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Sri Aurobindo's Message for the War

The world is at the brink of a war. With the two countries at war, the world seems to get polarised. All nations are required to take sides. It is indeed very difficult to decide, the side one should take. Did not the Mother say “When two people quarrel, both are in the wrong”? This time the Nations are at war. War, to the human mind is brutal. We all know that the politicians decide and the proletariats suffer. For the soldiers, we call it their duty to fight for their nation. But is war inevitable? Can there be a time when wars can be completely done away with? Sri Aurobindo has an answer to the problem of war:

So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical fact of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness; human nature recuperates itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end, the organisation will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity; what is within us, must manifest itself outside.

Meanwhile it is well that every false hope and confident prediction should be answered as soon as may well be by the irony of the gods; for only so can we be driven to the perception of the real remedy. Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonalty, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers,—that is a fragile bond,—but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a larger universal consciousness can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without the possibility of return. Meanwhile that he should struggle even by illusions towards that end, is an excellent sign; for it shows that the truth behind the illusion is pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.

(CWSA 25, *The Human Cycle*: 610-611)

Following Sri Aurobindo's instructions, we can only wait to change our consciousness, harmonise our individual being, realise the oneness of all beings, only then we can do away with war. Essentially, it is the rise in consciousness on the individual and collective levels that can bring world peace and do away with wars.

TRUTH



(Source: Internet)

Experience in thy soul the truth of the Scripture;
afterwards, if thou wilt, reason & state thy experience intellectually
& even then distrust thy statement; but distrust never thy experience.

Sri Aurobindo

The Path

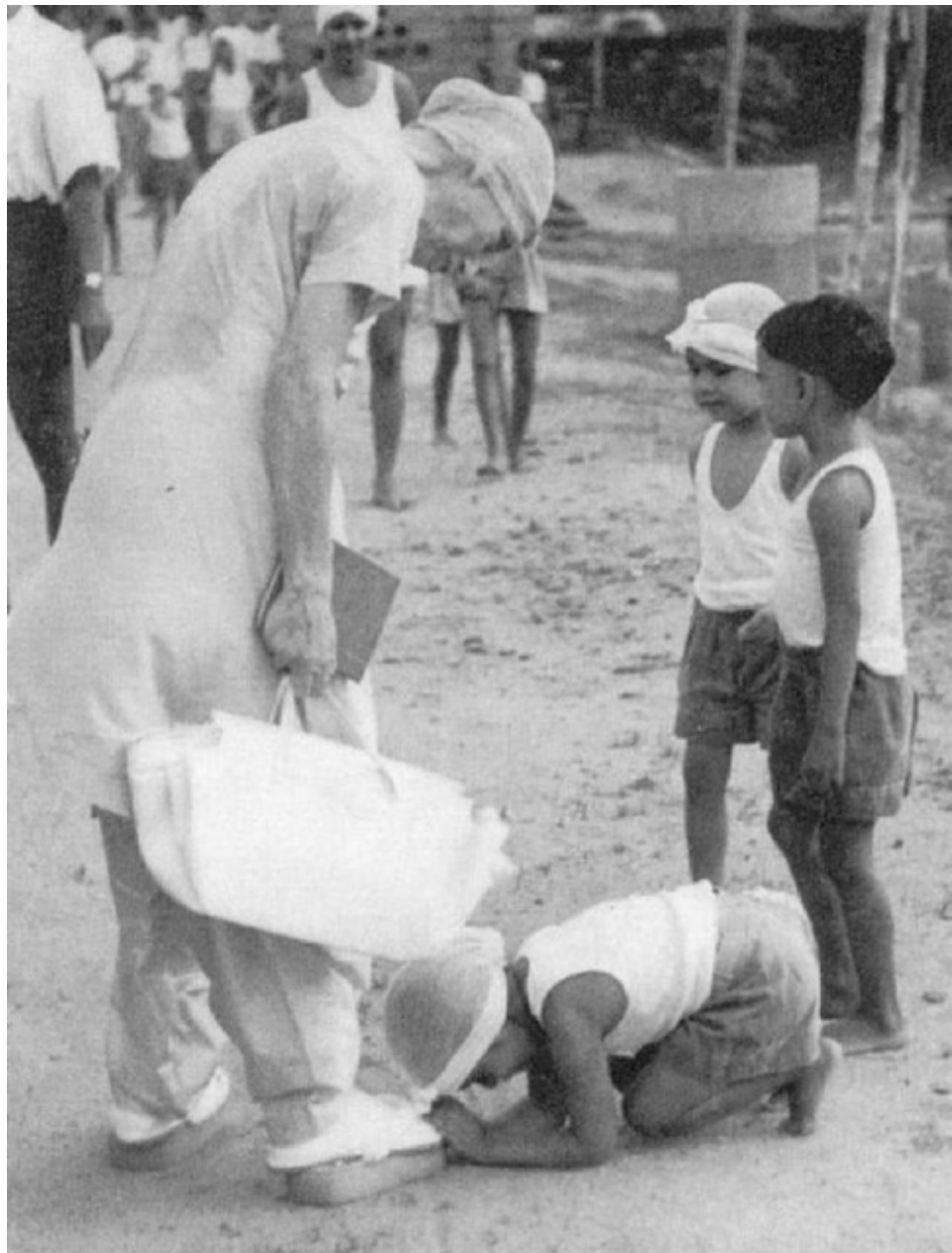
Sri Aurobindo

The supramental Yoga is at once an ascent towards God and a descent of Godhead into the embodied nature.

The ascent can only be achieved by a one-centred all gathering upward aspiration of the soul and mind and life and body; the descent can only come by a call of the whole being towards the infinite and eternal Divine. If this call and this aspiration are there, or if by any means they can be born and grow constantly and seize all the nature, then and then only a supramental uplifting and transformation becomes possible.

The call and the aspiration are only first conditions; there must be along with them and brought by their effective intensity an opening of all the being to the Divine and a total surrender.

This opening is a throwing wide of all the nature on all its levels and in all its parts to receive into itself without limits the greater divine Consciousness which is there already above and behind and englobing this mortal half-conscious existence. In the receiving there must be no inability to contain, no breaking down of anything in the system, mind or life or nerve or body under the transmuting stress. There must be an endless receptivity, an always increasing capacity to bear an ever stronger and more and more insistent action of the



divine Force. Otherwise nothing great and permanent can be done; the Yoga will end in a break-down or an inert stoppage or a stultifying or a disastrous arrest in a process which must be absolute and integral if it is not [to] be a failure.

But since no human system has this endless receptivity and unfailing capacity, the supramental Yoga can succeed only if the Divine Force as it descends increases the personal power and equates the strength that receives with the Force that enters from above to work in the nature. This is only possible if there is on our part a progressive surrender of the being into the hands of the Divine; there must be a complete and never failing assent, a courageous willingness to let the Divine Power do with us whatever is needed for the work that has to be done.

Man cannot by his own effort make himself more than man; the mental being cannot by his own unaided force change himself into a supramental spirit. A descent of the Divine Nature can alone divinise the human receptacle.

For the powers of our mind, life and body are bound to their own limitations and, however high they may rise or however widely expand, they cannot rise above their natural ultimate limits or expand beyond them. But, still, mental man can open to what is beyond him and call down a supramental Light, Truth and Power to work in him and do what the mind cannot do. If mind cannot by effort become what is beyond mind, supermind can descend and transform mind into its own substance.

If the supramental Power is allowed by man's discerning assent and vigilant surrender to act according to its own profound and subtle insight and flexible potency, it will bring about slowly or swiftly a divine transformation of our present semiperfect nature.

This descent, this working is not without its possibility of calamitous fall and danger. If the human mind or the vital desire seizes hold on the descending force and tries to use it according to its own limited and erring ideas or flawed and egoistic impulses, -- and this is inevitable in some degree until this lower mortal has learned something of the way of that greater immortal nature, -- stumblings and deviations, hard and seemingly insuperable obstacles and wounds and suffering cannot be escaped and even death or utter downfall are not impossible. Only when the conscious integral surrender to the Divine has been learned by mind and life and body, can the way of the Yoga become easy, straight, swift and safe.

And it must be a surrender and an opening to the Divine alone and to no other. For it is possible for an obscure mind or an impure life force in us to surrender to undivine and hostile forces and even to mistake them for the Divine. There can be no more calamitous error. Therefore our surrender must be no blind and inert passivity to all influences or any influence, but sincere, conscious, vigilant, pointed to the One and the Highest alone.

Self-surrender to the divine and infinite Mother, however difficult, remains our only effective means and our sole abiding refuge. Self-surrender to her means that our nature must be an instrument in her hands, the soul a child in the arms of the Mother.

(CWSA 12, *Essays Divine and Human*: 169-171)

“The Same Perfect Savitri”

Prema Nandakumar

Dedicating his narrative poem, “Love and Death” to his brother Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo defended his choice of the secular legend of Ruru and Pramadvava from the Adi Parva of the Mahabharata as the theme for his poem in English. It was not an easy task to transform an ancient Sanskrit tale into an English narrative, but he felt it was worth attempting and so he wrote:

To take with a reverent hand the old myths and cleanse them of soiling accretions, till they shine with some of the antique strength, simplicity and solemn depth of beautiful meaning, is an ambition which Hindu poets of today may and do worthily cherish. To accomplish a similar duty in a foreign tongue is a more perilous endeavour. (CWSA 36: 128-129)

When he had almost finished *Savitri* in mid-twentieth century, the old Mahabharata tale had retained not only its “antique strength, simplicity and solemn depth of beautiful meaning” but had blossomed into something more. It had become a living image of humanity’s hope for a supramental manifestation upon earth. Verily a spiritual dynamo, Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* is based on the Pativratopakhyana in the Vana Parva of Vyasa’s epic. Drawing out the significances contained in certain terms used by Vyasa in his Upakhyana, Sri Aurobindo transformed the original short narrative into a long poem in English of about 24,000 lines without changing the essentials. This was because, as he wrote to his brother, he saw more than what the surface of Vyasa’s tales showed up for us. What he said about “Love and Death” was a kind of manifesto that was realised in full in his later work, *Savitri*:

Ideal love is a triune energy, neither a mere sensual impulse, nor mere emotional nor mere spiritual ... My conception being an ideal struggle between love and death, two things are needed to give it poetical form, an adequate picture of love and adequate image of death. The love pictured must be on the ideal plane, and touch therefore the farthest limit of strength in each of its three directions. The sensual must be emphasised to give it firm root and basis, the emotional to impart to it life, the spiritual to prolong it into infinite permanence. And if at their limits of extension the three meet and harmonise, if they are not triple but triune, then is that love a perfect love and the picture of it a perfect picture. (Ibid)

So we have *Savitri*, probably the one long epic of twentieth century that is studied throughout the world today, memorised, recited and taught in innumerable academic and non-academic institutions. Meditating upon terms like *taponvita* and *dhyana yoga paraayana* used by Vyasa, Sri Aurobindo presents *Savitri* as a great *tapaswini* engaged in yoga. At the same time, he presents the same Vyasa’s Savitri, the ideal wife and daughter-in-law, the Princess of Madra remaining perfectly at home in the bare forest hermitage. This is how we see her at the beginning of the “Book of Yoga”;

No change was in her beautiful motions seen;
A worshipped empress all once vied to serve,
She made herself the diligent, serf of all,

Nor spared the labour of broom and jar and well,
Or close gentle tending or to heap the fire
Of altar and kitchen, no slight task allowed
To others that her woman's strength might do.
In all ha- acts a strange divinity shone:
Into a simplest movement she could bring
A oneness with earth's glowing robe of light,
A lifting up of common acts by love.

परिचारैर्गुणैश्चैव प्रश्रयेण दमेन च ।
सर्वकामक्रियाभिश्च सर्वेषां तुष्टिमादधे ॥१९॥
श्वश्रू शरीरसत्कारैः सर्वैराच्छदनादिभिः ।
श्वशूरं देवसत्कारैर्वाचः संयमनेन च ॥२०॥
तथैव प्रियवादेन नैपुणेन शमेन च ।
रहश्चैवोपचारेण भर्तारं पर्यतोषयत् ॥२१॥

(Vyasa's Savitri: 26)

The Savitri tale has been a great inspiration for poets all over India. Toru Dutt and Kumaran Asan may be mentioned in this connection. Sri Aurobindo does not use the Savitri-Satyavan myth as a mere allegory. He has brought his own yogic experiences and the experiences in spiritual living communicated by the Mother of the Ashram to effect transformations in the tale. According to him the characters who are inspired from the mythic cycle in the Vedas and the Upakhyana of Vyasa are actually “incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.” (CWSA 33: Author's Note) This is the reason which makes us study the epic poem as imaging the Supramental Manifestation that has been recorded as a firm possibility by Sri Aurobindo.

Let us then attempt a reading of the phrase “supramental consciousness.” A firm possibility, certainly, but Sri Aurobindo refused to be tied down to any definition of the actuality of the state, since that would limit Supermind itself. He was not allowed much peace in this regard and he spoke often like an incorrigible Krishna playing his flute in the Brindavan forests swaying the cowherd boys to laughter and seriousness by turns. Laughter there was a-plenty as he interacted with his disciples. Here is a doggerel encouraging the budding poet in Nirodbaran:

You are opening, opening, opening
Into a wider, wider scopening
That fills me with a sudden hopening
That I may carry you in spite of gropening
Your soul into the supramental ropening.”

(Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* Vol 1: 493)

However, the Supermind was a very serious proposition and Sri Aurobindo suffered from no self-doubt in this regard. According to him the Supramental Consciousness was a transformatory power that is between the upper hemisphere of Sat, Chit, Ananda and the lower hemisphere of mind, life and body. Can this power be defined? Is there a calculus that

can help us arrive at a concept? Sri Aurobindo says his is a revealed experience regarding the existence-of the Snpersmind and he has remained focused to it:

The supramental is not grand, aloof, cold and austere; it is not something opposed to or inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, because it was so revealed to me and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence. I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter. (CWSA 29: 482-483)

Is this but a dream and no more? But where faith reigns, there sojourns the Divine. I believe in Sri Aurobindo and what he stands for to bring forth a future humanity based on the life divine. It is very important for applied Vedanta that we should avoid doubting our own existence. If I am because I think, I live because I have faith. A Mahaviswasa in the vision of the Acharya helps clean the cobwebs in one’s mind regarding one’s existence. I believe in Sri Aurobindo and accept his word in his great little book, *The Mother*: “The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit.” (CWSA 32: 26)

Sri Aurobindo also said that “the question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces.” All that is asked of us is to create favourable circumstances for its happening at the earliest. How early is again a question that has no place in the agenda of Mahaviswasa. Nor need we worry about limning the supramental personality. There is no need to doubt that the Supramental Principle when established upon earth will “evolve its own forms and powers in the terrestrial order.” There may not be a total change immediately but then there is sure to be a lesser amount of “the Asuro-Rakshaso-Pishachic prakriti which now holds so large a place would more and more recede and lose its power.” Sri Aurobindo suggests no miraculous cures, and this is very important to me, so even in the solid mandala of Mahaviswasa, there is enough pragmatism for me to hold on to when he images the Supramental Principle upon earth:

A principle of greater unity, harmony and light would emerge everywhere. It is not that the creation in the Ignorance would be altogether abolished, but it would begin to lose much of its elements of pain and falsehood and would be more a progression from lesser to higher Truth, from a lesser to a higher harmony, from a lesser to a higher Light, than the reign of chaos and struggle, of darkness and error that we now perceive. For according to all occult teaching the evolutionary creation could have been such but

for the intervention of the Powers of Darkness - all traditions including that of the Veda and Upanishads point under different figures to the same thing.(Ibid: 283)

How does one create a favourable condition? How can one chase away the Powers of Darkness? The avenues are explored in *Savitri*. The entry into spiritual life marks an entry into the circle of light from the chaotic conditions in material life. But this step is only a first step and is yet far away from touching the Supramental. Sri Aurobindo tells us gently that we should not nurture ambitions for gaining the Supramental. It will come, he says: “it should be regarded as a natural end of the sadhana which will come of itself”. (CWSA 30: 406) A physical and external change is very much in the extended Promise but that is possible only through the Supramental Principle and that can come to work only under auspicious circumstances. And when it comes, it will not mean immortality in the sense of our mental world, “to live in the Divine and have the divine consciousness is itself immortality.”(CWSA 28: 314) Meanwhile what is the spiritual dawn and the greater Supramental dawn in *Savitri*?

All of it is Savitri. “Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save.” Savitri in the epic is the heroic girl-wife of the immortal legend; she is also our Universal Mother who incarnates and bears with infinite patience and immaculate strength the trials and tribulations of mortality to posit a victory over Death. The key to understanding the working of the supramental principle lies in the image of Savitri. Vyasa had imbedded a few bright hints in his Upakhyana. She is the Madran Princess who glows brilliant like aflame (*jvalanteemiva thejasaa*) which inspired Sri Aurobindo to title two cantos of Book Four as ‘The Birth and Childhood of the Flame’ and ‘The Growth of the Flame’. Vyasa Says:

न कार्यस्तात संतापः पारयिष्याम्यहं व्रतम् ।
व्यवसायकृतं हीदं व्यवसायश्च कारणम् ॥६॥

(Vyasa’s *Savitri*: 6)

Given as she was by Savitri, who was pleased by Savitri-oblations, the father and the wise ones named her too Savitri. The Princess grew like the goddess Fortune herself incarnate, fair and beautiful; then, in course of time she entered into youthful maidenhood. With large hips and a slender waist graceful as she was, like a golden statue, people beholding her believed that some heavenly damsel had descended amidst them. Her eyes were like full-blown lotuses and she seemed in her beauty to be flaming with splendour, indeed, warded off by that fiery brilliance, no one approached her asking for her hand. (Translated by R.Y, Deshpande)

Sri Aurobindo has many inspired descriptions of Savitri that bring out her brilliance in varied ways as a commentary on Vyasa’s phrases:

Near to earth’s wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflow the ways of Thought to unborn tilings.
Ardent was her self-poised un stumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave...
At once she was the stillness and the word,

A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire;
The strength, the silence of the gods were- here. (CWSA 33: 14,15,16)

Indeed this is a significant point about Savitri. She does not speak much in the epic. Is this then a clue towards gaining spiritual strength, the first step in the *sachhana*? When Savitri does speak, the utterances are those of a goddess, a Mahasaraswati. When Satyavan meets her for the first time, he gives a rapturous, lengthy welcome. Savitri replies simply:

“I am Savitri,
Princess of Madra. Who art thou? What name
Musical on earth expresses thee to men?”

Later on, there is tremendous calm when she assures her parents and Rishi Narad about her choice:

“Mid Shalwa’s giant hills and brooding woods
In his thatched hermitage Dyumatsena dwells,
Blind, exiled, outcast, once a mighty king.
The son of Dyumatsena, Satyavan,
I have met on the wild forest’s lonely verge.
My father, I have chosen. This is done.” (Ibid: 424)

When her mother tries to persuade her to change, Savitri spontaneously says: “Once my heart chose and chooses not again.” The Vyasa’s Savitri again:

सकृदंशो निपतति सकृत् कन्या प्रदीयते ।
सकृदाह ददानीति त्रीण्येतानि सकृत् सकृत् ॥२६॥
दीर्घायुरथवाल्पायुः सगुणो निर्गुणोऽपि वा ।
सकृद् वृतो मया भर्ता न द्वितीयं वृणोम्यहम् ॥२७॥
मनसा निश्चयं कृत्वा ततो वाचाभिधीयते ।
क्रियते कर्मणा पश्चात् प्रमाणं मे मनस्ततः ॥२८॥

(R.Y. Deshpande, *Vyasa’s Savitri*:19)

May he be of a short life or a long life, with virtuous qualities or else without them;
I have chosen him as my husband and I shall choose not again. (Translated by R.Y. Deshpande)

Whether it is Vyasa’s Savitri or the Savitri of Sri Aurobindo’s epic, she is always brief, she is firm, she uses the simplest words to convey her resolve. When Dyumatsena persuades her to give up the very difficult *tri-rattra vrata* she had undertaken, Vyasa’s *Savitri* speaks in such a way as to calm the worries of her father-in-law who has lost his eyesight:

यथा यथा भाषसि धर्मसंहितं
मनोऽनुकूलं सुपदं महार्थवत् ।
तथा तथा मे त्वयि भक्तिरुतमा
वरं वृणीष्वप्रतिमं पतिव्रते ॥५१॥

(*Vyasa’s Savitri*:30)

Be not disturbed about it please; I shall be able to carry the vow without blame; only a firm resolve makes it go through successfully and I have initiated it with that resolve. (Translated by R.Y. Deshpande)

The very difficult *tri-rattra vrata* of the legend is transformed into the highly significant “Book of Yoga” in the epic. We watch Savitri’s journey in the inner countries of the mind, her meeting the Mothers of Sorrow, Might and Light and her gaining universal consciousness. All of this strengthens her mind and infuses the power of the Divine Mother into Savitri’s being. We have a sheer poetic description of the state of universal consciousness attained by her:

She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,
She was the red heart of the passion-flower,
The dream-white of the lotus in its pool.
Out of subconscious life she climbed to mind,
She was thought and the passion of the world’s heart,
She was the godhead hid in the heart of man,
She was the climbing of his soul to God” (CWSA 33: 557)

However, the change within does not effect any difference in her approach to life. Sri Aurobindo indicates that the sadhana should go on strengthening the spirit within and it is marvellous how it is with Savitri:

To all she was the same perfect Savitri:
A greatness and a sweetness and a light
Poured out from her upon her little world.
Life showed to all the same familiar face,
Her acts followed the old unaltered round,
She spoke the words that she was wont to speak
And did the things that she had always done.

However, when she spoke, no one could fail to be charmed by the way she uttered her thoughts, and since they were firmly based on Dharma, no one could fail to be overwhelmed by the Truth-Consciousness she radiated. For instance, whenever Vyasa’s Savitri speaks to Yama he is very much pleased and gives her a boon. Finally she says:

सन्तो हि सत्येन नयन्ति सूर्यं
सन्तो भूमिं तपसा धारयन्ति ।
सन्तो गतिर्भूतभव्यस्य राजन्
सतां मध्ये नावसीदन्ति सन्तः ॥४८॥

(Vyasa’s Savitri:54)

By the Truth the saints lead the sun; by askesis the saints uphold the earth; the past, present and future find their refuge in the saints, King. Noble persons in the midst of the saints have never any grief. (Translated by R.Y, Deshpande)

There must have been Truth-Consciousness that was in the utterance of the syllables by Savitri that Yama exclaims:

यथा यथा भाषसि धर्मसंहितं
मनोजुकूलं सुपदं महार्थवत् ।
तथा तथा मे त्वयि भक्तिरुतमा
वरं वृणीष्वप्रतिमं पतिव्रते ॥५१॥

(Vyasa’s Savitri:56)

“O devoted and chaste lady, the more in well-adorned verses, full of great significance

and agreeable to perception, you speak of the noble things conformable to the dharma, the more does my excellent devotion for you increase; therefore, choose yet another but an appropriate boon from me. (Ibid)

It is this Savitri that we see in the epic also till we move with her in eternal night after the death in the forest. The Savitri-Yama *samvaada* in the Upakhyana has been recast by Sri Aurobindo as a confrontation between Savitri and Death. The argument between the two is verbally rich but then these are not words uttered by a mortal voice. “Two spirits strove; Silence battled with silence, vast with vast”. It is, of course, an eloquent silence. Death reasons, cajoles, insinuates, taunts, tempts, mocks, flatters. But Savitri’s words are hammer blows:

O Death, who reasonest, I reason not,
Reason that scans and breaks, but cannot build
Or builds in vain because she doubts her work.
I am, I love, I see, I act, I will. (CWSA 34: 594)

If Savitri’s consciousness walks through the night and the double twilight unscathed, it is equally poised in the higher principle when the Supreme offers her shoreless joy in everlasting day. The only difference is that now she talks on behalf of Satyavan (and perhaps all the aspirants of the world) as well:

In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss
Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born.
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine. (Ibid: 692)

It then becomes obvious that this is how the higher principle (call it the Supramental Principle, if you will) works. For the present, mankind must aspire for perfection within the present form. “The same perfect Savitri” is the inspiring image for us to reach the desired perfection. Indian culture has varied religions and spiritual quests and we have been helped by the Itihasas and the Puranas to get accustomed to several *adhyatmic* ideas. One such is the universal mother taking an individual form and a human image. The Divine Mother has come as Savitri and so here is beauty and grace, strength and silence. Yet, it is the same perfect Savitri everywhere! The Mahalakshmi of Aswapati’s palace, *saa vigrahavateeva sri* seen through an enlightened and loving father’s eyes:

A deathless meaning filled her mortal limbs;
As in a golden vase’s poignant line
They seemed to carry the rhythmic sob of bliss
Of earth’s mute adoration towards heaven
Released in beauty’s cry of living form
Towards the perfection of eternal things. (CWSA 34: 373)

The Maheshwari intent in meditation, *dhyana yoga paraayana*, achieving a *trikaal-drishti* as it were:

A seeing will pondered between the brows;
Thoughts, glistening Angels, stood behind the brain

In flashing armour, folding hands of prayer,
And poured heaven's rays into the earthly form.
Imaginations flamed up from her breast,
Unearthly beauty, touches of surpassing joy
And plans of miracle, dreams of delight... (Ibid: 539)

We also see the Mahakali in action when Death is burnt up by her cosmic fire, as the Sun of Supramental Light and Will-Power descent into the Ajna Chakra, the centre between the eyes. (R. Y. Deshpande, *Perspectives of Savitri* Part 2: 20)

Her forehead's span vaulted the Omniscient's gaze
Her eyes were two stars that watched the universe.
The Power that from her being's summit reigned,
The Presence chambered in lotus secrecy,
Came down and held the centre in her brow
Where the mind's Lord in his control-room sits ...
His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze. (Ibid: 667)

These images from Tantra are perfectly valid in the confrontation with Death indicating that the self-discipline of Poorna Yoga can conquer Time, annihilate Death and transform earthly humanity. Already Savitri's yoga has been etched in terms of the rising Kundalini by Sri Aurobindo's masterly English style:

A flaming serpent rose released from sleep.
It rose billowing its coils and stood erect
And climbing mightily stormily on its way
It touched her centres with its flaming mouth:
As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,
They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light and bliss;
Then at the crown it joined the Eternal's space.
In the flower of the head, in the flower of Matter's base,
In each divine stronghold and Nature-knot
It held together the mystic stream which joins
The viewless summits with the unseen depths,
The string of forts that make the frail defence
Safeguarding us against the enormous world,
Our lines of self-expression in its Vast. (Ibid: 528)

But, it is the Mahapremi aspect that is emphasised by Sri Aurobindo in the way Savitri looks after Satyavan as they return to the earth.:

The immense remoteness of her trance had passed;
Human she was once more, earth's Savitri,
Yet felt in her illimitable change..
But soon she leaned down over her loved to call
His mind back to her with her travelling touch
On his closed eyelids; settled was her still look
Of strong delight, not yearning now, but large
With limitless joy or sovereign last content,
Pure, passionate with the passion of the gods. (Ibid: 715-716)

The Epilogue, the closing lines of Savitri are a marvellous tractatus on love. To Satyavan full of feverish anxiety, she speaks soft words of assurance: “Our parting was the dream; We are

together, we live, O Satyavan". Their life had opened to divinity and the triune love - not the mere sensual, nor the mere emotional nor the mere spiritual - had been achieved;

Our love has grown greater by that mighty touch
And learned its heavenly significance,
Yet nothing is lost of mortal love's delight.
Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth
I am the Madran, I am Savitri.
All that I was before, I am to thee still. (Ibid: 719)

Her message again to the sages of the Ashram is a palimpsest of the next step in transformation of human lives. It is an answer to those who wish to know the manner in which our lives will be lived when the decreed and inevitable change occurs:

Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage.(Ibid: 724)

That is all we need to know at the present stage of evolution. The epic *Savitri* is the reality. The heroine is "the same perfect Savitri". The Supramental Principle has already achieved this marvellous poem in this tense time and its influence is spreading round the globe. If such a promising dawn is here, can the greater dawn be far behind?

Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march.
Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.
A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done. (CWSA 33: 55)

(Lecture delivered at the National Seminar on Supramental Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo and other Evolutionists held by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research on 29.3.04 at the Conference Hall, ICSSR, NewDelhi)

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I desire to see Thy Divine Form - *Dristumicchami te rupam*

V. Ananda Reddy

In chapter 11 of the Bhagavad Gita, we come across a beautiful sentiment or desire expressed by Arjuna to Sri Krishna, where he pleads him with the request — *Dristumicchami te rupam*, that is, “I desire to see thy divine form”. Infact, chapters 10 and 11, that is, Vibhuti Yoga and Vishvaroop darshana yoga, must be read together for they are complementary and complete each other. The chapters represent the obverse and reverse sides of the divine in his manifestation.

The very first verse of chapter 10 has Lord Sri Krishna say to Arjuna:

Again, O mighty-armed, hearken to my supreme word that I will speak to thee from My will for thy soul's good, now that thy heart is taking delight in Me. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Message of the Gita*: 193)

So there is some inner turning, a change in Arjuna, and he is now ready to be granted a *paramvacha*, supreme word. In essence it is nothing but the adoration of the Lord as the Supreme and Origin of all that is in existence. In the following verse he says:

Neither the gods nor the great Rishis know any birth of Mine, for I am altogether and in every way the origin of the gods and the great Rishis. (ibid.)

Gods are the original form of the Eternal and they have descended from the Supreme Lord. They contribute to the creation of the world-process, and their own existence, nature, power proceed from the One, the Transcendental Divine, explains Sri Aurobindo.

Hearing this, Arjuna now pleads with Him further and verse 16 goes like this:

Thou shouldst tell me of Thy divine self-manifestations, all without exception, Thy Vibhutis by which Thou pervadest these worlds and peoples. (Ibid: 201).

So, now Arjuna asks for the details of the manifestation of the Lord.

Among all these living beings, cosmic godheads, superhuman and human and subhuman creatures, and amid all these qualities, powers and objects, the chief, the head, the greatest in quality of each class is a special power of the becoming of the Godhead. (Ibid: 363).

In shloka 19 of chapter 10, the Lord replies:

Yes, I will tell thee of My divine Vibhutis, but only in some of My principal preeminences, O best of the Kurus; for there is no end to the detail of My self-extension in the universe. (Ibid: 203).

This is again a remarkable phrase where the Lord lets in each of us to have a deep intuitive knowledge and assurance that it is indeed He who is spread across all that is manifest. From where to begin, and what to leave out, while describing where He exists?

In shlokas 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 of chapter 10 he says:

Among the Vedas I am the Sama-Veda; among the gods I am Vasava; I am mind among the senses; in living beings I am consciousness.

I am Shiva among the Rudras, the lord of wealth among the Yakshas and Rakshasas, Agni among the Vasus; Meru among the peaks of the world am I.

And of the high priests of the world know Me, O Partha, to be the chief, Brihaspati; I am Skanda, the war-god, leader of the leaders of battle; among the flowing waters I am the ocean.

I am Bhrigu among the great Rishis; I am the sacred syllable OM among words; among acts of worship I am the worship called Japa; among the mountain-ranges I am Himalaya.

I am the Aswattha among all the trees; and I am Narada among the divine sages, Chitraratha among the Gandharvas, the Muni Kapila among the Siddhas.

Among horse know Me to be Uchchaishravas, nectar-born; Airavata among lordly elephants; and among men the King of men. (ibid: 204-205)

There are many more shlokas in a flow where He recounts where he is manifest, the essential truth being that He is hidden in each and every being and non-being.

In chapter 10 we see the Divine as One in the Many, or the One in All. But in chapter 11 it is the reverse — the Many in the One. As mentioned earlier, these two chapters are complementary to each other. In chapter 10 the Lord describes the Formless in all forms; while in chapter 11 he is describing the individual form that is actually the universal form.

Before we move to chapter 11, let us see the gist of Arjuna's experience till now which will make us appreciate the depth of the next chapter even more. Sri Aurobindo writes:

God as the omniscient and omnipotent, the sole original Being who manifests in himself all, whatever it may be, good and evil, pain and pleasure, light and darkness as stuff of his own existence and governs himself what in himself he has manifested. Unaffected by its oppositions, unbound by his creation, exceeding, yet intimately related to this Nature and closely one with her creatures, their Spirit, Self, highest Soul, Lord, Lover, Friend, Refuge, he is ever leading them from within them and from above through the mortal appearances of ignorance and suffering and sin and evil, ever leading each through his nature and all through universal Nature towards a supreme light and bliss and immortality and transcendence. This is the fullness of the liberating knowledge. (CWSA 19: 350-51)

Arjuna, seeing that the Lord is manifest in all such forms, prays to the Lord:

So it is, as Thou hast declared Thyself, O Supreme Lord; I desire to see Thy divine form and body, O Purushottama. (Ibid: 174, Ch. 11, V. 3)

Before Sri Krishna grants his prayer, he reveals to him

What thou hast to see, this thy human eye cannot grasp; but there is a divine eye (an inmost seeing) and that eye I now give to thee. Behold Me in My divine Yoga. (Ibid: 175).

This occult vision is granted to Arjuna. Sri Aurobindo describes the nature of this vision. He speaks of three different kinds of perception: the subtle vision with which we see things in dreams or the wakeful consciousness. Secondly, there is the "direct spiritual awareness"

with which we can see things in the subtle worlds. Lastly, there is the eye of yoga or the divine eye, *divyam chaksu*, with which we can see forms in the causal world. Arjuna was granted this divine eye, *divyam dadami te chaksu*, so that he could directly see the ultimate form face to face.

Alongwith Arjuna, even Sanjaya was granted this divine vision, for he was narrating to the king, everything that was happening on the battlefield. So Sanjaya says,

The supreme Form is then made visible. It is that of the infinite Godhead whose faces are everywhere and in whom are all the wonders of existence, who multiplies unendingly all the many marvellous revelations of his being, a world-wide Divinity seeing with innumerable eyes, speaking from innumerable mouths, armed for battle with numberless divine uplifted weapons, glorious with divine ornaments of beauty, robed in heavenly raiment of deity, lovely with garlands of divine flowers, fragrant with divine perfumes. Such is the light of this body of God as if a thousand suns had risen at once in heaven. The whole world multitudinously divided and yet unified is visible in the body of the God of Gods. (CWSA 19: 379)

It is a marvellous description which is not only powerful but extremely poetic. Infact in the *Purushasukta*, there are similar phrases describing the Lord as the Terrible Purusha. Mark the lines from this text:

“The Purusha has thousand heads, thousand eyes, and thousand feet.” (Veda line 1-1.5) “With three quarters the man rose upward, and one quarter of him still remains here. From this he spread out in all directions, into that which eats and that which does not eat.” (Veda line 4-4.4)

Now let us see what Arjuna sees

I see all the gods in Thy body, O God, and different companies of beings, Brahma the creating Lord seated in the Lotus, and the Rishis and the race of the divine Serpents. (Ibid: 176, Ch 11, V. 15)

I see numberless arms and bellies and eyes and faces, I see Thy infinite forms on every side, but I see not Thy end nor Thy middle nor Thy beginning, O Lord of the universe, O Form universal. (Ibid, V. 16)

We cannot even imagine the description. This is not just imagination. These are high visions, like a mantra.

I behold Thee without end or middle or beginning, of infinite force, of numberless arms, Thy eyes are suns and moons, Thou hast a face of blazing fire and thou art ever burning up the whole universe with the flame of Thy energy. (Ibid: 177, V. 19)

So we have a form here which can terrify one, like Time the destroyer.

Why does Sri Krishna choose to show Arjuna this specific form? Why not something magnificent in its beauty and splendour? In the meaning of all these terrible forms lies the crux of the Gita. It is actually related to the reason of the Mahabharata war. Why was it necessary to have the war? To quote Sri Aurobindo:

To put away the responsibility for all that seems to us evil or terrible on the shoulders of

a semi-omnipotent Devil, or to put it aside as part of Nature, making an unbridgeable opposition between world-nature and God-Nature, as if Nature were independent of God, or to throw the responsibility on man and his sins, as if he had a preponderant voice in the making of this world or could create anything against the will of God, are clumsily comfortable devices in which the religious thought of India has never taken refuge. We have to look courageously in the face of the reality and see that it is God and none else who has made this world in his being and that so he has made it. (CWSA 9:382)

This is marvellous and he has written similar ideas in many places. It is only Hindu dharma's vision that can digest the different forms of the Divine. It dares to synthesise the absolute and incomprehensible Evil with the omnipotent Good, instead of putting all blame on some semi-omnipotent Satan who somehow is outside the realm of God's influence and power. He writes further:

We have to see that Nature devouring her children, Time eating up the lives of creatures, Death universal and ineluctable and the violence of the Rudra forces in man and Nature are also the supreme Godhead in one of his cosmic figures. (Ibid)

It is almost childish to think that there is only one facet or *roopa* of the Divine. We have to take into account all those aspects too that may not be in accordance with our conceptions of the Supreme God.

We have to see that God the bountiful and prodigal creator, God the helpful, strong and benignant preserver is also God the devourer and destroyer. The torment of the couch of pain and evil on which we are racked is his touch as much as happiness and sweetness and pleasure. It is only when we see with the eye of the complete union and feel this truth in the depths of our being that we can entirely discover behind that mask too the calm and beautiful face of the all-blissful Godhead and in this touch that tests our imperfection the touch of the friend and builder of the spirit in man. (Ibid)

Here we cannot but help thinking of the description of Mahakali given by Sri Aurobindo. It is in this light that we can understand Sri Aurobindo's four aspects of the Mother- Mahakali, Maheshwari, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. About Mahakali he writes:

Terrible is her face to the Asura, dangerous and ruthless her mood against the haters of the Divine; for she is the Warrior of the Worlds who never Sinks from the battle. Intolerant of imperfection, she deals roughly with all in man that is unwilling and she is severe to all that is obstinately ignorant and obscure; her wrath is immediate and dire against treachery and falsehood and malignity, ill-will is smitten at once by her scourge. For she too is the Mother and her love is as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, pg. 19).

So this is an example of the great synthesised vision of God's wrath and terror, and behind it an infinite compassion and wisdom which our hearts and minds are too small to truly comprehend. It is only grace, or a vision such as bestowed upon Arjuna that we can

experience this most wonderous and magnificent truth of the Supreme. Continuing the initial passage of Sri Aurobindo:

The discords of the worlds are God's discords and it is only by accepting and proceeding through them that we can arrive at the greater concords of his supreme harmony, the summits and thrilled vastnesses of his transcendent and his cosmic Ananda. (CWSA 19: 381-82).

In a different place he says that man has to go through the Rudra before he can come to Vishnu. This destruction is there to be undergone by all of us, but for something profoundly new that needs to come into existence.

Let us see what psychological impact this vision has on Arjuna.

I have seen what never was seen before and I rejoice, but my mind is troubled with fear. O Godhead, show me that other form of Thine; turn Thy heart to grace, O Thou Lord of the gods, O Thou abode of this universe. (*The Message of the Gita*:187)

This is akin to his experience when he sees this:

The sons of Dhritarashtra, all with the multitude of kings and heroes, Bhishma and Drona and Kama along with the foremost warriors on our side too, are hastening into Thy tusked and terrible jaws and some are seen with crushed and bleeding heads caught between Thy teeth of power. (Ibid: 26-27)

So we see the weakness of the human beings. Nobody can be so wide as to receive this experience which is so awe inspiring in its proportions. Sri Krishna replies however:

Thou shouldst envisage this tremendous vision without pain, without confusion of mind, without any sinking of the members. Cast away fear and let thy heart rejoice, behold again this other form of mine. (Ibid: 49)

Sri Krishna consoles Arjuna and comes back to his delightful and graceful form. Arjuna says:

Beholding again Thy gentle human form, O Janardana, my heart is filled with delight and I am restored to my own nature. (Ibid: 51)

We see a very interesting psychological facet here. Human beings, even those of us who may be open to the Divine and full of faith and love for him, do not have the constitution to be able to sustain the Terrible vision of the Supreme. As Sri Aurobindo describes:

The form of the transcendent and universal Being is to the strength of the liberated spirit a thing mighty, encouraging and fortifying, a source of power, an equalising, sublimating, all justifying vision; but to the normal man it is overwhelming, appalling, incommunicable. The truth that reassures, even when known, is grasped with difficulty behind the formidable and mighty aspect of all-destructive Time and an incalculable Will and a vast immeasurable inextricable working. But there is too the gracious mediating form of divine Narayana, the God who is so close to man and in man, the Charioteer of the battle and the journey, with his four arms of helpful power, a humanized symbol of Godhead, not this million-armed universality. It is

this mediating aspect which man must have for his support constantly before him. For it is this figure of Narayana which symbolises the truth that reassures. (CWSA 19: 393).

First we have seen the necessity of this vision of the Vishwaroopa, now let us see the psychological reasons why this vision was granted. It is a sort of a preview of what is going to happen, to prepare Arjuna's mind and being. Sri Krishna says:

“I am the Time-Spirit, destroyer of the world, arisen huge-statured for the destruction of the nations.” Even without thee all these warriors shall be not, who are ranked in the opposing armies. (CWSA 19: 384).

Sri Krishna reveals another secret, that Arjuna is nothing but a means for the goal already decided by the Lord, and he must try to remember that he is only a *nimmit matra*, an instrument, and not the doer or one who has willed the battle. The Lord has worked towards creating the Kurukshetra war, in order to destroy the old kingdom of the Kurus and build new order based on the new dharma. No human will can intervene or alter that which is a *faite accompli*. Arjuna has only to obey and fulfil the command for he, in this War, is the chosen instrument of the transforming Power and Wisdom.

This is the larger truth behind everything that happens in the world. Vedanta tells us that there are three levels of existence. Prajna is the highest superconscious that is the causal world, but in deep sleep. In the light of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, this Sushupti state or Consciousness corresponds to the Supermind which is beyond the reach of our present mental consciousness. Next is the Taijasa, the world that belongs to Luminous Mind; its place is in the life-plane and mind-plane. It is the subliminal or the dream-plane. Lastly, there is Virat, the gross world of wakeful consciousness. All creation first takes its seed form in the causal world, in Prajna. It is then reflected in the mid-world of Taijasa or the Hiranya Garbha. Lastly, what is in seed form gets manifested in the physical world of time and space, that is, on our earth. That is why Sri Krishna tells Arjuna.

Slay, by me who are slain, Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and other heroic fighters; be not pained and troubled. (Ibid: 182).

This is the deeper rhythm of the world. All that happens to us and around us, has already taken place in the higher worlds. This vision can be applied to all global events but also to our daily lives. To believe we are the doer is to live in ignorance, and that is why becoming conscious of the witness self and remaining in that is a major step in one's sadhana.

To be an honest instrument, one has to be like a flute, absolutely empty, which may be experienced in moments but to keep it as a sustained experience is very difficult. So this vision of the Vishwaroopa was necessary to make us understand the sheer vastness and depth of the Divine's play and action in the world, and how non-existent really our will is. Who we really are, the *atman*, is not the doer, but rather it is the Prakriti, made up of gunas, which is the doer, always supported in the Purushottama.

What Arjuna saw through the eye of yoga is the real form of the Supreme as Sri Aurobindo confirms: “It is not a dream or imagination but the truth, the living truth”. (*Bengali Writings*: 89).

A Philosophical Analysis of Synthesis Model of Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's Thought

Shimi C. Mani & Rajiba Lochan Behera

Sri Aurobindo regards consciousness to be a force or power. Consciousness force is inherent in the matter and therefore, it can ascend and transform into higher forms of reality. There are many grades of consciousness higher than the mind. As we ascend to the higher grades of consciousness, we are able to gradually dispel ignorance and attain knowledge. Sri Aurobindo holds that the consciousness of mind passes towards infinite consciousness ascending the steps of the Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind and Overmind. He admits that mind has the quality of self-awareness and through this self-awareness the human mind can apprehend the eternal being, which is nothing but the Reality. (CWSA 21-22:157) For Sri Aurobindo, Self-consciousness is also consciousness-force and bliss. For him, Existence is not an attribute of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's Consciousness is a fundamental entity, as a "fundamental thing in existence", it is the energy, the motion. It is the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it, not only of the macrocosm but the microcosm as well. This view can be explored as a notion of consciousness, purely non-local. For instance, when consciousness in its downward movement or in involution forgets itself in action, and becomes an apparently unconscious energy; this way when it forgets itself it becomes an atom or an electron, a material object. In reality it is still the consciousness that works in energy and determines the form and the evolution of form. When it wants to liberate itself from this dormant state, it slowly releases itself from the clutches of matter, and emerges as life, as an animal or a man and it can go on evolving itself still further out of its involution and become something more than a mere man. (Ibid: 236-237)

Consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range, which cannot exhaust all the possible ranges of consciousness, than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or human hearing all the gradations of sound, for there is much above or below that is to man invisible and inaudible. So too there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range with which the normal human consciousness has no contact and to that extent humans are unconscious of these. (Ibid: 233) Nevertheless, we can conceptualize their existence and believe in them. Sri Aurobindo did not agree in confining consciousness as a functional property within our physical organism. Such an explanation, he argued, no more causes or explains thought and consciousness than the construction of an engine causes or explains the motive-power of steam or electricity. The force is anterior, not the physical instrument. (Ibid: 286) Consciousness is not only the power of awareness of self and things; it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. It can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions; it can not only answer to forces but create or put out by itself forces. Consciousness for him is not merely Chit but is also Chit Śakti; it is not only awareness but also conscious-force. (CWSA 30: 234)

Sri Aurobindo presents a theory of creation and offers a path for a seeker to delve into these fundamental mysteries and to find answers through a different form or state of

consciousness that knows things directly rather than through the constructed consciousness of the sensation or mind. In his theory, he argues that one must use an appropriate instrument that is capable of the knowledge we are trying to discover. He argues that for humanity to answer these fundamental questions on the nature of Reality, the process of creation and so on, it must give up the reliance on mind and its self-constructed knowledge and seek a new poise of consciousness that can know the nature of Reality directly. Based on this premise, he explains how a man must move away from his surface consciousness and break through to the inner being that is closer to his true nature. But this is not the final poise of consciousness needed to answer these questions fully. From this point of consciousness, one must continue to go within until he finds the psychic being^[*] and its connections with higher states of consciousness, which are the direct expansion of the original consciousness that created the material universe.

Sri Aurobindo describes this consciousness as the Supermind, a unitary consciousness that is the nature of Sat-Chit-Ānanda. He describes the mysteries of the universe in mental and rational terms, and from this hypothesis of supra-mental consciousness he proceeds to the rest of his theory and invites a new breed of explorer to an adventure of consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, the origin or source of all that exists in the cosmos and outside of the cosmos is a Self-Existent Reality. (CWSA 30:239) This Self-Existent Reality is beyond the cosmos and yet is all that is the cosmos. This Self-Existent Reality is without feature, form or quality. It is beyond all that we normally take into account as visible reality, and it is a state of Reality that we cannot describe by thoughts, words, space or time. It is all of these and at the same time it is none of these things. For him, it is the original essence of everything. It has always existed and it is all that has, does and will exist. This Self-Existent Reality is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present in its original state of Transcendent Existence. All exists in this poise of consciousness-Status as potential. Everything exists there in potential but it is not unreal or non-existent. It is not less or diminished by the fact that it exists only in Status. Everything is One in this poise of consciousness and nothing is separate from that Oneness.

The Self-Existent Reality is capable of assuming other poises of consciousness outside of Status without changing its fundamental nature and all that exists within it. It is possible for the Self-Existent Reality to assume a poise of consciousness in which all that exists in Status can be converted to an outer form or Reality. By changing its poise of consciousness the Self-Existent Reality has not altered itself, it has simply shifted from the poise of Being to the poise of Becoming. In the shift from one poise of consciousness to another, the unexpressed conscious force of the original Self-Existent Reality extends itself into an expression of conscious force and form manifestation. This change in consciousness does not create or manufacture the Cosmos, rather it brings forth all that existed in itself in the original poise of Status and expresses it through an extension in time and space and matter. Thus, all that we know in the Cosmos as force and form is an extension of the original consciousness of the One in Status. In this process of bringing forth itself in extension, the Self-Existent

[*] Sri Aurobindo has lived during an era when psychology as a new discipline could convince all that it is successful in unraveling the hidden nature of mind and consciousness.

Reality has organized its consciousness and energies in a gradient from the spiritual to the material. The centre of consciousness can be known from the inner being of the human form. It has been experienced and known by the great explorers of consciousness in the past as sacchidānanda. This primary extension knows itself to be, and in knowing itself, knows itself to be without limits, therefore, it knows itself to be blissful. The nature of this unitary state of manifest consciousness is Supermind. (Ibid: 245)

As the extension continues away from the Supermind towards inclusive material extension, a break in the unitary consciousness arises. Within the apprehending Supermind, consciousness loses its identity with the One. For the first time, consciousness is lost in the form and becomes identified with the outer nature, the surface expression, and characteristics of that form. At this point Supermind extends itself into the mind and creates the first stage of ignorance. Consciousness loses its sense of oneness and becomes aware of separation, isolation, demarcation and loss of its true identity as the One. It is in this stage of the extension that Mind is created and the roots of mental ego are forged. As the descent continues still closer to material manifestations, universal mind extends itself further to the formation of Life. In the continuing descent the further division and separation isolates life forces that create and sustain all material forms of existence. This further descent coupled with the initial division in mind further solidifies the sense of separation and isolation that characterizes the divided consciousness of material existence. In the final step of the descent towards material manifestation, universal mind creates the material forms of matter through an involution of itself that creates repeating forms of energy that are lost in self-absorption. Thus, the extension is completed through a series of stages of involution and self-absorption of the consciousness of the One. The final expression in the new state of extension is an external form that is matter that assumes the form of physical bodies, which are symbols of the Real Ideas of the Self-Existent Reality in the original consciousness of Status. Throughout the descent and formation of the cosmos the One has not changed. It still remains one. It never splits, rather it takes on temporary demarcations that allow it to appear as forms put forth from the original force of its consciousness in Status. The yogi will know that all forces and forms are one from the poise of the supramental consciousness. They will know that each and every form and every part of a form is a temporary demarcation of the One that allows the Real Idea to take on expression in the poise of Extension. Sri Aurobindo says, the cosmos and all that exists is the One, and this One is a Self-Existent Reality that can assume many poises of consciousness simultaneously. (Ibid: 247) Thus, the cosmos is made up of two poises of consciousness that exist simultaneously in the Self-Existent Reality, One of Status-Being, in which all exists in the unexpressed potential of consciousness, and the other of Extension-Becoming, in which through a movement of consciousness the One extends itself outwardly to manifest in space, time and matter, all that is subjected to our phenomenal experience.

According to Sri Aurobindo, when we widen our consciousness to partake of the cosmic being, we find that both of these statements appear to be true, just like how Quantum mechanics has begun to reconcile us to holding two apparently competing concepts as real at the same time, as in the case of light that can be both a wave and a particle apparently

simultaneously. Similarly, the universe is both a creation of the Infinite and itself the Infinite Existence simultaneously and without conflict or contradiction. The cosmic action can only take place through the existence of an infinite Force, and this force in turn depends on the existence of an infinite Consciousness. The order and systematic existence, processes and sequential actions that occur in the Universe presuppose a cosmic all sustaining, all developing Consciousness and Will-Force (Chit Śakti). Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness) and Ānanda (Delight or Bliss) are the source, support and cause of all manifested existence and they pervade all that is. The idea of Superman is the special contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the destiny of man.

Sri Aurobindo on Features of Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is a spiritual theory of evolution, based upon his spiritual experiences and not an empirical investigation. He stated that the ultimate reality is of the nature of a dynamic principle. Reality is all attempting to manifest itself and through its self-manifestation is trying to come back to itself. There are two processes going on in the Universe: one is the process of downward movement, called involution, and the other is the process of upward movement called evolution. Evolution presupposes involution; in fact, evolution is possible only because involution has already taken place. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Evolutionary growth is a triple process; it involves processes of widening, heightening and integration." At first it involves an extension of scope and the incorporation of co-existence of forms, and then it involves a development and growth towards higher form. But, in this process nothing is to be completely rejected, on the contrary, everything finally has to be integrated to one single reality. The process of widening means providing greater scope for the operation of every new element or principle. In the process of evolution there is a widening of the field, since it makes efforts to provide greater room for each principle that emerge from it. The second process of heightening means the ascent from one step or grade to another higher grade. Every new stage that emerges is higher than the earlier one. In the process of evolution there is a movement from higher to still higher one. This is indicated by the term heightening. But the most important character of the evolutionary process is integration. In the process of evolution, Sri Aurobindo points out, the lower grades are not discarded, and they are taken up, lifted up and transformed. By transformation they are incorporated into the higher grades. This is indicated by the term integration, and note that for integration the descent of the higher principle into the lower principle is required. Without the descent the lower principle cannot be incorporated into the higher principles. From this it is clear that for Sri Aurobindo the process of evolution requires prior involution, in this sense evolution is an ascent through descent. Evolution is not growing from the lower grades to the higher ones but superseding and rejecting the lower ones as they are crossed. On the contrary, it implies that the lower ones are uplifted and transformed. Integration in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo means ascent through descent. The higher descends into the lower and transforms it completely, in that way the lower ascends to the higher.

The evolution conceived by Sri Aurobindo was spiritual in nature. It involved a realization based on the concepts of the Supreme Reality, which is called Sacchidānanda, which he

names as Super consciousness, and it is related to the Mind (consciousness) through the Supermind, the most complete spiritual consciousness. And spiritual evolution is a process that spreads over the whole of Reality itself. While discussing evolution Sri Aurobindo mentioned eight phases or stages of reality. These stages may also be regarded as the stages of evolution. The first four stages represent the spirit coming down to the world viz., Existence, Consciousness-force, Bliss, and Supermind. According to Sri Aurobindo they constitute the upper-hemisphere of reality. The four remaining stages represent the world's upward movement to the spirit. These four stages are: Matter, Life, Psyche and Mind. Over and above this division Sri Aurobindo also posits higher levels of consciousness, and these two hemispheres are linked together by these higher levels of consciousness, viz., higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, over mind and Supermind.(Ibid: 259)

It is on account of the descent of the spirit in Matter, Life, and Mind that the ascent to the higher regions of the spirit is made possible. Matter can evolve into life only because life itself has been involved in it; life can ascend to mind only because there has been a descent of the mind into life already. The entire lower hemisphere can ascend to a higher one only because the higher is already in the lower one. Sri Aurobindo claims that the lower cannot evolve into the higher unless the higher is already in it, because evolution cannot proceed out of nothing, it cannot violate the principle of 'nothing comes out of nothing'(Ibid: 261). Therefore, he conceives evolution as the reverse process of involution. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Spirit is a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutory element and factor. Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution. What was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence".(Ibid: 265) Sri Aurobindo says that evolution in the realm has passed through matter, life, psyche and mind and has reached so far the realm of mind. Life evolves in Matter and therefore is 'matter-bound'. Mind evolves in Life, and therefore, it is both 'matter-bound and 'life-bound'. The Absolute reality comes from pure existence through Consciousness-Force and Bliss to the Supermind. On the other hand, in the reverse way matter has risen up to mind through the intervening stages of Life and Psyche. There is a meeting point of the upper-hemisphere and the lower hemisphere. There is a thin veil that separates the mind from the Supermind. If that veil is removed then the light from the Supermind will enter mind and as a result, our whole terrestrial existence will be transformed and this transformation will ultimately make the preparation for the Divine Life. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution comes along with the description of cosmic evolution, which in fact is a description of the evolution of the individual also. Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is as much individual as cosmic. In fact, he recognizes the immense importance of the individual and feels that the individual is the medium through which consciousness reveals and discloses its being.

Integral yoga

Integral yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expressions not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the

Light, the Divine Ānanda (Bliss). But for that, the surrender of the mortal mind, life and body to the Higher Consciousness is indispensable, for it is too difficult to the mortal human being to pass by its own effort beyond mind to a Supramental Consciousness, in which the dynamism is no longer mental but of quite another power. Only those who can accept the call to such a change should enter into this yoga. The Sādhana or practice of the Integral Yoga does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, mantras or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by a self-opening to an Influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine Presence in the heart and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things. It is only by faith, aspiration and surrender that this self-opening can come. The method we have to pursue is to put our whole conscious being into relation and contact with the Divine and to call Him to transform our entire being into His, so that in a sense God Himself, the real Person in us, becomes the Sādhaka and the Sādhana as well, as the Master of the Yoga by whom the lower personality is used as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection. In effect, with the pressure of the Tapas, the force of consciousness in us dwelling in the Idea of the divine Nature produces its own realisation. "The divine all-knowing and all-effecting descends upon the limited and obscure, and progressively illumines and energises the whole lower nature and substitutes its own action for all the terms of the inferior human light and mortal activity." (CWSA 23: 46) It is not merely to rise from the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a Divine life in Matter. (Rohit Mehta, *The Miracle of Descent*:106)

The object of the Integral Yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. The whole principle of Integral Yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone and to nobody else, and to bring down into ourselves by union with the Divine Mother all the transcendent light, power, wideness, peace, purity, truth-consciousness and Ananda of the Divine. The psychic change is inevitable so that complete devotion becomes the main motive of the heart and action and one can be in constant union with the Mother and be in her Presence. The descent of the Peace, Power, Light etc. of the Higher Consciousness through the head and heart spreads to the whole being, occupying the very cells of the body, and makes possible the perception of the One and Divine infinitely everywhere, the Mother everywhere, and living in that infinite consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo had not made any distinction between consciousness and existence. It is somewhat similar to Descartes dictum-‘cogito ergo sum’. I think therefore I exist, which would appeal to the thinking mind and existent body alike. Sri Aurobindo did not believe in the possibility of counteraction between the human body and the consciousness within the body. Within the planes of consciousness the planes of existent world gets enrolled and the relation between Purusha and Prakriti, between the Soul and Nature also form part of his theory of consciousness. For anything that we can call the world, there could be nothing else

than the working of a general relation, which a universal existence has created or established between itself, or let us say its eternal fact or potentiality and the powers of its becoming. The existence in its relations with its experience of the becoming is what we call soul or Purusha, individual soul in the individual and the universal soul in the cosmos; the principle and the powers of the becoming are what we call Nature or Prakriti. (CWSA 23-24: 429)

Sri Aurobindo points out that the knowledge we have to arrive at is not the truth of the intellect; it is not right belief, right opinions, and right information about oneself and things that emerge from the surface mind's idea of knowledge. To arrive at some mental conception about God, ourselves and the world is an object good enough for the intellect but not large enough for the Spirit, for it will not make us conscious of the Infinity. In ancient Indian thought by knowledge they meant consciousness which possesses the highest Truth in direct perception or in self-experience; to become or to be what we know is the sign that we really have of the knowledge of it. For the individual to arrive at the divine universality and supreme infinity, he needs to live in it, possess it, know, feel and express that he is in all his being, consciousness, energy; this is the delight of Being, what the ancient seers of the Veda meant by Knowledge. (CWSA 21-22: 685-86)

When a man lives in the cosmic self, he necessarily embraces the life of the world and his attitude towards that world, struggling upward from the egoistic state must be one of compassion, of love or of helpfulness. For instance, the Buddhists held that immersion in the infinite non-ego was in itself an immersion in a sea of infinite compassion. Gita and other Hindu scriptures point out that the liberated soul will have a natural disposition to work for the beneficence of all creatures. But this vast spirit of beneficence does not necessarily exercise itself by the outward forms of emotional sympathy or active charity. We must not bind down all natures or all states of the divine consciousness in man to the one form of helpfulness which seems to us the most attractive, the most beautiful or the most beneficent. There is a higher sympathy than that of the easily touched emotions, a greater beneficence than that of an obvious utility to particular individuals in their particular sufferings.

To sum up, Sri Aurobindo's vision of synthetic consciousness is a source of inspiration and insight for contemplation of the entire humanity. The fact that plant and animal life has evolved from matter, and humanity has evolved from the animal, permits us to conceive that human life will ultimately give rise to what he terms Supermind. Yet another unique position held by him is that Life is a conscious universal plane or field, not merely a characteristic of individual biological forms. The ultimate aim of spirituality is not to transcend or escape from the sufferings and limitations of life on earth but, to perfect and transform life on earth into the Life Divine. All life is a subconscious yoga of nature seeking to discover and release the spiritual consciousness hidden within it. Not just prayer or meditation, but every aspect and activity of life can be consciously utilized as a means for spiritual progress.

Influence of Gita on Sri Aurobindo's Life and Work

(An attempt to find similarities between the Gita and *Savitri*)

Shraddha Mohanty

The basis of Indian culture goes back to the living spiritual experience embodied in the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Gita, the Tantras and the Vedanta. Apart from the wide diffusion of spirituality in the consciousness of the masses, a continuity of the process of self realization runs throughout the period of Indian history.

Srimad Bhagvad Gita, popularly known as the Gita, is the marvel of a scripture. It occupies a unique place amongst the great scriptures of the world, religious or spiritual. According to the Indian tradition, the Gita is said to be 5000 years old, but in its essence it is even today as fresh as ever because of its texture, content, movement of consciousness and thought and vision. It is regarded now as a representative scripture of Indian thought and culture and philosophy, carrying in it the eternal wisdom, the 'sanatana dharma'.

Sri Aurobindo has a special relationship with the Gita. Being a scholar, a man of learning and a thinker, he had studied the Gita and translated it in English. He had a unique experience of the Divine in the Alipur jail in the year 1908-09 which he narrated in his Uttarpara speech:

He [Krishna] placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realize what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work,.. (CWSA 8: 5)

Sri Aurobindo also realized the highest divine vision termed 'Vasudeva darshana'. As Sri Krishna says in the Gita; "Amongst thousands of men, one rarely, strives for perfection, and out of those who strive and attain to perfection, rarely one knows Me (the Divine) in my essential principles." (*Bhagavad Gita*, Ch.7, Verse 3) And "so very rare is the great soul who sees that Vasudeva, the immanent Divine, is all that is." This is the perfection of vision which Sri Aurobindo had. It was after this realization that Sri Aurobindo wrote during the years 1916-1920 two series of essays on the Gita, each containing 24 essays. This subsequently got published as *Essays on the Gita* which has seen numerous editions and is translated into many Indian and European languages. To read this is to receive the Gita's message straight from the 'Divine Teacher'. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram says that according to Sri Aurobindo the message of Gita is the basis of the great spiritual movement which has lead and will lead humanity more and more to its liberation i.e, to its escape from falsehood and ignorance towards the truth. Apart from this we also find the influence of Gita in various works of Sri Aurobindo like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and his poems. He has written many poems depicting Sri Krishna and also the message of Gita. We also find this influence in his epic *Savitri* too.

In one of his poems "Who", he writes:

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,
Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?

And,

We have love for a boy who is dark and resplendent, (CWSA 2: 202)

Also in his poems 'Revelation', sonnet 'Krishna', he expresses the same devotion.

Writing towards the end of the 19th century, Sri Aurobindo composed *Savitri*, an epic in 12 books set in the ancient Vedic age, as poem of inner action, psychological ascent and descent, an epic of Godward movement in conformity with Indian sensibility. This is an epic of the human soul journeying through various stages towards the Divine Soul and returning again to raise the soul of all others. In many places there is an impression of Gita in various lines.

Savitri possesses a unity of structure in a remarkable degree. The opening canto with the symbol dawn brings straight to the crisis of the story-the imminent death of Satyavan and introduces the chief character Savitri to the savior of man. To show how Savitri came to be constituted as a "half-divine", being even in her external poise, the seer rightly pursues the thread of her birth and explains to us how "A world desire compelled her mortal birth".

The problem dealt with in *Savitri* is of man's imperfection and his unquenchable thirst for perfection, and his seeking for light and immortality. It can be solved by spiritual efforts alone. It can be solved only if the supreme divine can be persuaded to descend on earth and take up the burden of man. We are here introduced with the parents of Savitri, king Aswapathy and the queen mother. He is termed as 'a colonist from immortality'. His attempts towards self-perfection and self-realization form a natural background for the boon given to him by Devi shakti in the form of the avatar Savitri. Savitri too after facing the same problems of the riddles of karma, the realization of unknown future, the struggles to avert the fate, enters within and after travelling through various planes of consciousness ultimately finds her soul.

In *Savitri*, the story attains its cosmic significance when the fate of Satyavan rings with the destiny of man. Man, the middle identity between the nescience and the superconscience, sees the forces of the nether worlds and feels their impact upon his life. He sees also the possibilities of Higher worlds and feels their action upon himself. He has to work out his destiny with the Divine help upon this terrestrial globe. This has been determined by a supreme wisdom and power. When we read *Savitri* after going through the message of Gita, it strikes us that the characters are different but the essence is one, the journey is different but the destination is one. Sri Krishna chose Arjuna to preach his gospel and Arjuna's problem, the dilemma which is ultimately the dilemma of mankind could be solved only with the grace of lord Krishna.

The Indian conception of the Avatar, the descent of the divine in the earth-consciousness, undergoes a profound change in the character of Savitri. In the current Indian conception an avatar is not supposed to participate in human imperfections and is beyond all mistakes and sufferings. He comes down to do a divine work. He is in humanity but not a part of it. His experiences are not like those of other man. Sri Aurobindo for the first time has brought out clearly the necessity of complete identification in his nature part by the Avatar with the nature of man in order to save humanity. This identification is an act of divine compassion.

Thus the epic creates a human divine character Savitri and also succeeds in making all

the inner spiritual experiences of man real, concrete and direct. This example describes the work of the goddess of inspiration;-

...in darkness' core she dug out wells of light,
On the undiscovered depths imposed a form,
Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,
And through great shoreless, voiceless ... breaths
Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought
Hewn from silence of the ineffable. (*Savitri*: B.I C.3)

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* in its origin, its realm of experience and in some of its expressions – is comparable to the highest spiritual poetry of the world, the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita. His work adds to the rich spiritual treasures of the past by giving to mankind his great vision of the Supermind and by his insistence that life must be related to the Divine if man wants the true solution to his problems in the same way as Arjuna's problems got solved due to the God-Friend, Soul Master Sri Krishna.

In Bhagavad Gita, the eleventh chapter giving the vision of the Vishwarupa, the Cosmic Divine, bears a resemblance to some portions of *Savitri*. One can find the resemblance in the utterance of Arjuna, his exaltation of the Vishwarupa with the colloquy of Aswapathy and the Divine Mother in the third Book.

Measured for man by the initiate gods.
My light shall be in thee, my strength thy force.
Only one boon, to greaten thy spirit,demand:
Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire.
Above blind fate and the antagonist powers
Moveless there stands a high unchanging Will:
To its omnipotence leave thy work's result.
All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.

Similarly one can find the similar expression in Gita from the conversation between Arjuna and Krishna:

Declare to me who Thou art that wearest this form of Fierceness. Salutation to Thee, O Thou great Godhead, Turn Thy heart to grace. I would know who Thou art who Wast from the beginning, for I know not the will of Thy workings. The Blessed Lord said: I am the Time-Spirit, destroyer of the world, arisen huge-statured for the destruction of the nations.. Even without thee all these warriors shall be not, who are ranked in the opposing armies. Therefore arise, get thee glory, conquer thy enemies and enjoy an opulent kingdom. By me and none other Already even are they slain, do thou become the occasion Only, O Savyasachin.

The poetry of *Savitri* came to Sri Aurobindo from the Overhead regions of inspiration and even beyond that. Like all Indian scriptures and Veda and Upanishads, *Savitri* also opens a realm of inner experiences.

The idea of self in all and all in self finds itself in Gita as well as in *Savitri*. The mystic self is present in all in hidden form:

“Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all.” (*Savitri*: B.II, C.2)

And

“.....a larger self

That lives within us, by ourselves unseen;” (*Savitri*: B.I, C.4)

A great change came over the consciousness of Aswapathy as a result of his awakening to inner light which is expressed in Savitri ad “A great reversal of Night and Day”. The same idea is conveyed through Gita as described in the condition of the sage.

“That which is Night to all the beings, in it wakes the man who controls the self : that in which the creatures awake, is to the awakened sage, the dark Night.” 2.69

When the secret presence of the divine in the heart begins to manifest, it becomes, “a living image seated in the heart”(Book I,Canto 4). There is a similarity in the tone of expression with the below verse of Gita.

“The Lord abides in the heart of all beings.” (Gita XVIII)

The Spiritual delight and oneness of eternal lovers, Prakriti and Purusha deeply engrossed in love in Savitri also finds an expression in Gita with the love of Bhakta and the Lord. The Purusha opens himself to Prakriti and the Prakriti makes an effort to rise to the highest realms of the Purusha. Savitri carries the supreme Mantra due to its mantric language, similar to the language of Vedas and scriptures.

Thus Savitri and Bhagvad Gita both serve as the eternal truth or the cosmic answer to the cosmic riddle.

In Savitri king Aswapathy also sits for Tapasya to find the reason of existence and to get the divine boon. Similarly Arjuna also brings up several questions filled with the dilemma of meaningful and meaningless existence.

Gita, like Savitri begins from a critical situation in life. Sri Aurobindo says that the poet of Gita has the conscious intention of laying the form of unity on the soul of the hearer and help him to seek the experience. “He is the greatest Yogin who, come happiness by that or come grief, sees wherever he turns his eyes all equally in the image of his self.” Savitri also talks about the same equality.

Sri Aurobindo yoga may not be identical with the yoga of Gita but it contains all that is essential in the yoga of Gita. Though Gita does not speak of surrender to the Divine Mother like Savitri but talks about complete surrender to the Purushottama. Still commonly in both, there is no fulfilment in yoga without aspiration, rejection and surrender. Sri Aurobindo says about Gita,- “I may say that the way of the Gita is itself a part of the yoga here and those who have followed it, to begin with or at a first stage, have a stronger basis than others for this yoga.” The same applies to the great epic *Savitri*.

BEAUTY AND DELIGHT



(Source: Internet)

Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.

Sri Aurobindo

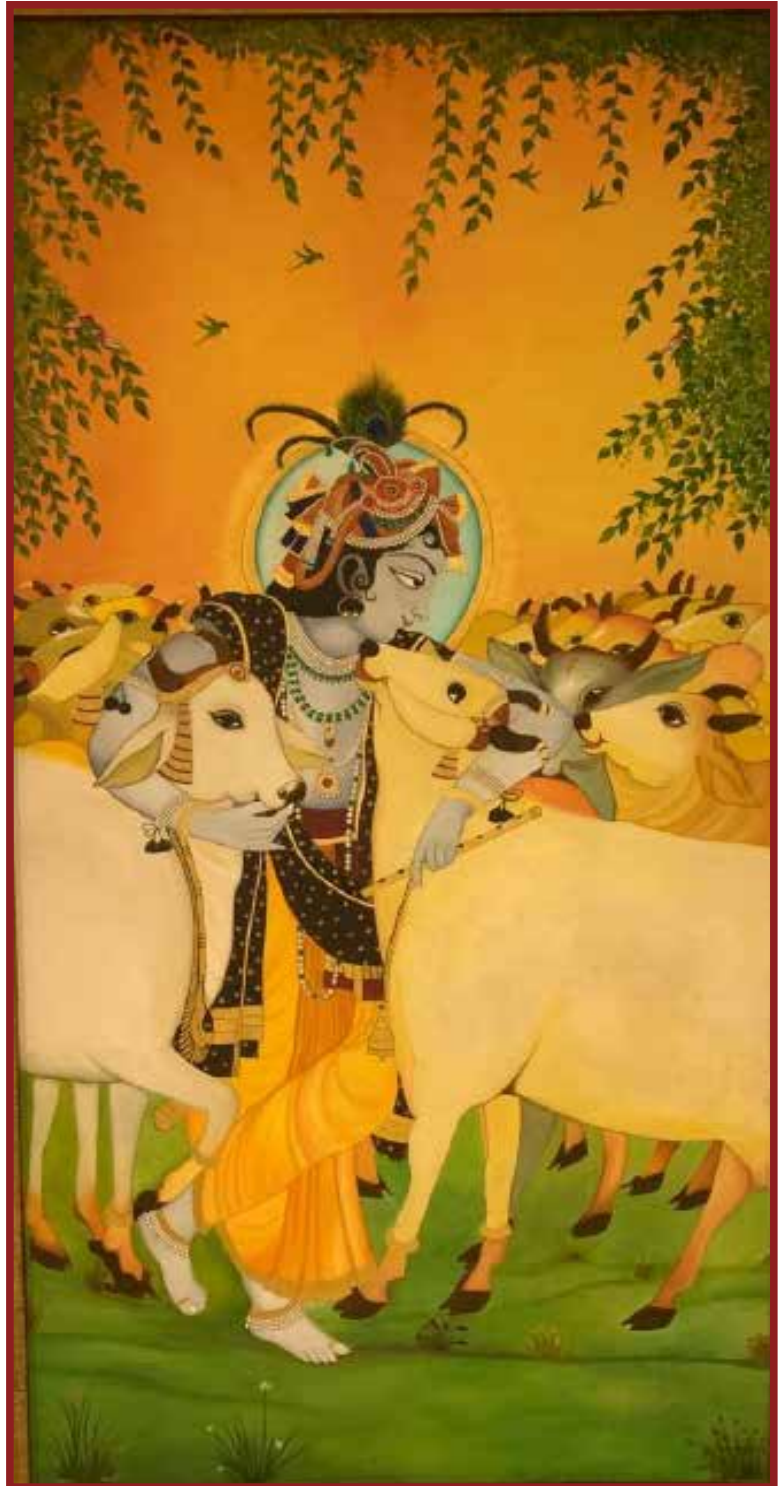
National Value of Art - IV

Sri Aurobindo

We now come to the kernel of the subject, the place of art in the evolution of the race and its value in the education and actual life of a nation. The first question is whether the sense of the beautiful has any effect on the life of a nation. It is obvious, from what we have already written, that the manners, the social culture and the restraint in action and expression which are so large a part of national prestige and dignity and make a nation admired like the French, loved like the Irish or respected like the higher-class English, are based essentially on the sense of form and beauty, of what is correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair to the eye and pleasing to the imagination. The absence of these qualities is a source of national weakness. The rudeness, coarseness and vulgar violence of the less cultured Englishman, the overbearing brusqueness and selfishness of the Prussian have greatly hampered those powerful nations in their dealings with foreigners, dependencies and even their own friends, allies, colonies. We all know what a large share the manner and ordinary conduct of the average and of the vulgar Anglo-Indian has had in bringing about the revolt of the Indian, accustomed through ages to courtesy, dignity and the amenities of an equal intercourse, against the mastery of an obviously coarse and selfish community. Now the sense of form and beauty, the correct, symmetrical, well-adjusted, fair and pleasing is an artistic sense and can best be fostered in a nation by artistic culture of the perceptions and sensibilities. It is noteworthy that the two great nations who are most hampered by the defect of these qualities in action are also the least imaginative, poetic and artistic in Europe. It is the South German who contributes the art, poetry and music of Germany, the Celt and Norman who produce great poets and a few great artists in England without altering the characteristics of the dominant Saxon. Music is even more powerful in this direction than Art and by the perfect expression of harmony insensibly steeps the man in it. And it is noticeable that England has hardly produced a single musician worth the name. Plato in his Republic has dwelt with extraordinary emphasis on the importance of music in education; as is the music to which a people is accustomed, so, he says in effect, is the character of that people. The importance of painting and sculpture is hardly less. The mind is profoundly influenced by what it sees and, if the eye is trained from the days of childhood to the contemplation and understanding of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in line and colour, the tastes, habits and character will be insensibly trained to follow a similar law of beauty, harmony and just arrangement in the life of the adult man. This was the great importance of the universal proficiency in the arts and crafts or the appreciation of them which was prevalent in ancient Greece, in certain European ages, in Japan and in the better days of our own history. Art galleries cannot be brought into every home, but, if all the appointments of our life and furniture of our homes are things of taste and beauty, it is inevitable that the habits, thoughts and feelings of the people should be raised, ennobled, harmonised, made more sweet and dignified.

A similar result is produced on the emotions by the study of beautiful or noble art. We have spoken of the purification of the heart, the *citta śuddhi*, which Aristotle assigned as the essential office of poetry, and have pointed out that it is done in poetry by the detached and disinterested enjoyment of the eight *rasas* or forms of emotional aestheticism which

make up life, unalloyed by the disturbance of the lower self-regarding passions. Painting and sculpture work in the same direction by different means. Art sometimes uses the same means as poetry but cannot do it to the same extent because it has not the movement of poetry; it is fixed, still, it expresses only a given moment, a given point in space and cannot move freely through time and region. But it is precisely this stillness, this calm, this fixity which gives its separate value to Art. Poetry raises the emotions and gives each its separate delight. Art stills the emotions and teaches them the delight of a restrained and limited satisfaction,—this indeed was the characteristic that the Greeks, a nation of artists far more artistic than poetic, tried to bring into their poetry. Music deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other. Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious. These, therefore, are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity on its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are, when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilising forces. (CWSA 1: 446-448)



Painting by Ms. Sushila Prakash

Sri Aurobindo on Poets and Poetry

Oeendrilla Guha

In this series of articles, I shall be taking up one literary stalwart at a time and study him in the light of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo has made unique and piercing observations on many literary personalities to help us understand their poetic genius and sources of inspiration.

Geoffrey Chaucer

The first literary personality is Geoffrey Chaucer. Who was Geoffrey Chaucer that Sri Aurobindo opines, “The high energy of English poetry has... portrayed life with charm and poetic interest in Chaucer...” (CWSA 26: 265) In fact, Sri Aurobindo dedicated a chapter titled “Chaucer and the Poetry of External Life” to Chaucer in *The Future Poetry*. Before looking into the comments made by Sri Aurobindo on Chaucer, let us, in brief, look at the period he belonged to and his contributions to English literature.

He belonged to the 14th century Britain. At a time when French was the courtly language and aristocratic literature was written in French, Italian and Latin, Chaucer, despite belonging to the gentle classes and being a member of the royal court of Britain, decided to write in English, which was not considered a gentleman’s language. By refining English, he made it a courtly language, but he did not use it to write aristocratic literature. The *Canterbury Tales* is no aristocratic literature but the literature of the English society with its divergent classes and their non-aristocratic occupations. So, Sri Aurobindo says, “The first early motive and style of this poetry as it emerges in Chaucer strikes at once an English note.” (CWSA 26: 66)

Chaucer’s language too bears witness to the “English note” for in the fashion of Dante, who helped enrich the Italian vocabulary, Chaucer invented and added words to the limited English vocabulary to make it a befitting tool for the scribe. Sri Aurobindo astutely states, “Chaucer gives English poetry a first shape by... the work of Italian masters...” (CWSA 26: 65-66) Thus, Chaucer is known as “the father of English literature”, or “the father of English poetry”. It is small wonder that in the chapter “The Character of English Poetry-2”, Sri Aurobindo writes, “We can mark off first the early English poetry which found its solitary greater expression in Chaucer.” (CWSA 26: 57) Hence, the relevance of Chaucer in the character formation of English poetry.

In the chapter entitled “Chaucer and the Poetry of External Life”, Sri Aurobindo notes in the very first line, “The Spirit and temper that have stood behind the creative force and come to the front in a literature are the one essential thing that we must discern, for it is these that predestine the course the poetry of a people will take and the turn it gives to its forms.” (CWSA 26: 63) So, according to Sri Aurobindo, the essential law of poetry is to capture the Spirit, but then the question arises did Geoffrey Chaucer manage to capture the Spirit in English literature in the 14th century?

The Canterbury Tales, considered as Chaucer’s master piece, is a collection of twenty-four satirical tales written as poetic fragments that shed light on the English society with its range of classes and types of people. Each tale is recounted by a person, and thus customs

and practices of the 14th century are made known to the reader by the knight, the miller, the cook, the man of law, the steward, the friar, the housewife, the squire, the merchant, the physician, the clerk, the nun, etc. As you can see, the poet addresses the aspects of trade, economy, medicine, cooking, family customs, law, and so on, which were then considered as non-aristocratic occupations.

The cook narrates the tale of an apprentice cook, who is a womanizer, and a gambler. He is dismissed from his job. He moves in with a friend whose wife owns a shop that

is a front for prostitution. This story exemplifies the “external life” of the English society, which was altogether dismissed in aristocratic literature for its crudity and immoral passions. The “life” element in the English society was controlled by the Church that dictated morals to regulate unbecoming passions. The wife of Bath is the archetypal 14th century housewife, who likes riches and fashion, and yet she is a fault-finder and gossipmonger. The tale she recounts is of a knight ravishing a young woman. This tale is filled with sexual violence and proves that sexual violence committed on women was a common practice during the latter half of the Middle Ages. The miller’s tale is on an adulterous wife. As you can see The Canterbury Tales depicts “no such great conscious idea or natural uplifting motive or spirit” (CWSA 26: 68) since the characters simply recount their day-to-day experiences that were shaped by the environment they belonged to.

So, the answer to the question did Geoffrey Chaucer manage to capture the Spirit in English literature in the 14th century is clearly ‘no’. Sri Aurobindo points out that his

...motive is a direct and concrete poetic observation of ordinary human life and character. There is no preoccupying idea, no ulterior design; life, the external figure and surface of things is reflected... Chaucer has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the visible action of life as it passes before him... He does not seek to add anything to it or to see anything below it or behind its outsides. He is not concerned to look at all into the souls or deeply into the minds of the men and women whose appearance, action and easily apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity. There is no call on the poet yet to ask himself what is the meaning of all this movement of life... He is not moved to interpret life... (CWSA 26: 66)

As you can observe, Chaucer’s works suffer from a complete success “in the intellectual or spiritual interpretation of life...” (CWSA 26: 63) So, for the Spirit to come to the front in English literature, “The first definite starting-point of this long movement is the poetry

A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.
Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
And thereto hadde he riden (no man ferre)
As wel in cristendom as hethenesse,
And evere honoured for his worthinesse.

(*Canterbury Tales*)

of Chaucer.” (CWSA 26: 65) This is why Sri Aurobindo acknowledges Chaucer’s initial contributions to forming the spine of English literature.

(Watch the talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOG2J7he1fE>)

Edmund Spenser

The second literary personality is Edmund Spenser. Let us try to understand his poetic genius and source of inspiration in the light of Sri Aurobindo. According to Sri Aurobindo if the essential law of poetry is to capture the Spirit, then the question arises did Edmund Spenser make contributions to the character formation of English poetry, and did he capture the Spirit in English literature in the 16th century Britain?

Of *The Faerie Queene*, which has been one of the many topics of deliberation in *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo states:

The *Faerie Queene* is indeed a poem of unfailing imaginative charm and its two opening cantos are exquisite in execution; there is a stream of liquid harmony, of curiously opulent, yet finely tempered description, of fluid poetical phrase and minutely seen image. For these are Spenser’s constant gifts, the native form of his genius which displays more of descriptive vision than of any larger creative power or narrative force. An inspired idea is worked out... (CWSA 26: 83)

The epic poem exemplifies both “descriptive vision” and “an inspired idea” in its symbolic rendering of virtues and vices personified as knights, princesses and queens. It is a typical example of allegorical literature to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline” (Spenser 15-16) since each character in the epic poem represents a virtue or vice, such as married love, glory, chastity, chivalry, justice, magnificence, holiness, courtesy, friendship, temperance, falsehood, and so on. A religious and symbolic war takes place between the good and the evil. The allegory of the good and the evil is symbolic as well as religious as the epic poem seeks to establish “true” or Protestant Church and destabilize “false” or Catholic Church. Queen Elizabeth I represents the Protestant Church, and Mary, Queen of Scots symbolizes the Catholic Church. This is why Sri Aurobindo notes that in Spenser, the Elizabethan mind

...takes the impressions of the surrounding physical world as hints only for a purely imaginative creation which seems to be truly drawn... from a more beautiful and harmonious life-scene that exists either within our own unplumbed depths or on other subtler vital or physical planes. This creation has an aim in it at things symbolic..., and it tries to shadow them out through the magic of romance... (CWSA 26: 88)

Sri Aurobindo appreciates Spenser’s efforts at making human figures the medium through whom the good and the evil play out their oppositions, but he simultaneously points out that these human figures “cannot be merely the good or the evil, this or that virtue or vice; they should stand for them as their expressive opportunity of life, not merely as their allegorical body.” (CWSA 26: 85) Hence, these figures remain in the hand of Spenser “vague and negligible” because they are at best romantic figures with the sole purpose of promoting one church over another.

It is small wonder Sri Aurobindo calls Spenser “the poet of second magnitude of the time” (CWSA 26: 83). There is another reason why Spenser was “the poet of second magnitude”, and it is because even though *The Faerie Queene* has “unfailing imaginative charm” (CWSA 26: 83), it “could not have come to a successful completion.” (CWSA 26: 84) And this Sri Aurobindo considers to be “a defect of the artistic intellect, a vice or insufficiency in its original power of harmonising construction, characteristic of the Elizabethan, almost of the English mind.” (CWSA 26: 84) This means that in Spenser’s case, regardless of the “life-spirit” being drawn from “within our own unplumbed depths or on other subtler vital or physical planes” (CWSA 26: 88), the poet failed to capture

... that depth of profounder substance and that self-possessing plenitude of form which are the other and indispensable elements of a rounded artistic creation... the music of a deeper spirit or higher significance we have to wait... (CWSA 26: 83)

The answer to the question did Edmund Spenser make contributions to the character formation of English poetry is ‘yes’. But did he manage to capture the Spirit in English literature in the 16th century Britain? The answer is ‘no’. Although he succeeded in interpreting life and human beings as storehouses of negative and positive feelings and energies unlike Geoffrey Chaucer, he could not go beyond the ethical and religious implications of the institution called the Church. So, Sri Aurobindo concludes that Spenser was a poet of “a high order, great in spite of an eventual failure”. (CWSA 26: 73)

For whatsoever from one place doth fall,
Is with the tide unto an other brought:
For there is nothing lost, that may be found, if sought.”
The Faerie Queene

If Geoffrey Chaucer is considered as the first memorable craftsmen of Middle English verse, Edmund Spenser is considered as the first memorable craftsmen of Modern English verse although it is universally accepted that Spenser contributed a negligible amount to English language. His vocabulary was largely classical and austere. In fact, after Geoffrey Chaucer, it was Shakespeare, who introduced new words into English language. Spenser’s contribution as the first memorable craftsmen of Modern English verse is limited to the Spenserian sonnet in which fourteen lines are grouped as three quatrains followed by a couplet.

To conclude, Britain emerged as the most powerful nation in Europe under the astute governance of Queen Elizabeth I. It was customary to dedicate works to one’s patron. As Queen Elizabeth I was Spenser’s patron, he dedicated as well as praised her in the character of Gloriana in *The Faerie Queene*, which is the first epic poem in Modern English and also the first epic poem in Modern English written in honour of an unmarried reigning queen.

(Watch the talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OGFySA57Ps>)

Christopher Marlowe: The poet who “knows that the human soul in action is his subject”

The third literary personality Christopher Marlowe. Let us try to understand his poetic genius and source of inspiration in the light of Sri Aurobindo. According to Sri Aurobindo if the essential law of poetry is to capture the Spirit, then the question arises did Christopher Marlowe capture the Spirit in English literature in the 16th century Britain?

Of Marlowe Sri Aurobindo comments in *The Future Poetry*:

Marlowe alone of the lesser Elizabethan dramatists stands apart from his fellows... because he knows what he is about; he alone has some clearly grasped dramatic idea... He knows that the human soul in action is his subject and Karma the power of the theme, and he attempts to create a drama of the human will throwing itself on life, the will egoistic and Asuric, conquering only to succumb to the great adversary Death or breaking itself against the forces its violence has brought into hostile play. This is certainly a high and fit subject for tragic creation... (CWSA 26: 77)

“The will egoistic and Asuric, conquering only to succumb to the great adversary Death” (CWSA 26: 77) may be interpreted as a reference to Dr. Faustus, the rebel hero of the play titled *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus*, who is created in the image of a fallen angel. This dramatic creation is “certainly a high and fit subject for tragic creation” (CWSA 26: 77) because Faustus’ desire to seek impermissible knowledge as opposed to traditional and canonical knowledge is only partially fulfilled.

Dr. Faustus is the quintessential Renaissance scholar who is dissatisfied with the conventional or Church-approved forms of knowledge of law, logic, religion and medicine. He feels his intelligence is wasted. So, he wants to delve into magic and necromancy to fathom the nature of Hell, who created the world, certain science-related questions. He approaches the Devil to learn of these metaphysical secrets since they have been denied to him and humanity by the religious institution called the Church. So, Dr. Faustus pawns his soul to the Devil to seek his answers. The Devil promises him twenty-four years during which Dr. Faustus has the power to incant magic to learn of these secrets, but instead of remaining persistent in his quest for the greater knowledge, he uses it for fulfilling pleasures and earning fame. At the end of twenty-four years, he realises his time is up. He does not want his soul to be carried off to Hell, but he cannot repent for his sins.

It is here that Christopher Marlowe fails to surpass the Biblical concept of sin and punishment. Dr. Faustus, who earlier sought liberation by reason and seeking a certain kind of knowledge unapproved by the Church, is finally reduced to a symbol of hedonism and mental ego and is damned. Faustus is the human reason and will in action in its zealous pursuit of the knowledge of the unknowable. He can be compared to the tree in the poem “A Tree” by Sri Aurobindo: “earth-bound” but “heaven-amorous.” (CWSA 2: 207) He is so fascinated by what his mind can see and do that he forgets his initial aim of finding convincing answers to the nature of Hell, who created the world, certain science-related questions. For twenty-four years he fails to notice that a part of him is using his reason to satisfy pleasures. In that case, on one fine day can he suddenly come to the realization that he has sinned? It seems improbable.

The question arises if Dr. Faustus feels sinful and remorseful, why cannot he repent? It may be because his individual reason does not accept that he has sinned, but his collective unconscious, which is the database of certain cultural and collective practices of his people, acts up. Here, we see that he is clearly torn between his individual reason and collective unconscious. And the view that is parroted is individual reason is egoistic as it challenges traditions and canons. Dr. Faustus' hubris is his desire in wanting to apply his individual reason to know more than what is deemed correct or right by the Church. This dilemma is sensed by Sri Aurobindo who aptly notes:

He is unable to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures; in the external manner so common in English poetry and fiction he rather constructs than evolves, portrays than throws out into life, paints up or sculptures from outside than creates from within, — and yet it is this other inward way that is the sole true method of poetic or at least of dramatic creation. He has not, either, the indispensable art of construction... (CWSA 26: 77-78)

Dr. Faustus can be said to be “a strong work” for tackling the fresh topic of individual reason taking on conventions of the Middle Ages, but it falls “short of greatness of a masterpiece because even though it begins as a dramatic criticism of the Church, it fails “to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures” for Dr. Faustus' reason does not come across new horizons of knowledge in the universe. It doubts and questions faith and religion but fails to come to “a deeper self-awareness”. His reason is caught at the crossroad of religion and knowledge. Sri Aurobindo points out that Marlowe, catering to a “semi-barbarous public” whose mind was not developed to tastes that were of intellectual order, himself “had not flexibility enough to bring within its scope or to elevate towards its level” (CWSA 26: 78) the complex topic of individual reason triumphing against the prevailing conventional practices of the Middle Ages.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Dr. Faustus

So, the answer to the question did Christopher Marlowe capture the Spirit in English literature in the 16th century Britain is ‘no’, but he was a step closer to capturing the Spirit than his predecessors Geoffrey Chaucer and Edmund Spenser were. According to Sri Aurobindo, Chaucer dealt with the ‘external life’ of the English society, and Spenser drew “a more beautiful and harmonious life-scene that exists either within our own unplumbed depths or on other subtler vital or physical planes”. (CWSA 26: 88) Considering what Sri Aurobindo spoke of Marlowe, he seems to have ushered in the stage of individual reason in his dramatic creations, and therein lies his contribution to English literature of the 16th century Britain. Now, we can see the impression of a gradual evolution of the human consciousness in English literature.

(Talk yet to be streamed)

Smiling Beauty

Deepshikha Reddy



The Deliverer

V. Ananda Reddy

When the wind-swept fields
Lay stretched, swooning in the sun,
Our Brother stood there, his mind
Swept with reflections from the future.

Crowding came into his mind's eye
Images of pagodas of knowledge,
And towering temples of wisdom:
All haloed in cathedrals of faith.

Hid bronze brow of wide wisdom
Steeped in India's ancient thought,
Was now aflame with inspiration
And a shaft of love entered his heart.

On the Freshy Day, framed in the Sala Thai,
He spoke fiery words born of love for motherland,
And utterances burdened with the Motto:
The golden words: "Labour Conquers All".

Himself a towering figure of the Ideal,
Is like the heavenward fountain – jet
That disturbs the sleeping silent waters,
Which reflect the meditating Sala-Thai.

On a sunny morning, him I saw
In robes of purity, walking along the pond,
Shaded by the merciful emerald trees,
And burdened with visions of a greater ABAC.

Stepping along the serpentine slippery path,
He looked around, every look filled
With the inner peace of satisfaction,
And sparkling with the glow of a large serenity.

Arresting my hurried steps, I wished him,
A gentle smile responded, reassuring,
And far more consoling to a strung heart,
Than all the smooth bureaucratic promises.

Treasured is that fleeting moment,
In the secret alcove of my heart;
Nobility striding amid the verdurous bowers,
Along the lazy, winding shadowy path.

Beautiful bamboo branches bow down
Filtering the laced sky above;

The rhapsodic orchids leap out of trees
Stunning the passer-by with deep bloom.

The luxurious shade-plants peep out,
With sunlight kissing their wide cheeks!
All this, a perfect picture of Keatsian dream:
“A thing of beauty is a joy forever”.

Hidden in this dappled green vault,
Marble-like statues of Venus and Aphrodite,
Sing in silence and whisper in agony,
Immemorial songs of parted love.

This filtering beauty bordering the pond,
Is reflected in the quiet lapping waters,
Wherein white angelic swans,
Paddle carefree, scattering grace.

Often when they unfurl their wings
It seems rainbows escape their plumage.
They encircle my fatigued heart
And quicken in me rhythms of joy.

Then the bird in my heart takes wing
Chasing the spreading rainbows,
And my being flutters in gratitude
Thinking of our Brother and his aesthetic eye.

Catholic in thinking, benevolent at heart,
His soul wrapped in the religion of man,
A dreamer of environmental beauty
And a builder of tall dreams, our Brother is.

Reclining in the shelter of the Queen's Tower,
Brother Martin now scans new horizons:
To turn the sun-kissed fields of Bangra
Into a sanctuary of culture and an oasis of beauty.

A precursor, inflamed with high purpose,
With stupendous tasks as his signature,
His immense deeds speak loud for themselves,
Surpassing all our efforts in rhetoric and rhyme.

The only way, to lionize this august man,
On his haloed fifth cycle birth anniversary,
Is to pray for him, and to share in his dream,
Guarding him closely in our grateful hearts.

(22-12-1993)

LIFE



(Source: <https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-qijrb>)

A touch of God's rapture in creation's acts,
A lost remembrance of felicity
Lurks still in the dumb roots of death and birth,
The world's senseless beauty mirrors God's delight.
That rapture's smile is secret everywhere;
It flows in the wind's breath, in the tree's sap,
Its hued magnificence blooms in leaves and flowers.
When life broke through its half-drowse in the plant
That feels and suffers but cannot move or cry,
In beast and in winged bird and thinking man
It made of the heart's rhythm its music's beat;
It forced the unconscious tissues to awake
And ask for happiness and earn the pang
And thrill with pleasure and laughter of brief delight,
And quiver with pain and crave for ecstasy.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*: 139)

Did Ancient Indians Travel?

The Idea, Praxis, and Economy of Travel in the Jātaka Tales

Revanth Ukkalam

The Jātakas are an integral section of the Pali Canon and early Buddhism. In the current arrangement, the Jātakas are placed in the Khuddaka Nikāya of the *Sutta Pitaka*. In these stories the Bodhisattvas are embodiments of several perfections that humans were to aim for. The five hundred odd stories, although tales related to the future-Buddha (or Bodhisattva as these figures are called) lives, seemed to flaunt a quality of the quotidian. They deal with ordinary traders, caravans, cities and villages, peasants and lords, and even animals. The Jātakas paint a highly mobile world – where the world is brought closer through the traveling men, women, and communities.

It is worthy first perhaps to look at the geographical spread of the Jātakas. The prologues of the Jātakas are set in the Jetavana at Sāvatti. The bulk of the Jātakas begin with the line “when Brahmadata ruled Varanasi.” While the reign of the king Brahmadata was to give the stories a temporal context and a reference to the audience of the text and stories, most of the Jātakas themselves take place in Varanasi. Where travel features, the starting point is often Varanasi only. The next most frequent location and common destination for the composers of the tales is Takkasilā in the Gāndhāra country – an important cultural, political, and economic centre.

Moreover, the geography of the Jātakas stretches the entire subcontinent. Prayāgain Gangeyya Jātaka(151), Ujjain in Guttala Jātaka(243), Kalingain Tittira(438) and Chullakalinga(301), Āndhrain Bhimasena(80), ‘Damila’ or the Tamil country and particularly Kaveripattinam in Akitta(480) find mention in the Jātaka tales.

Ancient Indian sources are often silent on the larger world beyond the subcontinent. It is worth noting – in light of this paradigm – that part of Valahassa Jātaka (196) takes place in Sinhala Island or Sri Lanka. Baveru in the title of the BaveruJātaka (339) is said to be a Pali rendition of Babylon. The Supparaka Jātaka (463) depicts the trade route that touches Broach in India and then to West Asia. The Mahājanaka(539) and Sankha (431) Jātakas gloriously portray the journeys made by traders to Suvarnabhumi which is often translated to South East Asia.

The Jātakas throw up an array of reasons and purposes to venture out and travel – ranging from love to war and trade to tradition. Looking at the Jātakas through the prism of travel unlocks the various phases of life and critical moments of social interaction.

Let us begin with traveling to give birth. Deeply reminiscent of the story of Krishna in the Bhāgavata, in the Ghata Jātaka (454), fearing homicide in the hands of the harsh ruler Kamsa, Devagabbha’s sons are exchanged with Nandagopa’s daughters. For that purpose Upasagara travels to the village of Govaddhamana to keep Nandagopa in charge – and of course Vasudeva and Baladeva travel to the capital to slay their uncle and again, to save their mother’s line. In the Ananusociya Jātaka (328), the Bodhisattvas’ parents “sent forth some emissaries with a large escort, and bade them place the golden image in a covered carriage

and go and search through the plains of India” and find the suitable maiden for their son. In the Kusa Jātaka (531), the physically displeasing Bodhisattva is rejected by his newly-wedded wife and he travels to recuperate from the heartbreak.

Among the rulers, formal education seems to have been a sign of an ideal king; and for the advisors of royalty, education is even more eagerly sought. Brahmins and princes living in Varanasi take great pains to pursue education and they palpably do this almost exclusively in the hub of Takkasilā. In 109 Jātakas in the collection published by Cowell we find mention of Takkasilā and in most of these, Takkasilā is the destination for cultural-educational reasons. We are told that an education at Takkasilā not only facilitated the imparting of essential technical knowledge but transcendental wisdom. In some tales, those educated at Takkasilā strive to perfect themselves through practice – which again often involves travel. In the Rajovada Jātaka, Prince Brahmadata of Varanasi at the age of sixteen studies all the sciences at Takkasilā and returns to Kashi to rule as a king. However he is not content with his personality and would like to discover his vices and hone himself. To that end he begins traveling again – he tours his whole city, the frontiers, and villages outside and encounters none willing to state his vices. Once, his path is blocked by the chariot of Mallika of Kosala kingdom. When neither is willing to give way, they begin to list their vices to see who is greater among them. It is discovered (to no surprise) that Brahmadata is greater – and he teaches Mallika to tour the world and learn his own vices. It is revealed then that Mallika had gone on this expedition because he too, like Brahmadata, had learned at Takkasilā. The Kunala Jātaka (536) also talks about learning through travel and interaction with peoples of the continent. Here, five brothers and sons of Pāndu, Ajjuna, Nakula, Bhīmasena, Yuddhitthila, Sahadeva – evidently inspired from the Mahabharata – get trained at yet again, Takkasilā, and begin journeying to the East, in the direction of the plains and the city of Varanasi. The narrator says that the five brothers were “travelling about with the idea of mastering local customs.”

The Chullakalinga Jātaka (301), the first Jātaka in the Chatukkanipata book narrates two very interesting stories of travel. The first lay in the prologue itself – which as stated previously is customarily placed in the Jetavana of Savatthi. Here travel is performed for an unusual cause – argumentation. The Buddha relays that in Vesali, that Licchavis, seven thousand seven hundred and seven took abode. At that time the nuns and monks of the Jain order were accustomed to debating. Travel in some Jātakas comes particularly close to the contemporary romantic idea – journeying in pursuit of pleasure and unpredictability. In the Samudda Vanijha Jātaka (466), a group of carpenters in the city of Varanasi decide to escape from the troubles of work and free themselves from the bonds of debts by fleeing to a remote island.

There is an entire complex of civil life that demanded travel and has been left out in this exposition: politics. In the Kamanita Jātaka (228), the king of Varanasi employs a Brahmin to capture three cities near modern day-Delhi and NCR, Uttaranchal, Indrapatna, and Kekaya. It is also mentioned that for this purpose the Brahmin must be offered lodging and wherewithal. It is fit perhaps to mention the Chulla-Kalinga Jātaka now again. In the main

story, the king Kalinga has been ruling Kalinga from Dantapura. Threatened by his mighty army, no state wished to attack or fight Kalinga. Prompted by his advisors, the king parades his four beautiful daughters in foreign states to challenge them for a combat.

What allowed the Bodhisattvas and the other characters in the Jātakas to travel was a road system and a means of transportation that connected major cities and important market centres. Such infrastructure was entailed in the project of hospitality that was supported by local kings. The Kulavaka Jātaka(31) talks of a Bodhisattva who consolidates a group of young men who work on repairs of roads and dig wells and plant trees. The Guthapana Jātaka(227) also mentions in passing, a guesthouse on the Anga-Magadha highway where travelers could rest at night. This guesthouse is also said to have been packed with alcohol and food. Additionally, the Anabhirati Jātaka (65) claims that highways, waterways, and taverns extend “one universal hospitality” to all alike.

A survey of the Jātakas and the appearance of the travelers’ tales make one ponder if there is in the Jātakas – a coherent idea, a philosophy, or an ideology of travel? According to the Jātakas – in other words – was it advisable to travel?

Let me begin with one particular Jātaka: the Telapatta. In this Jātaka, the Bodhisattva is born as a prince to King Brahmadatta while he reigned over Varanasi. The Bodhisattva is curious about the likelihood of his becoming emperor of Kashi. Once, when Paccekabuddhas visit the capital, the prince asks them if he could earn the throne somehow – and they respond by saying that in Varanasi it is not possible but if within a week he can reach Takkasilā, the capital of Gandhara, he will ascend as a king. The catch however is – the journey by the road to Takkasilā takes double the time that the forested route does. Telapatta takes the challenge of trekking through the forest to reach Takkasilā. The challenge thrown before the Bodhisattva here is highly demonstrative of several ideas: of kingship, of travel, of heroism etc. What value would a prince or contender to a throne display in quickly reaching a state capital that places him firmly as a suitable candidate for kingship? What ties Buddhahood to entering the forest?

At one level, the answer to the question is not too difficult. Courage and valour have been and are valued as great virtues that royalty must possess. The unpredictability of the forest and road-lessness is a brilliant arena to put these qualities to test; and none know it better than the writers of the Jātakas. Many a Jātaka are spun around the fears of traveling. In the Vannupatha (2), the Bodhisattva misled in his astronomical observations wrongly navigates his trading caravan. Pitchers of water that had been carried by the traders are thrown away before they realise that they had lost their way. Like water, food too. In the Kimpakka Jātaka (85), a caravan master tells his men not to consume unknown fruits for they could be poisonous; and to inquire from him before plucking any fruit. In relation to food practices, the Jātakas even articulate the fear of losing caste! In the Satadhamma(179), a Brahmin wanders away after borrowing the food of a Shudra, who also happens to be the Bodhisattva – and ultimately dies. In each of these cases the lack of state-controlled infrastructure is a cause of fear. Only through the mustering of courage can challenges like these be overcome.

It could be argued that the rubric for a sound prince in Jātakas like the Telapatta is extended to a true Bodhisattva as well. Why? The response, we hear in another Jātaka. In the Khurappa Jātaka, the Bodhisattva states that he is not afraid of robbers because the ultimate fear – fear of death does not move him. Both the Bodhisattvas articulate that fear comes from a place of attachment – to possessions, to wealth, and of course, to life. A fearless person is one who does not stand attached to what are considered essentials. In the Telapatta and Khurappa, travel through the forest, conquering robbers as well as ogresses engulfs a more personal journey, a spiritual travel so to speak. The conquering of these elements and sources of fright involves the rejection and outgrowing of ‘infrastructure’ which by extension, begins to appear like a metaphor to the manifold attachments in lived experience. This is a travel from a space of illusion to wisdom, attachment to freedom, and fear to courage.

And how does this arise from the thought of the Buddha? The concept of Dukkha, of course. The cessation of Dukkha or suffering is facilitated only through the fostering of detachment. The Bodhisattva accomplishes this in the Khurappa Jātaka and the prince truly becomes eligible to rule Takkasilā at the end by learning to be detached – and through travel. What allows their transformation is not their imminent Buddhahood but their travel experience only.

While representing the attachment that men may have with possessions, the Jātakas also depict human want for homeostasis and pointedly, the congruence of stasis and attachment. In the Darimukha, the point of departure of the Bodhisattva – towards Buddhahood lay in his recognition of the offset of stasis. In this Jātaka, Darimukha a Brahmin and Brahmadata are friends and peers at Takkasilā. They sleep on the same floor, eat the same kind of food, and study the same arts and sciences. To Brahmadata and the world of Takkasilā, there is not just equality but a sense of identity between the two youths. It does not take very long for Darimukha to realise the infeasibility of this way of life. Once out of Takkasilā, Darimukha sees that he is treated differently from his friend and hence that their destinies were different. Moving from one space to the other allowed a veil of ignorance, a sheet of illusion to be dropped and shattered. In the Darimukha Jātaka, travel first underlines the inevitability of change. Eventually, Darimukha explores the world and observes the multiplicity of ways of life and seeing. Here was another reason to travel. Here was also another ideology that writers of the Jātakas integrate as they embed travel into didactic storytelling: change.

But if change were the only constant, change would reside everywhere. Why travel? The Jātakas have a tacit answer to this question. Let us consider the Vannupathu Jātaka. It recounts the story of the caravan master who encouraged a trader in his team to dig soil in the desert till they struck water. In this Jātaka, the comparison lay between a state of drought and a state with water; thirst and comfort. In real time, the travelers transitioned from one state to another and back. If not for the occupation of trade, a city-dweller may never see a drought and especially an inhabitant of Varanasi which lay on the banks of a perennial river. True, the Ganga too could dry – over millions of years. The city too could die – over hundreds of years. What could unfold in monumental time frames gets compressed through travel.

So – one may ask – what does travel ultimately do to those who indulge in it? It exposes the self to the transience of objects and pushes the traveler to free himself from attachment and transform into a fearless person. We could thus see travel depicted as a vehicle of knowledge. There is – I believe – ample support for this claim from the Jātakas. We note in the Jātakas an overwhelming recurrence (109 times) of the site of Takkasilā - and this does not seem to be a coincidence. The repetition and occurrence of places cannot in my view be taken as an accurate reflection of the travel trends of the time. Instead, Takkasilā is an ideal or rather, a symbol or metaphor. Takkasilā is almost always connected with the acquiring of knowledge and the dawning of wisdom. When one went to Takkasilā, one learned essential truths of life and came to walk the path of Dharma. In other Jātakas like the Telapatta, Takkasilā is not noted for its university but an end of a journey both within and without. The space that journey to Takkasilā and trekking to Takkasilā for knowledge occupy in the Jātakas urge one to wonder if travel itself is a symbol of knowing.

As mentioned earlier in this article, travel in the Jātakas has myriad reasons and some that are especially amusing to the contemporary reader. Some of these motivations are tied in firm ways to some form of experience and understanding - practical knowledge as in Bhimasena Jātaka, about cultures as in the Kunala Jātaka, self-knowledge as in the Rajovada Jātaka and so on. When one surveys the shapes and configurations that the acquisition of travel experience takes in the Jātakas it is hardly disputable that travel was done for knowing and travel could have been a metaphor for knowing.

This ties in with what is known about the larger Buddhist tradition where mobility was lionised. The Sangha was often built around the culture of movement; and better, the passion of the Buddhist monkhood tradition with travel obviously points to the affinity of the Buddha's life with travel. Siddhartha Gautama's moment of realisation is when he begins to venture out of home for the first time. It is the irresistibility of reality and practical experience that shows him the four signs, despite Suddhodana's desperate attempts to protect his son from suffering.

Another important principle in the words of the Buddha is the middle way. Where does the Buddha learn the middle way? Again – through travel. He meets first, gurus who train him in ecstatic practices and then practices strenuous effort. It is in distancing himself from both methods – again through travel and this time incidentally to Gaya, that he stumbles upon both the principle of moderation as well as the other prime ideas of Dharma. After enlightenment at Gaya, the Buddha's teachings are spread entirely through travel by the person of the Buddha itself – and his disciples. Buddhist teachings begin gloriously at the Deer Park of Sarnath near Varanasi. Unsurprisingly, Varanasi became the centre in the world of the Jātakas.

Reference:

1. It should be added here that for the translation of the Jātakas, I have relied on the translation that historians have used – that of OB Cowel reprinted by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. The edition is footnoted here. Since I have consistently used that edition, next to each Jātaka that I have referred in italics I have given its number as is featured in this edition in parenthesis.
2. Particularly crucial to my work has been Moti Chandra's Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient

India and specifically the chapter on the period of the Mahajanapadas.

3. For an extended bibliography on trade: Lahiri, Nayanjot. *The Archaeology of Indian Trade Routes Upto C.200 BC: Resource Use, Resource Access and Lines of Communication*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
4. Dukkha NirodhaSacca; “DhammachakkapavattanaSutta.” SamyuttaNikaya, LVI, <https://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebud/ebud001.htm>.
5. “All conditioned things are impermanent” — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.”Dhammapada.Vol. 10, <http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Dhammapada.html>.

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The thought of the [Kena] Upanishad, as expressed in its first chapter in the brief and pregnant sentences of the Upanishadic style, amounts then to this result that the life of the mind, senses, vital activities in which we dwell is not the whole or the chief part of our existence, not the highest, not self-existent, not master of itself. It is an outer fringe, a lower result, an inferior working of something beyond; a superconscient Existence has developed, supports and governs this partial and fragmentary, this incomplete and unsatisfying consciousness and activity of the mind, life and senses. To rise out of this external and surface consciousness towards and into that superconscient is our progress, our goal, our destiny of completeness and satisfaction.

Sri Aurobindo