would want to be satisfied unto his reason before accepting anything as valid. This is the age of scepticism, of revolt, in the crucible of which all hitherto accepted standards and conventions have to pass, if they are to survive and claim the allegiance of the human mind which is out to find the Truth. The most notable outflowering of this time-spirit is to be seen in modern Europe. Of course Reason needs a certain touch-stone wherewith to test its discoveries, a standard of its own for proper assessment of values. And this the European mind has found in Physical Science. The services of this era of physical science and development of reason in the clearing of much ground of accumulated, dead-weight conventionalism and stagnant orthodoxy cannot be overestimated. No doubt there has arisen another danger from the other end viz. a reluctance to accept anything which does not stand the test of purely empirical physical science and consequently a threatened impoverishment of the heritage of knowledge and life open to man. Fortunately the danger seems to have passed. In its efforts to expand its domain, physical science has burst its self-imposed boundaries and has stumbled upon phenomena which can only be satisfactorily explained by sciences which base themselves not upon matter as the sole reality, but proceed upon other, and what are increasingly coming to be recognised as larger and more powerful, bases of existence, viz. life, thought and the Soul. The gaze of the thinker is turned to these subtler layers of man where he feels for the governing Truth of the Individual and the Society. The turn is towards the subjective and marks the beginning of the Subjective Age. Nietzsche's *Will to be*, Bergson's *Élan Vital* are the signposts of this turn towards the enthronement of Life in the place of Matter as the sole determining principle in existence. The attempt however was bound to fail; for, while the life-principle is undoubtedly the most dynamic in the constitution of man, there are other deeper and higher principles

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which can and do exercise a directional control over the operations of the life-force in him and his society. Dissatisfied with their expectations from the Life-*eidolon*, attempts are made to tap the other fountain-sources like those of mind and the subliminal parts of man. The astonishing growth of the science of psychology and para-psychology and experiments to guide men and events, even public affairs, in the light of their conclusions are an unmistakable sign of this subjectivism in approach to the problems of life that is a revealing feature of the present-day world.

The central truth of life however eludes the grasp on all these levels of the complex personality of man for the simple reason that the essentially motivating forces and impulsions issue from a deeper truth—the soul. The soul of man is the true fulcrum of his existence and the key to the all-round happiness of the individual and the establishment of true harmony in the collectivity is to be found there alone from where Love and Harmony well up in their native fount. When this fact comes to be recognised, as indeed it is being gradually done at the present moment, that is a sure indication of the right turn of human mind. For once it is recognised that man can find his true happiness and goal only if he shifts his centre of activity and vision to a deeper base within himself,—that is to say, if he develops the values of the soul, erects a synthesis out of them and lives out his life in conformity with this guiding light to lead him,—once this need is intimately felt and recognised, man is bound to take, sooner or later, practical steps to actualise this perception of truth in his own life. Such endeavours have been there for long ages, it may be said, and they have not made much difference to humanity at large. While the point may be conceded, we must note one important difference in the present-day awakening to this need and the past way of looking at the question. Today, it is not merely the individual who seeks the inner light for his personal deliverance and upliftment. There is a general awakening to the necessity of setting the soul-factor operate more openly and effectively, not merely for the solution of the individual problem, but much more as the only possible answer to the larger problem, the one remedy for the ills with which humanity is so acutely afflicted. This tendency as it spreads, indicates that we are on the threshold of the age of fulfilment—the Spiritual Age, Satya Yuga towards which humanity has been all along struggling to ascend and for which it has equipped itself with a progressive many-sided development of the various members of its corporate being.

In the light of this approach, we will see that the theories we considered earlier, while inadequate in themselves as explanations of the sense and direction of the social development of man, do get after all a respectable standing ground in the larger perspective. Each of them explains to a

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considerable extent the mode of working of the Human Evolutionary Spirit, its process of selection and effectuation in the material world. Even the theological theory has value in as much as it emphasises that the movement of the universe is not aimless; it is governed and directed with a Purpose—whatever the purpose be. It is this purposive Spirit that lends significance to the details in its field of working and once we understand the nature of its Goal and the route of its movement as elucidated in Sri Aurobindo's treatment of the question we are better equipped to appreciate the past and present trends of human thought on the progress of mankind at large.

## *The Mother on Divine Union*

RISHABHCHAND

**T**HERE are as many kinds of divine union as there have been mystics to realise it. Any supra-sensible and decisive experience in the inner consciousness is called divine union. Some Yogins, descending into the deeps of their being, realise an ineffable peace and call it divine union; some find themselves engulfed in an illimitable ocean of bliss or receive the torrential influx of a mighty power and call it divine union. Some realise the immutable Self and think that they have identified themselves with the Absolute. Some, again, unite themselves with the Divine in their hearts, *hriddeshe*, and cherish the belief that this is the highest possible union with the Master and Lover of all creatures. Instances like these could be multiplied ad infinitum, but that would hardly throw much light on the nature of the union we propose to deal with here. It is, of course, true that all these experiences and many more of the kind are genuine—not that there cannot be any faked ones—and that they are undoubtedly divine in so far as they are spiritual, but what is of capital importance is, first, whether all of them can be at all called union, and, second, whether they are union with the Divine.

We are, therefore, naturally led to a consideration of what we mean by the Divine and union with Him. Most philosophies and theologies agree to disagree on this point. We are not, of course, concerned here with those philosophies which are avowedly atheistic or materialistic, but even among the theistic ones, there are various conceptions of the Divine. Some postulate Him as the extra-cosmic Lord and Master of the universe; some regard Him as immanent in and co-extensive with the universe; some envisage Him only as an all-pervading static Existence; and yet some as the inexpressible, incommunicable, transcendent Absolute; and so on and so forth. The connotation of the words “divine union”, therefore, varies according to the conception one has of the Divine. And then various things are meant by union, as we have already said above. Even in cases of authentic divine

union, there are differences, not only of degree but also of kind, entailing considerable differences in their effects upon the consciousness of those who realise it. It is a vast and extremely interesting subject, but as it does not lie within the scope of our present object, we shall just touch upon it and pass on to the Mother's experiences of the divine union as transcribed in the "Prayers & Meditations". And in order to obviate a possible misunderstanding, we shall make it perfectly clear at the very outset that the union the Mother aspired for and realised, is not the traditional union experienced and held in the depths of the being and strenuously guarded against the disturbing elements of the surface-self and the surrounding world. That is a comparatively easy achievement—the outer personality hushed, the deeper layers of the consciousness are released into activity and the soul either plunges headlong into the eternal immobility of the silent Brahman or enters, thrilled and transported, into the beatific embrace of the Beloved. Or it passes, swiftly or by slow stages, through various realms of the Spirit, bathing in their light and feeding on their delight, into the ineffable Absolute. Whatever consciousness persists in the outer personality,—unless it is a complete trance, in which case there is a temporary suspension of all movements of the external nature—is left to itself and its helpless automatism. Or sometimes, in some Yogins of exceptional calibre, the rapturous state of inner union is reflected to a certain extent on the outer nature; there is a reproduction or radiation of the inner peace and purity and joyous freedom and, subject to certain conditions, a more or less conscious and direct play of the divine Force in the natural personality which undergoes, in consequence, a remarkable heightening and acquires a new and infinitely more perfect and potent dynamism. But great as these states are and equally glorious to the indiscriminating eye of mental intelligence, they are far from what the Mother has experienced and expressed in so many of her Prayers and Meditations.

We shall now proceed to see what the Mother means by the Divine and the divine union. By the Divine she means—and that is exactly the view of Sri Aurobindo, as we shall see presently—the one infinite and eternal Person, Purusha, who is at once the transcendent Author and Lord of the universe of His own creation, which is but His own multiple self-extension and self-representation in Himself, and immanent in it as a sustaining, guiding and consummating static and dynamic Presence. The Upanishad describes Him with a comprehensive sweep and a penetrating vividness:—

“But the divine and unborn and formless Spirit that containeth the inward and the outward is beyond mind and life and is luminously pure, and He is higher than the highest Immutable.

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And of Him is born life and the mind and all the organs of sense and of Him are Ether and Air and Light and Water and Earth that holdeth all.

Fire is the head of Him and His eyes are the sun and the moon and the quarters are His organs of hearing and the revealed scripture is His speech; Air is His life-breath and the universe is His heart and earth is at His feet. He is the inner Self within all creatures.

And from Him is fire, of which the sun is the fuel, rain that arises from the wine of the gods, and herbs that grow upon the earth; as when a man pours his seed into a woman, many creatures are born from the Spirit.

And from Him are many kinds of gods produced and the demigods and men and the beasts and the birds, and the breath and the nether breath, and grain of rice and grain of barley, and faith and truth and holiness and rule.

And the seven breaths are born of Him, and the seven tongues of the flame, and the seven kinds of fuel and the seven kinds of offering, and the seven worlds in which the breaths, whose chamber is in the secret heart, move and are placed within, seven and seven.

And from Him are the seas and all the mountains and from Him flow all forms of rivers, and all herbs are from Him, and sensible delight which maketh the soul to abide with the material elements.

The Spirit is all this that is here in the universe: He is works and self-discipline and Brahman and the the supreme immortality.”<sup>1</sup>

He is the eternal Ground of all things that were, are and will be. In Him there is no division, though He seems to be divided; no dualities and anomalies, though he creates them freely for the play of Ignorance with which evolution starts from Inconscience. He is the reconciliation of all differences and discords. He is the One, and He has become many; and this becoming is not an illusion, but a timeless fact of the divine Reality. And yet He is the ineffable, indefinable Absolute—unconditioned, unqualified and featureless.

It is clear that this comprehensive conception of the Divine is the fusion of all the current conceptions of religions and philosophies, and embraces and unifies the diverse experiences of the mystics of all ages and climes. It does not negate or invalidate any truth of spiritual realization or give the lie to any sane and substantial finding of metaphysical speculation. In its luminous amplitude Vedanta joins hands with Sankhya, Tantra with Vaishnavism, Paganism with Christianity, and even Materialism finds its essential quest justified, rightly interpreted and enlightened, and itself united with

<sup>1</sup> “Mundaka II, Chap. I

spirituality in a happy wedlock. It is a synthesis, not achieved by an intellectual or emotional eclecticism, but by a global spiritual experience—a synthesis which reflects the manifold unity of all existence. It is an epitome of all the conceptions of the Divine, past and present, and bids fare to be the sovereign, dynamic spiritual conception of the future.

“An omnipresent Reality”, says Sri Aurobindo in the *Life Divine* (Vol. 1, p. 51) “is the truth of all life and existence whether absolute or relative, whether corporeal or incorporeal, whether animate or inanimate, whether intelligent or unintelligent; and in all its infinitely varying and even constantly opposed expressions, from the contradictions nearest to our ordinary experience to those remote antinomies which lose themselves on the verges of the Ineffable, the Reality is one and not a sum or concourse. From that all variations begin, in that all variations consist, to that all variations return. All affirmations are denied only to lead to a wider affirmation of the same Reality. All antinomies confront each other in order to recognise one Truth in their opposed aspects and embrace by the way of conflict their mutual Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.”

Now, union with this Divine or omnipresent Reality will, of course, mean union with Him at once in all the states of His consciousness and all the modes of His Being. Anything short of it may be a partial, but can never be a complete or integral union. A seeker of integral union has to be identified with the Chatuspada Brahman of the *Upāṇishad*—the Brahman of the waking consciousness, the Brahman of the dream or subliminal consciousness, the Brahman of the sleep consciousness and That of the transcendent, absolute consciousness. When one is fully identified with the Divine in all these states of consciousness, one can be said to have realised the most complete union. Thus identified, one becomes, so to say, like the Divine Himself, at once transcendent and immanent, universal and individual, static and dynamic, one and many; and yet—this point has to be carefully noted—it is not a self-annihilation of the individual in the Divine, for that would mean an extinction of the very centre of manifestation in the world. The individual persists as an eternal portion and aspect of the Transcendent in the universe, but liberated from all limitations and participating in the infinity and immortality of the Supreme. In a perfect union, one holds in a divine grip and balance all the four states described above. One is beyond all universe, inaccessibly poised in the inconceivable supracosmic silence, and yet moves in all the multiple movements of the world, guiding it to its ultimate destiny. No alternation of the states, but an unbroken and spontaneous simultaneity, a firm possession

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and a termless ecstasy of multitudinous enjoyment are the experience of the integral divine union.

It goes without saying that we hardly ever come across any record in the ancient and modern scriptures and mystical hagiography of the world of such a comprehensive realisation, such a fourfold perfection of divine union. There have been many cases of transcendent union, necessitating a deliberate or automatic diminution of the activities of the surface nature, or, more usually, a temporary abrogation or suspension of the active physical self. Light has often been wooed and won, but at the expense of Life which has gone either pale or grey with neglect. But a fusion of Light and Life, of the One and the Many, of the Transcendent, the Universal and the individual, of utter silence and the stupendous stir and hum of the cosmic movement, of the Spirit and Matter in an integrated and divinized human consciousness, is an achievement yet unrecorded in the history of spiritual culture.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now try to follow in the footsteps of the Mother as she proceeds from one realization of union to another till the integral union is attained. Almost in the beginning of her "Prayers and Meditations" the Mother declares that she has realized divine union: "I said yesterday to that Englishman who is seeking for Thee with so sincere a desire that I had definitively found Thee, that *the union was constant*. Such is indeed the state of which I am conscious. All my thoughts go towards Thee, all my acts are consecrated to Thee; Thy Presence is for me an absolute, immutable, invariable fact, and Thy Peace dwells constantly in my heart.....how many times already when I pronounce it (the word "I"), it is Thou who speakest in me, for I have lost the sense of separativity."<sup>2</sup>

The reader will find in this description a beautiful and living example of divine union. "I have definitively found Thee", "All my thoughts go towards Thee, all my acts are consecrated to Thee", "I have lost the sense of separativity." All these words signify a state in which the Divine is not only discovered, but embraced and served even in the minute details of the Mother's life. And yet, she continues, "I know that this state of union is poor and precarious compared with that which it will become possible for me to realise tomorrow." She is not content with what would have been readily regarded by most mystics as the final attainment; she finds

<sup>1</sup> There is, it is true, the legend of Yajnavalkya who wished to possess both the worlds, *ubhayameva*, and also the Rajarishis (king-sages) and those "liberated in life" (Jivanmuktas); but the exact implications of their integral realisation have to be established.

<sup>2</sup> "Prayers and Meditations", p. 3.

it "poor and precarious", for her aspiration is something much higher and wider, something that is indissolubly bound up with the very mission of her life. And she gives expression to this aspiration in some of her Prayers:—

"I aspire for the day when I can no longer say "I", for I shall be Thou".<sup>1</sup>

"Let the pure perfume of sanctification burn always, rising higher and higher and straighter and straighter, like the ceaseless prayer of the integral being, desiring to unite with Thee so as to manifest Thee."<sup>2</sup>

In the second quotation we have the key-note of her sublime aspiration: "desiring to unite with Thee so as to manifest Thee." Not union in itself and for itself, for that has been already realised, but union for the sake of manifestation, that is to say, a permanent and active union in the whole consciousness and the whole nature. It is a union in which the Mother does not so much revel as reveal; it is a union for bridging "earthhood and heavenhood" and making deathless "the Children of Time".

This, then, is the central truth of the Mother's aspiration, and unless we have a clear grasp of it, it would be difficult to follow in her footsteps through the Prayers which are a mounting symphony of dynamic union. There are many Prayers which may appear to be self-contradictory and self-repetitive, but that is a common experience of the human mind when it tries to follow the movements of an infinite consciousness and force whose incalculable flexibility and subtle self-modification baffles its comprehension. Most of the Prayers, especially the later ones, are a kaleidoscope of a difficult perfecting of the physical being of the Mother, without which the union of her longing could not be realised. This physical transformation is a revolutionary conception, extremely intricate and arduous in its process, involving a systematic exploration of the subconscious and the inconscient parts of the human being, and their eventual purification and illumination. A complete union includes a union even of these parts with the superconscience and omniscience of the supreme Reality.

It is true that transcendental union, which means union with the Reality in its timeless and spaceless self-existence, is the first necessity. Unless we attain to the Transcendent, we remain tied to Time, cooped up in the cosmic formula. Complete liberation implies transcendence of the universe and a secure superiority to the waves of Nature. But a naked, irrevocable retreat to the relationless Absolute cannot be the aim of the soul's incarnation in the world of relativities, it can only be an important episode

<sup>1</sup> "Prayers and Meditations", p. 2.

ibid., p. 13.

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in its spiritual evolution. If the soul has descended into Matter, it is only to transfigure it and manifest the Divine in its transmuted substance. If it has descended into the relativities, it is to realise and fulfil the Absolute in the very play of the relativities. If it has come down into Time, it is only to reveal the Eternal in the very flux of Time. Therefore, after the transcendental union, the integral union, or, in other words, the perfect and permanent union of the whole being and consciousness of man with the Divine. In this integral union one does not lose the transcendental union, but only annexes to it the universal, dynamic union, and makes the integrality, thus attained, the base of an unfettered action in the world. The Mother expresses this idea in the following words: "Now I clearly understand that union with Thee is not an end to be pursued, so far as the present individuality is concerned; it is a fact accomplished long since. And that is why Thou seemest to tell me always, "Do not revel in the ecstatic contemplation of the union, fulfil the mission I have confided to Thee on the earth."

"And the individual work to be pursued simultaneously with the collective work is the awareness and possession of all the activities and all the regions of the being and the definitive establishment of the consciousness in that highest point which will allow at once the prescribed action and a constant communion with Thee. The joy of perfect union can come only when what has to be done has been done."

"We must preach to all, first, union, then work; but for those who have realised the union, each moment of their life must be an integral expression of Thy Will through them."

Describing this union with a greater elaboration, the Mother says, "In all the states of being, in all the modes of activity, in all things, in all worlds, one can meet Thee and be united with Thee, for Thou art everywhere and ever present. He who has met Thee in one activity of his being or in one world in the universe, says: 'I have found Him', and seeks no more for anything else; he thinks he has arrived at the summit of human possibility. What a mistake! It is in all states, in all modes, in all things, in all worlds, in all elements that we have to discover Thee and be united with Thee; and if we leave out one element, however small it may be, the communion cannot be perfect, the realisation cannot be accomplished.

And that is why to find Thee is only the first step in an ascent that is infinite".<sup>1</sup>

The Mother leaves no doubt in our minds as to the nature of the divine union she calls integral. Obviously, it is not a union on the heights of the

<sup>1</sup> "Prayers and Meditations", p. 156.

being, nor is it realised only in the distant depths. It enfolds each and every element in the infinite existence and remains the same, whatever the field and role of action assigned to the individual. The prevalent idea that "consciousness of the Many and consciousness of the One are mutually exclusive states" is so strongly fixed in men's minds that it does not occur to them that the state they describe as union or complete self-absorption or self-annulment of the individual soul in the Reality "in which all outward things are forgot", is but a partial, a truncated union. If the Reality is everywhere, at once in all worlds, in all states, in all beings and in all elements as well as beyond all states, all worlds and all elements, then a complete union with It will surely never exclude the "outward things"; for, in fact, there is nothing that is outward, nothing that is not essentially divine and contained in the Divine. A union that causes a forgetfulness of the outward things is a kind of trance, a limited and localised, intensive union, not an integral one. Tuned to an ampler key runs this other Prayer:—

"O Lord, Lord, a boundless joy fills my heart, songs of gladness surge through my head in marvellous waves, and in the full confidence of Thy certain triumph, I find a sovereign Peace and an invincible Power. Thou fillest my being, Thou animatest it, Thou settest in motion its hidden springs, Thou illuminest its understanding, Thou intensifiest its life, Thou increasest tenfold its love; and I no longer know whether the universe is I or I am the universe, whether Thou art in me or I am in Thee; Thou alone art and all is Thou; and the streams of Thy infinite Grace fill and overflow the world."<sup>1</sup>

Experience succeeding to richer and wider experience tends towards the final, dynamic identification. The path stretches interminable through the fields of inconscience. Often the gallop slows down to a trot and the trot to an amble; after the unspeakable rapture of a rapt union, a spell of "harsh solitude", "a desert arid and bare", but a new Light emerges from the heart of the solitude, a fresh gust of Force sweeps the being again to the summits and plunges it into a union incomparably deeper and more comprehensive than ever before. Here a word of caution is necessary. Those who have studied Western mysticism may run away with the idea that it is the "dark night of the soul" that the Mother describes by the phrases, "harsh solitude" and "a desert, arid and bare", a state of inevitable transition, of spiritual fatigue or of a desperate upsurge of the lower impurities before their final elimination. But even a cursory glance through the Prayers will belie this assumption. There is a

<sup>1</sup> "Prayers and Meditations", p. 14.

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ransition, of course, but a transition in the long and difficult process of transforming the physical consciousness by a descent into the subconscious and the inconscient and their conquest and illumination. These obscure regions of the human consciousness, of which we know precious little, are still dominated by the twin principle of Ignorance and Falsehood, and unless their universal base and dynamic are mastered and metamorphosed, unless Ignorance is turned into Knowledge, darkness into Light, Falsehood into Truth and suffering into Ananda, there is no possibility of any individual, however spiritually great he may be, achieving a complete conversion and transformation of his physical being. It is this universal work that has engaged the whole of the Mother's attention and labour, because it is the work which the Divine has entrusted to her. It is, in fact, the mission of her life.

"Thy will is that from the heart of this heavy and obscure Matter I must let loose the volcano of Thy Love and Light. It is Thy will that, breaking all old conventions of language, there must arise the right Word to express Thee, the Word that never was heard before; it is Thy will that the integral union should be made between the smallest things below and the sublimest and most vast above; and that is why, O Lord, cutting me off from all religious joy and spiritual ecstasy, depriving me of all freedom to concentrate exclusively on Thee, Thou hast said to me, 'Work as an ordinary man in the midst of ordinary beings; learn to be nothing more than they are in all that is manifesting; associate with the integral way of their being; for, beyond all that they know, all that they are, thou carriest in thyself the torch of the eternal splendour which does not waver, and by associating with them, it is this thou wilt carry into their midst.'"<sup>1</sup>

Sweeping through unimaginable experiences of ineffable ecstasy and utter desolation, the Divine lands her at long last on the threshold of the "Marvellous Way" where the Mother feels that "in the perfect union I am this plan and this Will, and I taste the supreme bliss of the infinite, even while I play with ardour, precision and energy, in the world of division, the special play Thou hast entrusted to me."

"Thy power in me is like a fountain, strong and fertilizing, which clamours behind the rocks, accumulating its energies to break down the obstacle and gush forth freely to the exterior, pouring over the plain to fertilize it."<sup>2</sup>

A further progress through the "sombre night" and the Mother emerges into the sunlight of a deeper union which finds expression in the following: "Thou hast taken entire possession of this miserable instrument, and if it

<sup>1</sup> "Prayers and Meditations", p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 236.

is not yet perfected enough for Thee to complete its transformation, Thou art at work in each one of its cells to knead it, and make it supple and illumine it, and to class, organise and harmonise it in the ensemble of the being.”<sup>1</sup>

Describing the detailed action of transformation leading to the integral union, the Mother says at one place:—

“Little by little, the vital being was habituated to find harmony in the most intense action, as it had found it in passive surrender. And once this harmony was sufficiently established, there was light again in all parts of the being, and the consciousness of what had happened became complete.

“Now the vital being has recovered in the midst of action the perception of Infinity and Eternity. It can, through all sensations and all forms, perceive Thy supreme Beauty and can live it. Even in its sensation, extended, active and fully developed, it can feel the contrary sensations at the same time and always it perceives Thee.”<sup>2</sup>

“Thou hast willed, O Lord, that the being should become larger and greater. It could not do so without entering again, at least partially and temporarily, into ignorance and obscurity. It is this ignorance and this obscurity that it has come now to place at Thy feet as the most modest of ordeals.”<sup>3</sup>

When the spire of the temple of perfection gleams in the distance, the Mother hears in the silence of her being:—

“By renouncing everything, even wisdom and consciousness, thou wert able to prepare thy heart for the role which was assigned to it: apparently the most thankless role, that of the fountain which always lets its waters flow abundantly for all, but towards which no stream can ever remount; it draws its inexhaustible force from the depths and has nothing to expect from outside. But thou feelst already beforehand what sublime felicity accompanies this inexhaustible expansion of love.....

“Be this love in everything and everywhere, ever more widely, ever more intensely and the whole world will become at once thy work and thy estate, thy field of action and thy conquest...Fight that thou mayst conquer and triumph; struggle to surmount all that has been up to this day, to make the new Light emerge, the new example which the world needs.”<sup>4</sup>

Another heroic advance through the darkness of Matter culminates in an experience of union of a unique depth and comprehensiveness:—

<sup>1</sup> “Prayers and Meditations”, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 248-49.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 264-65.

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“My heart has fallen asleep, down to the very depths of my being.

The whole earth is in a stir and agitation of perpetual change; all life enjoys and suffers, endeavours, struggles, conquers, is destroyed and formed again.

My heart has fallen asleep, down to the very depths of my being.

In all these innumerable and manifold elements, I am the Will that moves, the Thought that acts, the Force that realises, the Matter that is put in motion.

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being.

No more any personal limits, no more any individual action, no more any separative concentration creating conflict; nothing but a single and infinite Oneness.

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being.”<sup>1</sup>

We have called this experience unique, for, we believe there is nothing in the whole range of mystical literature to compare with it in depth and amplitude. Here there is a perfect, a divine combination of the abysmal silence of the Eternal and the stupendous movement of the Universal. There is sleep “down to the depths” of the being, a state of *sushupti*, the third state of the fourfold consciousness of the all-comprehending Brahman, the state of the Consciousness of the supreme Lord of the world, Sarveshwara. And in the very midst of that sleep there is a perception of the stir and agitation of perpetual change. Is it only a perception? Then it cannot be a total identification with the Lord of the universe. A total identification implies a participation, not only in the infinite Peace and Silence of the Lord, but also in the thrilled delight of the movement of His creative Force. And we have an illustration of the participation, a full and integral participation, in what follows:—

“In all these innumerable and manifold elements, I am the Will that moves, the Thought that acts, the Force that realises, the Matter that is put in motion.”

This is a complete dynamic identification. The Mother is identified with the Lord’s Will, the Lord’s creative Thought and the Lord’s realising Force and, at the same time, with this inert and inconscient substance, this dark Matter which is being churned and redeemed and in which the integral union is to be consummated. And yet, implicit in the very grain of this identification, its inalienable base and sustenance, is the perfect identification of the Mother’s consciousness with the Consciousness of the Absolute in its eternal Silence and Immutability. This combination constitutes what the Mother calls integral divine union. And still there may be many more

<sup>1</sup> “Prayers and Meditations”, p. 283.

conquests to be made and consolidated in the rolling fields of inconscience—who knows? Matter is not only obscure but obdurate, Life is complex and convulsed with desires, and the Light invincibly insistent. What will be the issue? Who knows? Who cares to know? Man is enamoured of the tinsel and preoccupied with it, and has little time and less inclination to follow the labours of one whose sole object in life has been to dig “a bed for the golden river’s song” and bring “the fires of the splendour of God into the human abyss.”<sup>1</sup>

Not union with the Divine in the soul alone, not in the soul, mind and heart alone, but a union, a constant, dynamic, honey-dripping, life-transforming union even in the physical being, even in the cells of the body—a complete and creative union between the Summit and the Base—has been the labour of the Mother, not for herself alone, but for mankind.

Man will one day awake from the nightmarish reality he calls his life and garner the golden harvest of a divine humanity upon earth, but know not who ploughed the fields and who sowed the seeds. God’s Grace, even when it takes a human form, remains invisible to the fleshly eyes of material men.

<sup>1</sup> “Poems Past and Present”: Sri Aurobindo.

## *The Divine Maya\**

ARABINDA BASU

**T**HERE is an aspect of our nature which Sri Aurobindo has called the physical mind. Its reliance is almost entirely on the objective and it can, with very great difficulty only, be aware of the supraphysical or the subjective realities. The attitude of Physical Science is the same as that of the physical mind—its test of reality is the objective, the physical, the actual. The physical mind being an aspect of mind, sometimes loses its faith in the reality of the objective world and doubts its own constructions. Added to this is the loss of zest of the vital mind which is a dealer in possibilities. It not only enjoys the actual but also is a hunter after unrealised possibilities and a builder of imaginary triumph. But being stamped with the characteristic inadequacy of the mental consciousness, the vital mind not only loses interest in its actual and fanciful triumphs but also comes to look upon everything as futile and ultimately meaningless. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity then becomes the burden of its song. To justify this aversion of the vital mind comes the thinking mind or the mind proper with its destructive philosophies and unmakes all sense of the reality of the world and that of life in it. The history of philosophy is an eloquent record of the uncertainty of the mind's attitude towards and valuation of the world and all that it means to us. There is no philosophy which has not been controverted or at least hotly contested, and no denial of a philosophy which in its turn has not been challenged. Realism, Idealism, Illusionism or Nihilism seem to be the steps of the progress of philosophy. But the wheel turns full circle and Realism asserts itself with a redoubled force.

Sri Aurobindo says that the vital mind's aversion has no validity in itself, but the thinking mind's support of it has philosophical importance and needs to be examined carefully. When the thinking mind declares the

\* For the introductory instalment of this article, see Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual 1948, p. 51.

world to be illusory, it not only asserts the proposition but builds a case which it supports by logical arguments and constructs a formidable philosophy of negation.

The positive mind, however, cannot easily believe that the world is illusory. To convince it of the soundness of the theory, the analogy of the dream is given to show that it is possible for the consciousness to have experience of things which really are not. The Illusionist theory does not say that the world is a dream but that it is like a dream—just as waking proves dream to be unreal, so also the knowledge of reality shows the waking world to be unreal. But still the effect of this analogy is so devastating on the minds of men that we must carefully examine it and also see whether it applies to our world experience.

One reason why dream is pronounced unreal is that it ceases and loses validity when we wake up from sleep. But Sri Aurobindo does not consider this a sufficient reason. All that it proves is that there are different states of consciousness each with its own realm of realities and the fact of passing from one state to another does not prove the unreality of the former. Dream objects are real to the dream consciousness, the normal waking world to the waking consciousness. So long as we are dreaming, the dream world is the real object of our experience; the fact that it vanishes when we wake up is normal and due to this that the consciousness necessary for its experience, the dream consciousness, is no longer active. Thus the disappearance of dreams on waking up does not in the least touch their reality.

Those familiar with the logic of *vādhā* or negation of the Illusionist school of Vedānta will take exception to this. The argument is put forward that waking negates dream and thus renders it unreal. But from what we have said above, it should be clear that this argument confuses the real issue by forgetting that waking is a different state of consciousness from dream. *Vādhā* or negation is exemplified in the celebrated snake-rope illustration but it should be remembered that in this case, the two experiences of the snake and the rope following each other belong to the same state of consciousness, namely, waking. Similarly, if in dream itself the snake were found to be a rope, that would be an example of negation. A 'waking rope' does not negate a 'dream snake'. The logic of *Vādhā*, therefore, cannot be employed against Sri Aurobindo's doctrine that different states of consciousness have their own worlds of reality and the passing from one state to another does not in any way compromise the reality of the former.

But another reason why dream is condemned as unreal is its evanescence; it has neither an antecedent nor a sequel. Also normally it lacks sufficient

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coherence and the waking being does not catch its significance. Our waking life, in spite of a few hours' sleepy interval, is coherent, each day taking up and continuing our world experience. But a particular night's dream has no connection with that of the previous night or that of the next, even dreams of the same night may not have any connection with each other. "There is, therefore," says Sri Aurobindo, "no analogy between dream and waking life; these are experiences quite different in their character, validity, order."<sup>1</sup>

Our life too is charged with want of inner coherence and significance. But it will be evident that this charge is made by a superficial view of life. An inner and deeper view reveals a complete and connected significance. The real meaning of life is revealed to an understanding deeper than the normal. Also the apparent incoherence disappears before a knowledge from within and is felt to be due to a lack of coherence in our own seeing. Sri Aurobindo says life is a chain of firm sequences. Even if, as it is alleged, the sequence is not really there in life but is a mental delusion, the difference between dream and waking consciousness does not disappear. There is no such thing in dream as coherence given by an observing inner consciousness. The apparent sequence is an imitation of that of waking life. Besides our life is to some extent controlled by the waking consciousness which dream is not; "it has the nature-automatism of a subconscious construction and nothing of the conscious will and organising force of the evolved mind of the human being."<sup>2</sup> There is also no comparison between the evanescence of dream and of life; that of the former is radical and one dream has no relation with another, but that of life is of details only. The totality of world experience does not suffer from evanescence. While bodies perish, souls do not and are reincarnated; solar systems may disappear but the universe as such continues and may be a permanent existence, and life in it persists in spite of all kinds of disaster. The conclusion drawn from this is that between dream and waking experiences, the analogy is not valid and should not be used in serious philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo himself, however, takes a different view of dream than the one described above. He does not believe that there is complete lack of coherence and significance in dream and he denies that it is totally unreal. In sleep it is only the waking activities that are suspended but the inner consciousness remains active. Of these activities we remember only those that take place in something that is nearer the surface mind. A subconscious

<sup>1</sup> "The Life Divine", Vol. II, part I, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 193.

element remains there in sleep. It is both a passage of our dream experiences and also a dream-builder. Many of its dream creations are built upon circumstances taken from waking life both past and present, others seem to be merely fanciful. Sri Aurobindo pays a tribute to the method of psycho-analysis which "trying to look for the first time into our dreams with some kind of scientific understanding,"<sup>1</sup> unravels their meaning to the waking consciousness. The interpretation of dream given by psycho-analysis may not be entirely correct, but "it begins to look as if there were something real behind it and as if too that something were an element of no mean practical importance."<sup>2</sup>

We have spoken of the subconscious both as a recorder of dreams and a dream builder. Its place is between the conscient and the inconscient. It is that part of our nature which borders on the inconscient; more properly it is the inconscient struggling into half-consciousness. It must be borne in mind that the subconscious is not the sub-mental, for Sri Aurobindo holds that the submental aspects of our nature, namely, the vital and the physical, have an incipient consciousness of their own. Consciousness, according to him, is not dependent on mentality and mental reaction to things; compared to it, the mind is only a tiny bit.<sup>3</sup> "The true sub-conscious," says Sri Aurobindo, "is the Inconscient vibrating on the borders of consciousness, sending up its motions to be changed into conscious stuff, swallowing into its depths impressions of past experience as seeds of unconscious habit and returning them constantly but often chaotically to the surface consciousness, missioning upwards much futile or perilous stuff of which the origin is obscure to us, in dream, in mechanical repetitions of all kinds, in untraceable impulsions and motives, in mental, vital, physical perturbations and upheavals, in dumb automatic necessities of our obscurest parts of nature."<sup>4</sup>

Now in sleep, the physical part of us, a formation of the inconscient, sinks back to its origin through the subconscious transcriber of dreams. "There it finds the impressions of its past or persistent habits of mind and experiences,—for all have left their mark on our sub-conscious part and there a power of recurrence."<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon of recurrence as it takes place in sleep seems to be fanciful and the waking intelligence cannot

<sup>1,2</sup> "The Life Divine," p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> See the letters entitled "Consciousness" and The Physical "Consciousness" in Letters of Sri Aurobindo.

<sup>4</sup> "The Life Divine", Vol II, part I, p. 403-4.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 195. The subconscious in this respect corresponds to the *chitta* of Patanjali's Yoga-Philosophy.

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grasp its sense. When the subconscious activity sinks completely into the inconscient, we name that state dreamless sleep. But in fact this is a deeper layer of the subconscious and here too the dream activity continues though the recording layer fails to retain any of its impressions.

There is another aspect of our nature which also is a behind-the-veil entity and which Sri Aurobindo has called the subliminal. Of this also our waking intelligence has no awareness. In itself, however, "it is in full possession of a mind, a life-force, a clear subtle-physical sense of things. It has the same capacities as our waking being, a subtle sense and perception, a comprehensive extended memory and an intensive selecting intelligence, will, self-consciousness; but even though the same in kind, these are wider, more developed, more sovereign. And it has other capacities which exceed those of our mortal mind, because of a power of direct awareness of the being, whether acting in itself or turned towards its object, which arrives more swiftly at knowledge, more swiftly at effectivity of will, more deeply at understanding and satisfaction of impulse". We have given this rather long quotation because we find here noted the broad characteristics and capacities of the subliminal, a clear idea of which is essential for an understanding of Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of dream. It has both an inner and upward extension and consequently has contacts with both the occult and the spiritual. From the former emerge in our experience what may be called the more than normal, from the latter what may be called the supernormal or the genuinely spiritual, both emerging through the subliminal, our gateway to these realities.

Now in dreamless sleep, we either go into the deeper layer of the subconscious from where no intimation of its structures comes, or into the inner chambers of our being, the subliminal mental, the subliminal vital, the subtle-physical and lose almost all connection with our surface intelligence. There may be some recording by the surface subconscious layer of our experiences of these regions of our being if they are nearer our surface being. The reason why we do not understand this record is that it is in the subconscious's own transcription to which our waking mind has no key. But there is a plunge still deeper where the record fails and produces the illusion of dreamlessness. A growth of the inward consciousness however reveals continuance of dream activity even there. And the dreams of the subliminal become "a series of thoughts, often strangely or vividly figured, problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve, warnings, premonitions, indications of the future, veridical dreams replace the subconscious incoherence."<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo even recognises

<sup>1</sup> "The Life Divine", p. 197.

the possibility of full consciousness in sleep and of following the progress of our dreams from beginning to end. We pass from state to state, from one state of consciousness to another to the deepest or the highest level and come back to the surface. In the course of the return the experiences slip away from us but with a proper training and growth of consciousness, a coherent knowledge and retention in our surface memory of these dreams though difficult is not impossible. We remember the dreams that are thrown up by the subconscious but the dreams of the subliminal also may impress our sleep consciousness in such a way that they are retained by our waking memory. When that happens dreams assume reality and a significance.

Sri Aurobindo also makes out that the subliminal is in direct touch with supraphysical realities and the other planes of our being. Our entry into the subliminal enables us to make contact with them. This entry is possible both in sleep and trance which, like sleep, is also a withdrawal of consciousness from its external field. For those who are not trained in the necessary yogic discipline and cannot enter into trance, sleep is a normal passage to the subliminal. The experiences of the subliminal are also figured in dreams. In fact, the Upanishad calls the subliminal the Dream Self who has "inner intelligence and enjoys things subtle."<sup>1</sup> Thus we see that the dream activity is very extensive and can be traced back to what is called dreamless sleep state, to what Sri Aurobindo calls the super-conscious and the Upanishad the Sleep Self or the *sushuptam*,<sup>2</sup> because "normally all mental and sensory experience cease when we enter this super-consciousness".<sup>3</sup> The touch of the superconsciousness makes the normal mind almost inactive. That is why the surface being cannot retain consciousness of contacts with it; but even here it is not altogether impossible for the surface being to hold something of these extraordinary contacts. It can be done "by an especial and unusual development, in a supernormal condition or through a break or rift in our confined normality."<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly this unusual development is the result of an outburst of our now-secret faculties. But the fact that the kind of retention referred to above is a result of a special training of the normally undeveloped faculties of a new combination of the forces of subjective being and the discovery of its latent states, should not make it suspect. Let us remember the simple definition Sri Aurobindo has given of Yoga: it is the science of the subjective

<sup>1,2</sup> "Mandukya Upanishad", verses 4 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> "The Life Divine", Vol. II, part I, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 202.

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forces just as physics and other natural sciences are a study of the forces of objective nature. Let us also remember that he never tires of pleading for serious consideration of the deeper experiences of our subjective being. After all experience is our main gateway to reality and yogic experiences should not be an anathema to the metaphysician because they are unusual to our consciousness as normally organised in us. All spiritual philosophies in India have taken due account of these deeper subjective experiences; we may even say that a systematic study of these has been made the very basis of metaphysical construction in India. What is new in Sri Aurobindo is his insistence on the possibility of living in all the states of being simultaneously and the holding of these strata of consciousness and their respective worlds in a single act of knowledge. A hint at this possibility is already contained in the Upanishad but it is in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo that we find the hint worked out fully for the first time. Indeed the very aim of the Integral Yoga is so to transform the outer consciousness as to enable it to be aware of its deeper and higher levels normally and not through any special effort like trance etc. This gives an entirely novel, revolutionary and harmonic view of our experience of the gross (*jāgaritasthāna*), subtle (*svapnasthāna*) and the bliss worlds (*sushuptam, ānandabhuk*).<sup>1</sup> The unbroken continuity of conscious existence and its activity in the three worlds is revealed and their connection with *Turiya*, the fourth firmly established.

The Mandukya Upanishad starts with saying that the mystic seed-sound *AUM* is all. It is what has been, what is and what will be, and what is beyond the 'three times'.<sup>2</sup> Then the Upanishad goes on to say that all this is Brahman, the Self is Brahman and that the Self is fourfold or has four parts. It proceeds to define the four parts which are waking, dream, sleep and the fourth, the incommunicable, non-dual Self. It is further asserted that *AUM* is the Self and that *AUM* also exists as *mātrā* or measure. The three Matras of *AUM* are again waking, dream and sleep and the incommunicable fourth is *Amātra*, or transcendent of *mātrā*, the Beyond-measure. But that also is the *AUM* just as in the previous description the fourth also was the Self. It is clear from the above that the Three or the three *mātrās*, namely, waking, dream and sleep are also the Self, the Brahman, and the intention of the Upanishad is that they are not unreal. It is conceded that a very strict logic may say that the fourth alone is real. But it may be held with equal

<sup>1</sup> "Mandukya Upanishad", verses 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, I.

justification that while the *Turiya* or the *Amātra*, the fourth or the Beyond-measure is the basic status of reality, the others are its self variations. Otherwise, the Upanishad would not have described all the four as parts of the Self. The logic of experience transcends the logic of the thinking mind. The dialectic of spiritual consciousness outstrips the steps of analytic thought. And Sri Aurobindo, following the logic of experience, considers *jāgrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti* as worlds of reality, not of illusion. The result is the restoration of a concrete sense of reality of all the three worlds and this sense of reality proves to the hilt the inapplicability of the dream analogy to our normal waking world experience.

The reader may wonder why the activities in the deeper states of our being should be called dream. He may wonder because his view of dream is very limited and he is accustomed to look upon it as a mental process dependent on our waking experiences. But Sri Aurobindo's analysis shows that what we call dream in common parlance is really and originally an activity of the deeper recesses of our subjective being. Dream originates in the subliminal and its annexe, the subconscious or even in the super-consciousness. That dream is not entirely dependent on waking experiences is proved by the fact that people have been known to dream of things to which nothing in their waking experience corresponded or which proved true later in their life; in other words, waking experience has corresponded with and confirmed the dream experience.<sup>1</sup> It should also be remembered that the authors of the Upanishads following the practice of the Vedic seers, used the terms of our daily life even for things which are quite extraordinary and beyond the range of normal experience. Their method of knowledge was intuitive and their use of language symbolical. Words ordinarily used for normal things were employed to indicate supernormal things. The practice leads us to a misreading of their minds but the ancients, who were familiar with their methods of knowledge and the manner of their

<sup>1</sup> Biographies of Yogis and books on 'psychical' research are full of records of this kind of dreams, and it is not necessary to make any detailed reference to them here. But I would like to record what a great sanskrit scholar—a savant and a sadhak—told me in Benares about a couple of years ago. I was discussing this particular topic with him and he related this personal experience to me. In his boyhood once he dreamed of a visit to a place which was a wasteland. For a number of years with intervals, he dreamed of revisits to the same place which became a plot of land on which a house was being built. With the passage of years the building of the house progressed and several years after the first dream, the building was completed in a final dream. What is pertinent about this dream progressing over a number of years to a legitimate finish, is that the dreamer actually had in his life a house built for himself similar to the one seen in the 'serial' dream.

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language, knew their intended significances all right. Obviously these names—waking, dream and sleep are figurative.

We have already said that nowhere in the Upanishad it is laid down that these three states are unreal. On the contrary, they are described as parts of the self-same Brahman which is fourfold. An identity which self-varies itself into four states is the concept of Brahman presented by the Upanishad. Sri Aurobindo concedes that the first three states may be regarded as illusion, the sole reality being the *fourth*, the absolute superconscience. But he argues that "it is equally possible to regard and rank them together as three different orders of one Reality or as three states of consciousness in which is embodied our contact with three different grades of self-experience and world-experience".<sup>1</sup> In the last analysis the two would mean the same thing. For according to Sri Aurobindo, it is really the Reality that knows in and through us its self-objectifications. From the side of Brahman, *susupti* is the causal-bliss world which evolves into *swapna* or the subtle world of which *jagrat* or the waking world is the gross evolution. The individual lives normally in the last. But to realise its own secret reality, it has to reach the *Fourth* through the other two which are its own states. As the individual enters the deeper and the higher states, he realises them as orders of cosmic existence and not merely as states of his own consciousness.

The above analysis of dream makes it clear that it is not an unreal figure of unreal things. Its analogy, therefore, as an illustrative support of the illusionist theory is not valid. The objection may be raised that dream though a transcript of real things, is not itself real and that similarly our waking life is also a collection of symbols or images and not itself real. They try to figure something that may be real but the figures that they make are not true representations of that. Students of western philosophy will be reminded of Representationism. The difficulty in that theory is the lack of connection between the image and the imaged. We can, however, answer by saying that even though dream and for the matter of that, our waking experience, were a symbol, it was the symbol of something. It is not a baseless construction and is grounded on the real. Besides we have an intuition which immediately and adequately relates the image with the imaged, the symbol with the symbolised. Intuition is a direct perception of reality which "gives us a touch of things." It is, according to Sri Aurobindo, active in all our knowledge processes. Intuition is not the highest knowledge, because though there is no interdiction between it and reality,

<sup>1</sup> "The Life Divine", p. 202.

the level of consciousness in and through which it works makes its function limited. In other words, it is coated by our mentality, vitality and physicality. Thus though a flash of intuition puts us in direct contact with reality, its mixture with and expression through the natural parts of our being render it open to error or mistaken stress. Reason comes in to systematise our intuitions and correct their errors. The adequacy of the relation established by intuition between the image and the imaged, between the knower and the known, is amplified by an illumined reason which observes and corrects the errors of our sense-transcripts in which also, as has been said, intuition works. Thus in spite of errors our knowledge is substantially correct. In a sense all our knowledge is symbolic and of the nature of image, because it is never completely exhaustive of reality and is a partial expression of it. Yet the symbol is a symbol of something objective; the image though not fully adequate is of some reality and not of illusion. In the illusionist theory, however, there is nothing to image, nothing to transcribe, nothing that could be expressed through symbols. For in that theory reality is a pure indeterminable, *nirvesesha*, for ever void of self-determinations, and perfectly incommunicable, *avyavahāryam*. Neither waking nor dream experience can image That because That is indescribable and ineffable.

Thus the dream analogy fails us completely and though useful as a vivid metaphor and as expressing a particular attitude towards life, it has no place in any worthy metaphysical enquiry.

# *Sri Aurobindo and Plato*

S. K. MAITRA

WHITEHEAD has said in a passage in his book *Process and Reality* that “the safest general characterization of European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato”. This clearly proves the importance of Plato’s philosophy as the source of all European philosophy. Although I am not in a position to accept this view in its entirety inasmuch as there are other factors than Plato’s philosophy which have been responsible for the development of European philosophy, such as the influence of the Christian Church, the impact of the advance of science upon the entire cultural life of Europe, etc., yet it is undoubtedly true that one of the main formative elements in European philosophy is furnished by Platonism.

Another reason—and that is more or less a personal one—why I have chosen Plato as a representative European philosopher with whom to compare Sri Aurobindo is that having dealt with the relation of Sri Aurobindo to Nikolai Hartmann and Plotinus, I felt that it was incumbent upon me to deal with the source from which these philosophers drew their inspiration.

In any case, the series of comparative studies which I have made in successive numbers of this Annual, in which I have tried to show how Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy stands in relation to representative Western thinkers, cannot be said to be complete without bringing it into relation with the philosophy of Plato.

## I

### THE BACKGROUND OF PLATO’S PHILOSOPHY

To understand Plato, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the spirit of Greek philosophy, of which Plato represents the optimum development.

The Greek spirit was one of free inquiry, unfettered by tradition or dogma. The Greek mind first looked outwards, towards Nature, and tried to find therein some principle which could explain the entire phenomena of Nature. Thales, universally regarded as the founder of Greek philosophy, found such a principle in water. Other members of his school, known as the Ionian school, took some other natural principle, such as air, as the fundamental one. A change was made by Anaximander who took a more abstract principle, namely, the Boundless, as the starting-point of his philosophy.

Greek philosophy thus far was synonymous with natural speculation, though Anaximander gave it a turn which took it into the realm of abstract speculation. From now onwards Greek philosophy became more and more fond of abstractions. This tendency reached its climax in two philosophers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who although they differed fundamentally about the nature of the ultimate principle, one looking upon it as Being and the other as Becoming, yet made the ultimate principle the most abstract one that could be conceived. This process of abstract speculation continued in Pythagoras, who looked upon Number, as the symbol of measure and proportion, as the ultimate principle. But in Pythagoras Greek philosophy had its first touch of mysticism, which it acquired partly from the followers of the Orphic cult and partly from its contact with Eastern, specially Indian, philosophy, for there can be no doubt that Pythagoras was greatly influenced by Buddhism and other Indian trends of thought. How important this fact is for understanding Plato we shall see presently.

After Pythagoras there was a reversion to the concrete, and in Empedocles, Anaxagoras and the Atomists, Greek philosophy returned to the original concrete standpoint of the early Ionians, with this very important difference, that it no longer regarded the ultimate principle as one but as many. Greek philosophy, in fact, in this period was caught in a wave of pluralism. But Anaxagoras, although he was essentially an atomist, yet introduced a principle fundamentally different from any that Greek philosophy had so far conceived and which was of far-reaching importance for the subsequent development of that philosophy. This was the principle of Nous or Mind which was totally unknown to Greek philosophy before him. It is true he could not make full use of this principle and it was only externally connected with the rest of his philosophy. In fact, it was in search of a principle that could explain motion, that he hit upon Nous. To the end it remained in his philosophy a *deus ex machina*.

In fact, the credit of turning the centre of gravity of philosophy from Nature to Mind or Consciousness goes to Protagoras, rather than to Anaxagoras. It was Protagoras who, with his doctrine *Man is the measure of all*

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*things*, made a revolutionary change in the outlook of Greek philosophy, which had hitherto been more or less a sort of natural speculation. By making man the centre of philosophical interest, he turned the gaze of philosophy from outside within. Henceforth Greek philosophy never departed from this fundamental standpoint. From now on, man and his problems came to occupy the centre of Greek philosophy.

But Protagoras had a very poor conception of the nature of man. Man for him meant only the sensuous man, that part of man which expresses itself only in sensations and perceptions. Thus, although Protagoras was the author of the revolutionary change which gave Greek philosophy its characteristic note which it preserved till the end, yet he was also responsible for the most extreme form of subjectivism which acknowledged the reality of only the individual man's particular sensations and perceptions.

A second revolution therefore was necessary, and this was led by Socrates. He pointed out that it was only the universal element in man represented by his reason or intellect, that could be placed in the centre of philosophical interest. This, of course, gave an altogether new turn to Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine, and intellect or reason came to occupy the place which Protagoras had assigned to sensation and perception. Philosophy thus became in the hands of Socrates the science of the universal as discovered by human reason.

Plato as the true disciple of Socrates inherited this universalistic bias of his master, but he inherited along with it the tendencies of the previous philosophers, especially, the mysticism and love for number and measure of the Pythagorean and the fondness for the natural philosophy of the Ionians. Thus Plato became the complete Greek, uniting in himself the main tendencies of all the previous Greek thinkers. This no doubt accounts for his many-sidedness, but it also accounts for the fact why it was so difficult for him to maintain a consistent philosophical standpoint throughout, being swayed alternately by the different tendencies. On the whole he followed the Socratic principle of reason, but it would be doing injustice to him if we were to treat him merely as a Socratic and ignore the Pythagorean and other elements in him. This, in fact, is the charm of Plato, the wonderful many-sidedness of his genius and even his failures—the gaps in his philosophy—are not without a charm of their own.

### MAIN FEATURES OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

Plato's philosophy, thus, is extraordinarily many-sided, and even the enumeration of all its different features would take a good deal of space.

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In the short space at our disposal, therefore, we shall deal only with some of its main features. These, excluding from our consideration those which relate to his political philosophy (for we are not directly concerned with them), may be put under the following four heads: (1) his theory of ideas, (2) his theory of creation, (3) his conception of God, and (4) the idea of good. I will deal briefly with each of them in the following pages.

### (1) PLATO'S THEORY OF IDEAS

The most important feature of Plato's philosophy is undoubtedly his doctrine of ideas. The ideas of Plato are Universals, which alone are the ultimate realities for him. They are realities which are beyond sense and which are perceived by the mind alone when it is freed from the disturbing element of the body. They are unchangeable and invisible, and it is by participation in them that things are what they are. For instance, the beautiful is beautiful because it participates in the idea of beauty, the just is just because it participates in the idea of justice, and so on.

Whitehead believes that the ideas of Plato are the same as his (Whitehead's) "eternal objects", which he calls the Pure Potentials. But in Plato's view they are the ultimate realities and cannot be treated as potentials. It is not that they become real when they are actualized in the world of experience. But the world of experience has to show its credentials to them and is real precisely to the extent to which it succeeds in doing so. The 'actual entities' of Whitehead, in relation to which he calls the ideas pure potentials, are, from Plato's point of view, very poor stuff, as compared with them. Plato does not attach much importance to what we call the 'realization' or 'actualization' of the ideas. They do actualize themselves partly or fully in our world of experience, but whether they do so or not, they remain the ultimate realities. The reality of what Whitehead calls 'the actual entities' is in Plato's view far inferior to that of the ideas. Hartmann is right when he calls the ideas values, but he deviates from Plato when he attaches so much importance to the 'realization' of the ideas. In fact, he even goes further than Whitehead, for he calls ideas or values non-real. This, as I have explained in my article *Sri Aurobindo and Nikolai Hartmann* (Path Mandir Annual, 1945), is of course the height of absurdity, for if the values have no reality, how can they be called values?

How the world of experience or the world of finite objects participates in the ideas, Plato has not shown beyond pointing out that the world is a creation of God who creates it after the pattern of the ideas. This, of course, leaves a number of problems unsolved, as pointed out in the dia-

logue *Parmenides*. This dialogue also points out other difficulties in the theory of ideas.

Burnet in his "Platonism" holds the view that the theory of ideas is not Platonic but Socratic. Now this, we may venture to point out, is a historical question, and does not concern us here. Even if it can be proved conclusively (as it cannot) that Plato did not hold the theory of ideas but faithfully reproduced it in his dialogues as he heard it from his master's lips, even then we shall be justified in including it in our account of his philosophy, for what we mean by Plato's philosophy is the philosophy that is presented in the dialogues. Plato never mentioned in the Dialogues what his own views were. What the historical Plato's views were, it is for the historian to find out. For us Plato's views mean what is presented in the Dialogues.

The chief defect to our mind of Plato's theory of ideas is his view of them as static, devoid of all power of self-generation or creation. Another great defect is his failure to bring any unity or order into the system of ideas. The ideas are nothing but spiritual atoms or monads, without any connection among themselves. Only, in the *Republic*, he gives one idea, namely, the idea of good, the supreme place, but he expressly mentions that this idea is fundamentally different from the others. His calling it therefore the supreme idea does not help us in our problem, which is to arrange the ideas in a hierarchical order.

### (2) PLATO'S THEORY OF CREATION

I come now to Plato's theory of Creation. How does the world of plural beings come into existence? The problem of Creation has been in fact the stumbling-block in Greek philosophy. Anaxagoras solved it by postulating the existence of the Soul or Nous which, being not of the nature of material objects, could impart motion to them. Parmenides cut the Gordian knot by saying that there is no creation at all, for there is only the one immovable eternal Being. The difficulty is also one which we meet with in Plato, for, like Parmenides and unlike Heraclitus, he also takes his ideas to be without any power of becoming or generation. Unlike Parmenides, however, Plato does not deny creation but assumes the existence of a second principle outside of the ideas but dependent upon them for the plan or scheme of creation. This second principle Plato calls God or the Creator. Below I give an account of creation as it is described in the "Timaeus".

"Tim. Is the world created or uncreated?—that is the first question. Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore

sensible, and if sensible, then created, "and if created, made by a cause, and that cause is *the ineffable father of all things, who had before him an eternal archetype* (italics mine). For to imagine that the archetype was created, would be blasphemy, seeing that the world is the noblest of creatures and God is the best of causes. And the world being thus created according to the eternal pattern is the copy of something, and we may assume that words are akin to the matter of what they speak.

Sim. Excellent, Timaeus. I like your manner of approaching the subject, proceed.

Tim. Why did the Creator create the world? He was good and therefore not jealous, and being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be like himself."<sup>1</sup>

There are various difficulties which arise in connection with this description of Creation. The most fundamental one, as Jowett points out, is this: In what relation does the archetype stand to the Creator himself? since the idea or pattern of the world is not the thought of God, but a separate, self-existent nature, of which creation is the copy. Jowett gives his own reply to this question as follows: "We can only reply, (1) that to the mind of Plato subject and object were not yet distinguished; (2) that he supposes the process of creation to take place in accordance with his own theory of ideas; and as we cannot give a consistent account of the one, neither can we of the other. He means (3) to say that the creation of the world is not a material process of working with legs and arms but ideal and intellectual; according to his own fine expression, "the thought of God made the God that was to be". He means (4) to draw an absolute distinction between the invisible or unchangeable which is or is the place of mind or being, and the world of sense or becoming which is visible or changing. He means (5) that the idea of the world is prior to the world, just as the other ideas are prior to sensible objects; and like them may be regarded as eternal and self-existent, and also, like the idea of good, may be viewed apart from the divine mind."

The chief thing which we are to notice in connection with this answer of Jowett's is that creation, according to Plato, is not a material process, not a matter of hands and feet, but is mainly ideal and intellectual. Because it is so, therefore, Plato speaks of the idea of creation existing prior to creation. He even goes so far as to say that the idea of God creates the God that is to be. Of course, the latter statement becomes unintelligible if God is to be looked upon as the Ultimate Reality. But evidently, that

<sup>1</sup> "Timaeus", 29-32, (Jowett's translation.)

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position is reserved for the ideas, and therefore, God must be content with the position of being a penultimate and not the ultimate reality.

There are various other difficulties in connection with the theory of creation as given in the "Timaeus" and evidently Jowett is not quite sure whether a solution of them is at all possible. That is why he says, "We must reply again that we cannot follow Plato in all his inconsistencies, but that the gaps of thought are probably more apparent to us than to him. He would perhaps have said that "the first things are known only to God and to him of men whom God loves."

These words are as clear an admission as possible that there are inconsistencies in Plato's philosophy which it is impossible to explain away. To our mind the main inconsistency lies in having a double set of creators—the ideas which are the ultimate creators and God. God evidently has not got the power to create without getting the patterns from the ideas, and the ideas cannot also create directly because they have no power of generation.

One difficulty which has exercised the minds of most Greek scholars is this: Does Plato believe in creation out of nothing, or does he assume the prior existence of matter in a chaotic state prior to creation? There are some passages in the "Timaeus" where Plato speaks of the elements as moving in a disorderly manner before the work of creation starts. Jowett thinks that Plato does not attach much importance to this question. "The real creation began", he says, "not with matter but with ideas". It is the latter creation that Plato has in mind. Taylor is definitely of opinion that it is wrong to suppose that, according to Plato, there was a pre-existent chaos before the work of creation started. "If we look at the text of the "Timaeus", he says, "we shall see that at any rate Plato does not mean to say that there ever was a *time* before God constructed the world, since he tells us, as Aristotle allows, that time and the world 'began' together, God in fact making both of them. Thus the language which seems to imply a primitive state of pure chaos cannot be meant seriously" (*Plato, the Man and His Work*, p. 443).

There are other questions which arise in connection with Plato's description of Creation in the "Timaeus". Does the entire creation of mortal and immortal beings proceed from God, or does the former only proceed from Him? Plato definitely says that God created only immortal beings, the creation of mortal beings being delegated by Him to inferior powers. And the reason which Plato gives for this is that whatever is created by God is created in His image, and therefore if the world of mortal beings were created by Him, that world would be like the world of gods. Conse-

quently, that world cannot be created by Him. This means that Plato does not want to hold God responsible for evil.

The world of mortal beings, including the world of man, is thus removed from the sphere of God's creation. This gives man a very inferior position. Man, in fact, is relegated to the background, the foreground being occupied by Nature and the gods. This constitutes, as we shall presently see, one of the main differences between Plato and Sri Aurobindo.

The seriousness of this disparagement of man in the "Timaeus" is to a great extent toned down by the fact that the "Timaeus" does not occupy the centre of Plato's system. As Jowett says, "A greater danger with modern interpreters of Plato is the tendency to regard the Timaeus as the centre of his system. We do not know how Plato would have arranged his own dialogues. But if he had arranged them, there are many indications that this is not the place he would have assigned to the Timaeus. We observe, first of all, that the dialogue is put in the mouth of a Pythagorean philosopher, and not of Socrates. And this is required by dramatic propriety, for the investigation of nature was expressly renounced by Socrates in the Phaedo. Nor does Plato himself attribute any importance to his guesses at science. He is not at all absorbed by them as he is by the idea of good". He goes on: "We are led to regard the Timaeus, not as the centre or inmost shrine of the edifice, but as a detached building in a different style, framed, not after the Socratic, but after some Pythagorean model". This being so, not much importance is to be attached to the views expressed in this dialogue.

It must not be supposed, however, that it has not much philosophical value. Apart from the fact that creation is a fundamental philosophical problem, the manner in which the doctrine of ideas is presented in this dialogue is of considerable philosophical significance. It brings out the strength, as well as the weakness of the doctrine of ideas. Its strength lies in the fact that it treats the ideas or values as the central realities, in terms of which all other realities have to be expressed, whereas its weakness consists in the circumstance that it shows no way, except by a sort of *tour de force*, in which the ideas can be brought into contact with the world of human experience. As I shall show in the sequel, this constitutes another fundamental difference between Plato's philosophy and that of Sri Aurobindo.

### (3) PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

I now come to Plato's conception of God which I have dealt with incidentally in connection with the previous topic, for the problem of creation

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cannot be dissociated from that of God. The main question for us to consider is this: Is the God of Plato an idea? We have seen that at least in the "Timaeus" He is not, for God is conceived as creating in accordance with a pattern which is fixed by the ideas. The ideas, moreover, are immobile, and have no power of creation or generation. Taylor in his *Plato, the Man and His Work* strongly emphasizes the fact that the God of the "Timaeus" is not a form but a soul. He says, "God and the forms are to be kept distinct in Plato for the simple reason that the activity of God in producing a world "like" the forms is the one explanation Plato ever offers of the way in which the "participation" of things in forms is effected. If God simply meant the same thing as the forms or a supreme form, it should remain a mystery why there should be anything but the forms, why there should be any becoming at all" (p. 442). Thus what the "Timaeus" offers us is the theistic conception of a personal God creating the world according to a design.

But there is another question which arises in connection with the nature of God, and that is the question that if God is not an idea, is He not subordinate to it? There is no doubt that for Plato the ideas are the ultimate realities, and if God is not an idea, then certainly He cannot be regarded as the ultimate reality, whatever power He may possess of creating things. In fact, the position of God here is very similar to that of *Īśvara* in our Vedānta systems. If the ideas are static beings, so also is Brahman of the Advaita Vedānta, and if *Īśvara* is the active, creative principle, it becomes so by shedding some of its reality, by becoming *māyāśavala* or *māyāvīṣiṣṭa*, exactly as the God of Plato becomes.

But there is one inherent contradiction in this conception of God. Plato has distinctly stated in the "Timaeus" that God created the world because He was good and free from jealousy. But if God is not an idea, how can He be said to be perfectly good? Again, in one passage in the "Parmenides" (Parm. 134D) God alone is said to have absolute knowledge. Similarly, in a passage in the "Theaetetus", He is said to be absolute righteousness. Now how can God be absolutely righteous or absolutely good or have absolute knowledge, unless He is the same as the idea of righteousness or goodness or absolute knowledge? In this respect our Vedānta systems are more logical. They distinctly admit that there is imperfection in *Īśvara* on account of the presence of *Māyā*. The matter acquires greater importance from the fact that Plato is very particular about the purity of the world that God creates. In all that God creates directly, namely, the worlds of immortal beings, there is absolutely no blemish of any kind. Not only so, but because in the world of mortal beings, to which man belongs, there

is evil, therefore, Plato expressly declares that God does not create it but leaves the creation of it to inferior powers. This clearly proves that for Plato not only is God Himself completely free from any imperfection, but anything that He creates is likewise also completely free from imperfection. And yet he maintains that God is not an idea but a soul. There are, however, some passages in the Dialogues (as, for instance, "Republic" x.597c) where Plato calls God the creator of ideas. In the passage of the *Republic* mentioned above, God is spoken of as the maker of the ideal bed, which is nothing else than the idea of the bed. Plato evidently oscillates here between two conceptions of God—God as a Creator who can create only after the pattern of the ideas, and God as the originator of the ideas. The logic of the theory of ideas requires that the ideas should maintain their supremacy and that even God should be made subordinate to them, but Plato's philosophical insight seemed to revolt against this and hence the oscillation, which is the first sign in him of a conflict between intuition and reason. Plato remained to the end true to the Greek spirit and never deserted the path of reason. No Greek philosopher of any eminence ever did so. Even Heraclitus, perhaps the most mystical among Greek philosophers, did not, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out in his brilliant monograph on this philosopher. But Plato did not also want to leave the guidance of intuition, and hence the conflict. This conflict deepened in his conception of the idea of good, to which I now pass.

### (4) PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF THE IDEA OF GOOD

In the *Republic* Plato has given us a conception of the idea of good, which is so far above the other ideas dealt with in the Dialogues, that it has proved a puzzle to Greek scholars. Here we see the advantage which a philosopher has over his interpreters. The philosopher gets an intuition of truth, like the poet, and notes it down. How he arrives at it, he does not know. If asked to show the logical steps by which that truth can be reached, he will in most cases fail, for he did not reach it by any logical process. You excuse that in a philosopher, but you do not excuse it in an interpreter. He *must* show the logical process which leads up to these peaks of intuition, or he is no good as an interpreter. Now the difficulty about the idea of good is that it is an idea and yet not an idea. It is so much more significant, so much more universal and yet so much more concrete than all the other ideas, that it looks more like a towering peak rising precipitously from the valley of the ideas than any continuation of it. The following passage from the "Republic" will give an idea of what the nature of it is:

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Soc. Now that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the idea of good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge; beautiful too, as are both truth and knowledge, you will be right in esteeming this other nature as more beautiful than either; and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honour much higher. What a wonder of beauty that must be, which is the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty; for you surely cannot mean to say that pleasure is the good?<sup>1</sup>

Plato further explains (through the mouth of Socrates) that although the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge of all things known, but of their being and essence, yet the good is not essence but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.

From this account of the idea of good, there is no doubt that it represents Plato's highest conception of reality. This is clear from his description of it as "the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty". There are certain characteristics of it which deserve careful consideration. In the first place, as its name "idea of good" suggests, it is to be looked upon as a value and not merely as an existent. But it is not a mere ethical value but something much more universal than that, something in which the ethical value is merged as a smaller whole into a greater whole. No greater mistake can, I think, be committed than to regard it as an ethical value. It is a metaphysical value. Its being termed good only draws our attention to the fact that it is not a mere being in the sense of a mere existent; nor is it merely an essence, understanding by essence a logical essence. But it is the ultimate metaphysical value. It is something which, in the language of the *Gītā*, may be described as that "by obtaining which, no other gain is deemed higher". We have, in fact, here one of the clearest and strongest affirmations of the philosophy of values ever found in philosophical literature.

It is a trite remark that Plato here breaks his attitude of neutrality towards the different ideas. Plato does here something so very revolutionary that to describe it as merely doing this is saying nothing. It would, moreover, give a wrong idea of the change brought about by this new idea. It

<sup>1</sup> "Republic," 6, 509, Jowett's translation.

is not that Plato picks up here one idea from the list of ideas and gives it a pre-eminent position, but this idea was not present in his previous scheme of ideas. It is an altogether new idea, the like of which did not exist in his theory of ideas. Giving the topmost rank to this new idea, not existing before in his scheme of ideas, does not mean abandoning his attitude of neutrality towards the other ideas. So far as the ideas of which he treated before are concerned, his attitude remains as neutral as before. What really happens after the introduction of the idea of good is that the old theory of ideas is scrapped, scrapped except in name.

Taylor in his book *Plato, the Man and His Work* (pp. 288-89), has discussed the question whether the idea of good can be identified with God. I will give his views in his own words. He says, "We cannot answer this question correctly except by making a *distinctio* sometimes forgotten. If the question means "is the Form of Good another name for *the God recognized in the Platonic philosophy?*", the answer must be definitely No, for the reason given by Burnet, that the good is a form, whereas God is not a form but a "soul", the supremely good soul...But if we mean "is the good spoken of in the Republic identical with what Christian divines and philosophers have meant by God?", the answer must be modified. In one most important respect it is. The distinguishing characteristic of the "Form of Good" is that it is the transcendent source of all the reality and intelligibility of everything other than itself. Thus it is exactly what is meant in Christian philosophy by the *ens realissimum*, and is rightly regarded as distinct from and transcendent of the whole system of its effects or manifestations... In other language, it transcends the distinction, too often treated as absolute, between value and existence".

Now all this is no doubt technically true. The idea of good, being an idea, cannot be identified with God, for God is a soul and not an idea. We may, however, ask: What is a soul? Now Taylor has given at p. 306 of the same book, quoting from Phaedrus (246a), the following definition of the soul: "The soul may thus be rigorously defined as "that which moves itself"." So the question reduces itself to this: Does the idea of good as presented in the "Republic" possess any dynamism, or is it merely static? It is true that Plato has treated all his other ideas as static. But the idea of good, as I have pointed out already, is a very different kind of idea, and we must not blindly attribute to it all the qualities or absence of qualities that characterise the other ideas. Now if we examine carefully the description of the nature of the idea of good which we quoted above, we find that the idea of good is described as "that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower". Again, it is called,

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“the cause of science and of truth”, “the author of science and of truth”. Now do not these expressions show that the idea of good possesses dynamism and is not purely static as the other ideas are? I admit that Plato has not expressly said that it possesses self-initiated motion, but the words “imparting truth” and “the cause of science and truth” undoubtedly give this idea the dynamical quality of projecting itself out of itself to give rise to truth. I shall explain presently why Plato is somewhat halting in his ascription of any dynamic quality to the idea of good.

Taylor further says that if by God is meant the God of the Christian divines and philosophers, then he has no objection to admitting that the Platonic idea of good is God. Now I would ask Taylor: Do the Christian divines and philosophers not insist upon God’s possessing the power of self-initiated movement? Are they content with an inane God who cannot create or generate? If the idea of good cannot be Plato’s God because it does not possess the power of moving itself, how can it be the Christian divines’ God who also similarly insist upon God possessing the power of generating motion?

To my mind the explanation of the halting character of Plato’s ascription of a dynamic quality to the idea of good is quite obvious. Plato had a vision or intuition of the idea of good as the ultimate principle of the universe. As such he felt it clearly as endowed with the necessary dynamism to enable it to function as such. But then his logic stood in his way. He had already made a divorce between the ultimate metaphysical realities and a Creator who is metaphysically a subordinate principle but is dynamically supreme. His logic always clipped the wings of his metaphysical flights. He was, as it were, a prisoner of his reason or logic. If he had been born in another country he would have thrown logic to the winds and given free play to his flights of metaphysical intuition, but being a true Greek, he could not do so and had to make a compromise with reason.

Jowett in his introduction to the “Republic” speaks thus of the idea of good: “The Idea of good is so called only in the Republic, but there are traces of it in other dialogues of Plato. It is *a cause as well as an idea* (italics mine), and from this point of view may be compared with the creator of the Timaeus, who out of his goodness created all things. It corresponds to a certain extent with the modern conception of a law of nature, or of a final cause, or of both in one, and in this regard may be connected with the measure and harmony of the Philebus. It is represented in the Symposium under the aspect of beauty, and is supposed to be attained there by stages of initiation, as here by regular gradations of knowledge. Viewed subjectively, it is the process or science of dialectic”. In another passage

he says, "This self-proving unity or idea of good is a mere vision of which no distinct explanation can be given, relative only to a particular stage in Greek philosophy."

From these quotations, one thing is quite clear, namely, that Jowett is not in a position to make up his mind as to how to characterize the idea of good. In one and the same sentence he calls it a cause and even compares it with the creator of the *Timaeus*, and then again describes it as an idea. I think Jowett is not to blame for this. Plato is himself not quite sure what it is. His intuition and his logic are in conflict here. To the end of his days he could not shake himself free from the narrowness of the Eleatic or Megarian logic, much as he tried to criticise it in the "Parmenides" and the "Sophist". That logic could not give any dynamic character to the metaphysical ultimate. Motion, if it is to come at all, has to come from an inferior source. This accounts for Plato's not having a proper theory of Evolution. In fact, that is the chief weakness of Plato's philosophy. Here, as we shall presently see, Sri Aurobindo scores a distinct triumph over Plato. But where Plato's logic failed him, his intuition guided him. That is why in the idea of good he had a vision of a reality which could function as a true metaphysical ultimate, but his logic could not suggest the apparatus by which it could do so, and so this grand conception remained philosophically comparatively barren. It is not surprising, therefore, that Plato tried to examine critically the bases of the Megarian logic, which was his own logic, with a view to finding out whether any improvement could be effected in it, but as we know, beyond achieving its negative object, that is, showing the inherent weakness of the Megarian logic, this critical examination did not lead to any positive result, and it was left to a philosopher who flourished two thousand years later, namely, Hegel, to construct a gigantic system of logic out of the materials furnished by Plato in the *Parmenides*.

It is not, however, entirely true to say that the barrenness of the idea of good is due entirely to the inadequacy of Plato's logic. It is also due, as we shall see presently, to the inadequacy of the idea of good itself.

### ESTIMATE OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

From the account we have given above of some of the main features of Plato's philosophy, two things emerge clearly: First, the grandeur and nobility of its conception and the architectonic beauty of its construction, Starting from the idea of good it comprehends in its gigantic sweep the vast panorama of Nature and Man, not excluding even the region of the

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gods. It places before man certain grand ideals to be striven after: the ideal of the philosopher-king, the science of dialectic with its crowning phase, the knowledge of the idea of good, the ideal State, and so on. It stresses that aspect of reality which has to do with value, rather than with existence or being and gives a reorientation of the whole of human culture and the entire life of man from this point of view. It leaves us agape with wonder at the stupendousness of the task it has set before itself and the untiring energy and labour of thought that its great author has bestowed upon it.

But secondly, we are conscious also of the gaps which his philosophy has left, such as the gap between the ideas and the sensible world, the gap between the idea of good and the other ideas, the gap between the ideas and God, and the gap between the soul and the body. As Gomperz has said (*Greek Thinkers*, Vol. III, p. 262), if Plato is many-sided he is also equally one-sided, pursuing the path which he chooses with the utmost self-confidence, untroubled by difficulties that are often too patent. This is one of the reasons why there are so many gaps in his philosophy. But I think the main reason is that Plato was a seer rather than a philosopher in the narrow sense of the word. He had a vision of truth which he described in the Dialogues. Like a true Greek he, of course, always gave a rational foundation for his vision. But his reason could not keep pace with his intuition, and therefore there were big gaps in the rational structure which he erected for supporting his intuitions.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the real influence of Plato's philosophy is due to the fact that it was not a closed system. Everybody could find in it some new idea, some new inspiration. Realists, idealists, orthodox Churchmen, protestants in religion and philosophy, sceptics, materialists have all found in Plato a source of never-failing inspiration. Even Whitehead looks upon Plato as his philosophical father or godfather. In fact, I began this article with a quotation from Whitehead, in which he says that the whole of Western philosophy is nothing but so many footnotes to Plato. This enormous influence Plato could never have acquired if his philosophy had been a closed system.

One thing I feel bound to say in the interest of truth and in justice to Plato on the subject of gaps in his philosophy. It is not true to say that Plato is not conscious of them. On the contrary, his philosophy is a series of revisions rendered necessary by the discovery of gaps in the earlier presentations of it. The most glaring example is the criticism of the doctrine of ideas which we find in the dialogue "Parmenides". So thorough and searching was the criticism that Uberweg thought that the entire dialogue

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was spurious. This view, of course, is absurd, as Jowett has pointed out in his introduction to his translation of this dialogue. Fortunately this view is not shared by modern Greek scholars. Burnet in his *Platonism* holds an even more radical view, for he looks upon the doctrine of ideas as not Platonic at all but Socratic. Of course, he holds this view not merely on the ground of the criticism of this doctrine in the "Parmenides", but also on other grounds. This view, however, he does not hold in his *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*. We hold therefore with Jowett that the criticism of the doctrine of ideas is only an illustration of the fact that Plato's Philosophy has had a development and has undergone a continuous process of revision at his hands.

### II

#### COMPARISON WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY: THE GREEK SPIRIT AND THE INDIAN SPIRIT

In comparing Plato with Sri Aurobindo, the first thing that strikes one is the difference between the Greek spirit and the Indian spirit. The Greek mind, as I have already pointed out, is at first directed outwards, and it is only at a later stage, that it is directed inwards. In fact, although Protagoras was the first to make this change, it was not before Socrates that the Greek mind was really turned inwards. But it never lost its original tendency, the tendency to look outwards. The result was that the purely idealistic approach, the approach from the standpoint of consciousness, was never fully established in Greek philosophy and was always liable to be disturbed by the other mode of approach. This is the cause of the oscillation we have noticed in Plato between the idealistic and the naturalistic standpoint. This is also the reason why he could not interpret the grades of reality in terms of the grades of consciousness, and why in consequence, intuition and reason fell apart. All the gaps in Plato's philosophy, may in fact, be explained by the seesaw movement between the purely idealistic and the naturalistic outlook. His idealism appeared in the form of brilliant flashes of intuition, but his logic was coloured by his naturalism, and the gap between the two could not be bridged. The fault was not entirely that of his logic, it was also partly that of his intuitions, which, although they were brilliant, could not give a steady light.

The spirit of Indian philosophy is very different from this. It was from the beginning turned inwards. The highest reality was always conceived as Atman or Self, and the duty of man was "to see, hear, think and con-

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template it" ("*ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ*"). Knowing the reality within, the Indian mind discovered it also outside. This discovery was the discovery of the all-pervading character of Atman: "*yadeveha tadamutra, yadamutra tadanviha*" ("what is here is also there; what is there is also here"). The interpretation of the universe, therefore, which the Indian seers gave was always from the standpoint of consciousness. The different grades of reality were explained in terms of the different grades of consciousness. Consciousness at the level of intuition revealed one grade of reality, that at the level of reason another, and so on. There was thus no opposition between reality as seen through one grade of consciousness and that as envisaged by another grade. Not only that, but the highest consciousness, which may be called the supreme intuition, was conceived as uniting all the lower forms into one harmonious, homogeneous whole.

Sri Aurobindo, as a true descendant of our ancient sages, has kept true to this standpoint. He looks at the whole universe from the standpoint of the highest consciousness, which he calls Sachchidananda. Unlike the Greeks, who oscillated between the naturalistic and the idealistic interpretation of the universe, Sri Aurobindo looks upon the naturalistic interpretation itself as one that is made from the standpoint of consciousness at one stage of its evolution.

Paradoxical as it may sound, even the idealistic interpretation is made from the standpoint of the same level of consciousness. This level is what we call mental consciousness. Mind is incapable of framing a perfect synthesis, and therefore, all its constructions exhibit gaps or contradictions. Even the intuitions of Plato had not completely freed themselves from mental elements, and therefore, there was a clash between them and his logic or reason. How this standpoint enables Sri Aurobindo to steer clear of the difficulties of Plato's philosophy, I shall explain in the next paragraph.

### THE TRAGEDY OF PLATO: HOW SRI AUROBINDO AVOIDS IT

Plato's philosophy, thus, is haunted by a sense of its incompleteness: its intuition and reason cannot be reconciled with each other. This is its great tragedy. It may be removed by lowering the intuitions, by doing away, for example, with the idea of good. This was the solution offered by Aristotle. He did away with the idea of good, the philosopher-king and all the other great ideals revealed by Plato's intuition. Or the remedy may be applied to logic by raising it so that it may be made a fit vehicle for the intuitions. This second method was that which was adopted by Hegel.

Sri Aurobindo's solution is totally different from either of these. He avoids Plato's tragedy not by lowering the intuitions, nor by raising the logic, but by still further raising the intuitions. His diagnosis of Plato's tragedy is that it is due to Plato's having imperfect intuitions. The intuitions that Plato had were intuitions of abstract truths, and therefore did not have the potency to project themselves out of themselves. The highest intuitions create their own logic and do not have to wait for logic to come up to their level. It is one of the cardinal principles of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy that intuitions differ very much in value. This is one of the main points of difference between Sri Aurobindo and most of those Western philosophers who also rely partly or wholly upon intuitions.

Whatever that may be, it is undoubtedly true, from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, that Plato's intuitions were imperfect, as they were intuitions of abstract truth. His idea of good, grand as it is, is yet nothing but an abstraction. It is impossible with such a principle to have any kind of relationship with the world of sensible experience. It is dead before it is born, and it is useless to try to make it work by offering it a more suitable logic. The only remedy is to raise it to the position of a concrete universal.

### PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY IS RATHER STATIC AND HAS NO THEORY OF EVOLUTION

One of the most serious defects in Plato's theory of ideas is that the ideas as he conceives them are absolutely static and have no power of generation or creation. It is only the souls that have got this power, and therefore God as the highest soul performs the functions of creation in his philosophy. One consequence of this static view of the ideas is that they cannot bring themselves into any sort of connection with the world of sense. The only way in which a connection is effected is through the agency of God. But the God of Plato is only an underdog, having the power to create only according to the pattern seen in the ideas. Thus the connection between the ideas and the world created by God is a somewhat remote one. In the case of the human world it is still more remote, for God does not create it directly but leaves it to the inferior powers. This gives the human world a much lower status than what it would have if it had direct connection with the ideas. Although it is supposed to participate in the ideas, such participation can only be very imperfect.

This defect we notice also in other systems of philosophy which take a similar static view of their ultimate principle. For instance, we notice it in the philosophy of Spinoza whose Substance or ultimate principle is also,

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like the ideas of Plato, static. There is no passage in Spinoza from Substance to the world of modes or finite beings, and he has therefore to fall back upon all sorts of devices, such as that of infinite modes, in order to bridge the gulf between the two. We notice it also in the philosophy of Hartmann who has borrowed his main ideas from Plato: the values of Hartmann cannot bring themselves directly into contact with the world.

Another consequence of his static view of the ideas is that Plato has no theory of evolution. There is no goal or destination towards which the world may be said to be moving. Individual souls can, of course, improve themselves by education, and if they are sufficiently enlightened, they can, through instruction in dialectic, have even a vision of the idea of good, but there is nothing in Plato which gives us any indication of the whole world marching to a higher goal. On the contrary, the nature of the world has been determined beforehand by the manner of its creation, and consequently the possibility of such advance is ruled out. We shall discuss this question when dealing with the problem of evil.

### EVOLUTION, HOWEVER, IS THE SOUL OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

The contrast here with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is striking. His theory of evolution is the pivot round which the whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo moves. Evolution is the movement which is the reverse of the movement of involution or creation. It is because of the descent of the Spirit into matter, life and mind, that these can ascend to the higher regions of the Spirit. Because the Spirit in creation has involved itself in matter, life and mind, therefore, matter, life and mind feel an impulse to rise to their Source. Evolution, thus, is a sort of home-sickness of the Spirit. The Spirit has descended into the lowest particle of matter; therefore, matter seeks to evolve into something higher than itself, namely life. There is a descent of the Spirit into life, and therefore, life seeks to rise to something higher than itself—mind. Similarly, there is a descent of the Spirit into mind, and consequently mind must ascend to something higher than itself, namely, Supermind. The highest principle so far evolved is mind. But evolution cannot stop with mind, for mind is not its last word. It must move further up and come to the next stage, namely, Supermind. There is no uncertainty about it: it is bound to do so by the necessity which is forced upon it by the process of involution or creation. But when it does so, there will be a radical change in the nature of the

world, for with the emergence of Supermind the process of evolution becomes a process through knowledge, the previous process being through ignorance.

Such, in brief, is Sri Aurobindo's scheme of evolution. It is the most optimistic scheme ever conceived by the mind of man. What concerns us more particularly here, however, is the picture which it presents to us of the goal of human life and society. I cannot do better here than quote a passage from his recent book *The Human Cycle*, where it is set forth as clearly as possible:

"The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, not as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, subsouls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma." (*The Human Cycle*, pp. 281-82)

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### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: PLATO'S ATTITUDE CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF SRI AUROBINDO

Plato's philosophy, optimistic as its general tone is, regards evil as a permanent condition of human beings. Although for Plato there is no moral evil, for, like his master Socrates, he does not believe in wilful wrong-doing, yet he admits the existence of evil in the form of metaphysical evil or the presence of error and ignorance. Although man's will is not perverted, yet man's intellect is defective, and this defect is something which can never be cured, so long as man's soul is chained to the body. And that is why, as he says in the "Phaedo", the philosopher longs to die. In the "Phaedrus" he says the soul is like a charioteer driving a pair of winged steeds.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the divine souls, both the steeds are good, but in the human soul one of the steeds is bad. This unruly steed caused the charioteer to see imperfectly at the time of the festival of souls, in which they visited the heaven above the heavens. So the soul lost her wings and fell to earth, and it then acquired an earthly body. It is this complex of body and soul which we call man.

From these accounts it appears that Plato looks upon evil as a necessary condition of human life on earth. The only chance for human beings to escape it is through rebirth. In the "Phaedrus" Plato says that on the manner in which he makes use of his life on earth depends a man's condition after death. And only in ten thousand years can the soul of man return to her primitive state except through a life of philosophy or a pure and noble love. In the "Timaeus", as I have already pointed out, Plato's attitude is still more uncompromising, for even the creation of mortal beings he leaves to inferior powers, as God can only create beings in His own image. This certainly leaves man in a permanently helpless condition so far as escape from evil is concerned.

The "Republic" apparently gives us the hope that at least the philosopher who is "the spectator of all time and all existence", and has knowledge of the idea of good, is freed from all taint of evil. But the "Phaedo" expressly declares that it is the philosopher who particularly longs to die, for he realizes that so long as he is not freed from the body, there is no chance for him of escaping evil. This clearly shows that even the philosopher is not free from evil.

For Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, evil is not a permanent feature of human society. There is evil, no doubt, at the present stage of human society.

<sup>1</sup> The similarity of this idea with that of Kath. 1.3.3-4 is too striking to escape notice.

But its present stage is not the highest of which that society is capable. Evil is only a phase in the evolution of man. It arises at a certain stage of human evolution when certain conditions prevail and disappears with the disappearance of those conditions. The world as such is not evil. In the beginning when the world was enveloped by the darkness of inconscience there was no evil. So also in the end when the superman will emerge there will be no evil. It is only in the middle stage which represents where we are at present, that there is any evil.

The question which arises in connection with the problem of evil is: How does evil originate in this world? The answer from Sri Aurobindo's standpoint as I have given it in my book *Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* is this:

"When truth exists as a whole on a basis of self-aware oneness, evil cannot enter. It is only when there is a disturbance of this self-aware oneness, that evil can enter. This happens when the separate divisions in their self-assertiveness offer opposition to the unity of consciousness-force which created the divisions. Separateness cannot cause evil, but when separateness is combined with this kind of self-assertiveness, which we may call aggressive self-assertiveness, an *imperium in imperio*, is set up, and it is then that we have the beginning of evil. The name which Sri Aurobindo has given to this aggressive self-assertiveness is Egoism." (ibid. p. 116).

### CAN PLATO AND SRI AUROBINDO BE CALLED MYSTICS?

I come now to a question on which there have been considerable differences of opinion: Can Plato and Sri Aurobindo be regarded as mystics? I have already dealt with the question whether Sri Aurobindo can be regarded as a mystic in my article *Sri Aurobindo and Plotinus* which I contributed to this Annual three years ago. As I said there, Sri Aurobindo cannot be called a mystic simply because he takes the help of intuition as a means of discovery of the highest truth. The test is whether he employs it as the sole means of discovering truth. Judged by this test, I showed that Sri Aurobindo could not be regarded as a mystic, because he had never discarded reason and other lower levels of consciousness, but on the contrary, gave their due place to them. I even showed there that Plotinus could not be regarded as a full-fledged mystic, because it is only in the last part of the quest for truth that he relied upon intuition, the rest of his philosophical structure being based upon reason.

The same thing can be said of Plato. Although there is a good deal of the mystic element in his philosophy, as for instance, in his conception of

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the idea of good, yet he cannot be called a mystic. Platonism cannot be dubbed mysticism simply because it believed in intuition as a source of truth. To show that it is mysticism it is necessary to prove that it relied upon intuition and upon no other source for the knowledge of truth. This, of course, it is impossible to prove, for Plato was a true disciple of Socrates, who asserted against Protagoras that it was not sensuous perception but reason which alone could reveal the truth.

There are undoubtedly traces of mysticism in Plato. As I have already said in connection with the background of Plato's philosophy, the influence of Pythagoras is very strong upon it. This influence in fact is one of the main sources of the mystic element in it. In the mystic symbolism of numbers which is found in the "Timaeus" we see a clear influence of Pythagorean mysticism. Not only that, but the entire description of creation from the mouth of a Pythagorean philosopher is in a deeply mystic vein. But it was not from Pythagoras alone that Plato derived the mystical trends in his philosophy. During the twelve years that he spent in travel after the death of Socrates, he visited Egypt, Italy and Sicily and possibly also some other countries, and it is quite possible that he not only came in contact with Orphic mystics but also with Oriental mysticism. Be that as it may, there are undoubted traces of mysticism in his writings. All his great conceptions, such as that of beauty in the "Symposium" or love in the "Phaedrus" or the idea of good in the "Republic" are the products of such mysticism. The "Phaedo" is through and through mystical. Its description of the body as a prison and the longing of the philosopher for release from the world of sense into the bliss of the soul-life is deeply mystical. If we are to single out, however, one feature of Plato's philosophy which is more mystical than any other, it is his idea of good. The philosopher has a "vision" of this idea of good. It is something ineffable; in the words of our ancient sages, something from which "words come back with an unfulfilled mind". It is not the kind of reality as we ordinarily conceive, but something which absolutely transcends it. It is therefore somewhat surprising that Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison in his article "Mysticism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition) refuses to recognize any mysticism not only in Plato but also in the entire Greek philosophy prior to Neo-Platonism. He dismisses the question of mysticism in Greek philosophy summarily by saying, "For opposite reasons, neither the Greek nor the Jewish mind lent itself readily to mysticism, the Greek, because of its clear and sunny naturalism; the Jewish, because of its rigid monotheism and its turn towards worldly realism and statutory observance". Greek philosophy cannot be summarily dismissed in this way as sunny naturalism: this description

will certainly not fit the philosophy of Heraclitus or Pythagoras or Plato.

Plato's philosophy, therefore, undoubtedly shows a good deal of mystical tendency, but it would not be correct to characterize it as mysticism, for it does not believe that the mystic vision is the only way to truth. It has never lost its faith in reason, but has always been careful to join an elaborate rational structure to the supreme truths revealed by mystic vision. Of course, the joints have in many cases been rather weak, as I have tried to point out, but this does not entitle us to say that Plato is a mystic.

Reverting to Sri Aurobindo, we find that mysticism does not touch merely the fringe of his philosophy, but that it has contact with the whole of his philosophy. But mysticism has undergone a complete transformation in his hands. It has shed its awful aloofness and mixes freely with other ways of approaching truth. If fact, from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, there is nothing mystic about mysticism.

It is a great mistake to treat mysticism as a sort of Pope or Dalai Lama living in isolated grandeur. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the mystic experience has value only when it is joined to other kinds of human experience. Detached from them it becomes a mere flash of intuition which quickly disappears without leaving any permanent mark. Such a mystic experience is hardly of any value. What is wanted is what I may call a process of acclimatisation of the mystic experience, that is to say, a process by which the mystic experience is brought into contact with reason and sensuous experience, and even something lower down the scale, namely, our vital experience. The mystic experience, if it is made to go through this process, is of course of great value, as it is the means of raising the lower forms of experience, the mental and the vital experience, to a higher level.

Another thing upon which great stress is laid by Sri Aurobindo is that there are various grades of mystic experience. All consciousness, in fact, above the mental level, such as the higher mind, the illumined mind, intuition, the overmind and the supermind may be called mystic. But there is a vast difference, both in content and in value, between the consciousness which is just above the mental, such as the higher mind, and the supra-mental consciousness. It shows therefore only our ignorance of these different grades if we give the same name 'mystic' to all of them.

It is wrong to suppose that the mystic experience will always maintain its distance from normal human experience. For Sri Aurobindo a time is bound to come when the normal human experience will overtake it and even go beyond. Human consciousness is bound to evolve to something higher than what it is to-day. The result is that what we take to be super-

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normal to-day will be the normal state of human consciousness in the higher stages of its evolution. What we call mystic experience comes from a source slightly higher than our normal experience to-day. There are still higher forms of consciousness of which even our highest mystic experiences do not give us anything more than the faintest inkling. Our evolution is bound to take us one day to that stage where it will be possible for us to dwell permanently in that level of consciousness of which our present mystic experiences, even the best of them, give nothing more than the faintest glimmering. For Sri Aurobindo the problem of philosophy is to investigate the conditions under which such a possibility can arise. He is not interested in singing the virtues of the mystic experience as a freak consciousness unrelated to the rest of our experience. But that is precisely what interests the mystic. I have therefore always maintained that Sri Aurobindo is not a mystic.

## *A Few Words on Sri Aurobindo*

GABRIELA MISTRAL

ONLY rarely do we South Americans come in contact with remote literature. It is perhaps one of the paradoxes of the world that semi-asiatic people such as we are should harbour such fabulous ignorance about the Indo-European and Oriental portions of the globe and fail to recognise our mongolian and polynesian strains, while at the same time feel a kinship to this or that part of Europe.

Because of this anomalous situation the vast culture of Asia has reached our shores only in the form of three guests: the works of Tagore, one book of Gandhi, and a few emasculated fragments of the Mahabarata and the Ramayana. Even the rare oriental book which does arrive, usually in a twice removed translation, labours under several severe handicaps in trying to reach our people; these religious texts are abstruse and our ordinary reader is an easy-going fellow who very much prefers uncomplicated literature through which he can race with little effort. The Oriental texts, on the contrary, are veritable mountains, not easily scaled and their steep sides offer little solace to the weary climber; they require in fact heroic efforts from the reader, like those which must be made by one who aspires to plumb the depth of the sea or scale our high Andes, which present obstacles second only to the Himalayas.

Thus the discovery of Sri Aurobindo came to me late and in a mutilated form. On the shop counter of a French book-stall I unexpectedly came across a copy of "The Mother" and found myself in contact with one of those pieces which are so intense and beautiful that they captivate at once even though they are mere fragments of something far greater. I sought for more by the unknown author and I was told of "The Synthesis of Yoga". Unfortunately I did not find then his central work "The Life Divine" and I have remained until today thirsting for it. (I remember smiling at a photograph of the Hindu sage whose features seemed to me so much like these of my South Pacific peoples; to those indigenous features which recur everywhere between Peru and Mexico.) I read these books knowing

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almost nothing about the author: his strange Indo-European background, his high rank in oriental letters and his wide influence on Indian political life.

To give an opinion on a writer read in double translation is a painful ordeal. Honesty and diffidence would normally require one to abstain from comment under such circumstances and therefore I write this appraisal with shy misgivings. I can only hope to give my South America, my beloved Chile some glimmering participation in this great day of jubilation. For the man who is now retired in his Asram belongs to that order of human beings who are universal because of the breadth of their message and who, like gushing fountains, bring refreshment and solace to the human race.

It is probable that if the extinct League of Nations and the "United Nations" of today had in their midst more true apostles and fewer tricky politicians, their debates would be attended with more Divine Grace for the good of humanity. Even in Greek mythology Mercury-Commerce followed rather than preceded Apollo, the enchanter of man. We must eliminate from the Conclave of Nations all this name calling and empty speech making entirely devoid of any sincere desire for *Spiritual Unity*. The word "world-wide" recurs in these debates only because our delegates are descendants of men of a high spiritual order. On the other hand this term has never lost its true meaning in that Asia scorned by Europe which has become the victim of a great amnesia. To have forgotten one's Mother is perhaps the greatest amnesia and the Orient is the mother of Europe in every sense, for it is to the Orient that European culture owes its birth and sustenance. If the word "unity" is repeated by a faithful Asia day after day it is simply because it is the first letter in their moral alphabet. It is repeated in the morning prayer and in the evening vespers of the faithful. The devotees of Asia have always striven to encompass in their faith the entire human race. Nothing is cut off or excluded by frightening chasms. There is no attempt to evaluate nations by economic standards. The same cannot be said of our own preachers whose sphere is usually bounded by their own coastlines or by the white-washed marker stones of frontiers whose origin is political and therefore false. No learned man today need remain in absolute ignorance of the two religions which encompass millions of Asiatics. A sincere attempt to approach Buddhism—to mention only one of the more profound Oriental creeds—would free us from the error of making infantile mockery of a great religion, which was surely the forerunner of Christianity and the prologue to the "Great Event". This sea of prose of Sri Aurobindo turns out to be a Mediterranean smooth and buoyant like the one which bore the galleons of old.

Six foreign languages have given the Master of Pondicherry a gift of

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co-ordination, a clarity free from gaudiness, and a charm which borders on the magical. These are three attributes which are rarely found together in the exegete even less in the Seer. Some fall into the sin of obscurity, others suffer from doctrinarian fever, a serious thing which leads us astray seizing us in the grip of religious controversies. Moreover, apostles and exegetes usually lack the beauty of expression though the substance they seek to expound may come from the world of the Divine and be more precious than gold or rare spices.

Mysticism has been declared by many as a dangerous zone. It is said to be barren and even disreputable. In the two branches of Christianity, Catholic and Protestant it is viewed with suspicion as a malarial marsh covered with unhealthy mists. In spite of the glorious names of our saints and devotees, from St John the Evangelist to Ruysbroek and Spain's contingent of enlightened souls, the majority of ordinary Christians as well as the spiritual petit bourgeoisie of Christian hierarchy still seem altogether afraid of approaching the great zone of fire.

Sri Aurobindo, the Master, highest of mystics, happily presents the rare phenomenon of an exposition clear as a beautiful diamond, without the danger of confounding the layman. This is possible only because Sri Aurobindo is a unique synthesis of a scholar, a theologian and one who is enlightened.

These are indeed "glad tidings" that come to us; to know that there is a place in the world where culture has reached its tone of dignity by uniting in one man a supernatural life with a consummate literary style, thus making use of his beautifully austere and classical prose to serve as the handmaid of the Spirit. One finds here texts which do not belabour with the anxious stutterings so common to saintly souls whose poor expression often dissuades even the most zealous readers. We have before us a prose which approximates that of the great Eckhart, German classicist and fountain-head of European mysticism.

It is a gift which reaches us at a time when we are besieged by a petrifying materialism, in which we have been living since the surge of French and English rationalism destroyed the tenets of Universal Christianity. I should like to know if the co-ordination which an inner discipline of the spiritual type gives and the perfect agreement between a spiritual doctrine and a way of life are always necessarily reflected in a human writing of the highest order. The extraordinary case of Sri Aurobindo the writer surely seems to give great validity to such a thesis.

(Translated from Spanish).







