

# New Race

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*blessings*



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## *From the Editor's Desk*

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"No man or nation need be weak unless he chooses, no man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction", wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1905. He also said "India cannot perish". It is the upholder of Sanatana Dharma and with the rise of India, it will rise and spread across the world. For it is the eternal Dharma, it is not a sectarian religion. It is deep and vast in its approach. It has the whole earth or perhaps universe as its domain.

In the recent years of India's remarkable development as a *vishwa mitra*, world-friend, we have seen that Sanatana Dharma also is rising. The re-establishment of Lord Rama in Ayodhya was celebrated by everyone who has faith on India and the Sanatana Dharma. They may not necessarily know about this Eternal dharma, but this temple emerged as a symbol of human unity. Mark Sri Aurobindo's words:

When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the dharma and by the dharma that India exists.  
(Sri Aurobindo: *Uttarpara Speech*)

We can clearly see these words of a seer coming true. The establishment of Indian temples across the world, the growing faith of the world on India, Indian trade and economy are nothing but the realisation of the rishis of the yore and the present. The message that Swami Vivekananda gave in the Parliament of Religions seems to have its real impact now.

If we were to assess our condition and motivation in this leap year, we may all agree that we have grown leaps and bounds. "India moment" has come. Do we not see the Mother's words coming true: In fifty years the receptive section of the society will be absorbed in Sri Aurobindo's thought! The spreading of Indian spirituality is Sri Aurobindo's fourth dream about which he wrote 75 years ago. Today, his words are fructifying. It only remains for a keen eye to correlate his words with the rise of India, Asia and the Sanatana Dharma. We will see the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo coming true.

This issue is dedicated to exploring a few key concepts of Tantra in Sri Aurobindo's light. We hope our readers will enjoy this exploration through a variety of papers on this and related subjects.

*Shruti*

## On Tantra

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*Sri Aurobindo*

We observe, first, that there still exists in India a remarkable Yogic system which is in its nature synthetical and starts from a great central principle of Nature, a great dynamic force of Nature; but it is a Yoga apart, not a synthesis of other schools. This system is the way of the Tantra. Owing to certain of its developments Tantra has fallen into discredit with those who are not Tantrics; and especially owing to the developments of its left-hand path, the Vama Marga, which not content with exceeding the duality of virtue and sin and instead of replacing them by spontaneous rightness of action seemed, sometimes, to make a method of self-indulgence, a method of unrestrained social immorality. Nevertheless, in its origin, Tantra was a great and puissant system founded upon ideas which were at least partially true. Even its twofold division into the right-hand and left-hand paths, Dakshina Marga and Vama Marga, started from a certain profound perception. In the ancient symbolic sense of the words Dakshina and Vama, it was the distinction between the way of Knowledge and the way of Ananda,—Nature in man liberating itself by right discrimination in power and practice of its own energies, elements and potentialities and Nature in man liberating itself by joyous acceptance in power and practice of its own energies, elements and potentialities. But in both paths there was in the end an obscuration of principles, a deformation of symbols and a fall.

If, however, we leave aside, here also, the actual methods and practices and seek for the central principle, we find, first, that Tantra expressly differentiates itself from the Vedic methods of Yoga. In a sense, all the schools we have hitherto examined are Vedantic in their principle; their force is in knowledge, their method is knowledge, though it is not always discernment by the intellect, but may be, instead, the knowledge of the heart expressed in love and faith or a knowledge in the will working out through action. In all of them the lord of the Yoga is the Purusha, the Conscious Soul that knows, observes, attracts, governs. But in Tantra it is rather Prakriti, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe. It was by learning and applying the intimate secrets of this Will-in-Power, its method, its Tantra, that the Tantric Yogin pursued the aims of his discipline,—mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude. Instead of drawing back from manifested Nature and its difficulties, he confronted them, seized and conquered. But in the end, as is the general tendency of Prakriti, Tantric Yoga largely lost its principle in its machinery and became a thing of formulae and occult mechanism still powerful when rightly used but fallen from the clarity of their original intention.

We have in this central Tantric conception one side of the truth, the worship of the Energy, the Shakti, as the sole effective force for all attainment. We get the other extreme in the Vedantic conception of the Shakti as a power of Illusion and in the search after the silent inactive Purusha as the means of liberation from the deceptions created by the active Energy. But in the integral conception



the Conscious Soul is the Lord, the Nature-Soul is his executive Energy. Purusha is of the nature of Sat, the being of conscious self-existence pure and infinite; Shakti or Prakriti is of the nature of Chit,—it is power of the Purusha's self-conscious existence, pure and infinite. The relation of the two exists between the poles of rest and action. When the Energy is absorbed in the bliss of conscious self-existence, there is rest; when the Purusha pours itself out in the action of its Energy, there is action, creation and the enjoyment or Ananda of becoming. But if Ananda is the creator and begetter of all becoming, its method is Tapas or force of the Purusha's consciousness dwelling upon its own infinite potentiality in existence and producing from it truths of conception or real Ideas, *vijñāna*, which, proceeding from an omniscient and omnipotent Self-existence, have the surety of their own fulfilment and contain in themselves the nature and law of their own becoming in the terms of mind, life and matter. The eventual omnipotence of Tapas and the infallible fulfilment of the Idea are the very foundation of all Yoga. In man we render these terms by Will and Faith,—a will that is eventually self-effective because it is of the substance of Knowledge and a faith that is the reflex in the lower consciousness of a Truth or real Idea yet unrealised in the manifestation. It is this self-certainty of the Idea which is meant by the Gita when it says, *yo yac-chraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ*, "whatever is a man's faith or the sure Idea in him, that he becomes."

We see, then, what from the psychological point of view,—and Yoga is nothing but practical psychology,—is the conception of Nature from which we have to start. It is the self-fulfilment of the Purusha through his Energy. But the movement of Nature is twofold, higher and lower, or, as we may choose to term it, divine and undivine. The distinction exists indeed for practical purposes only; for there is nothing that is not divine, and in a larger view it is as meaningless, verbally, as the distinction between natural and supernatural, for all things that are are natural. All things are in Nature and all things are in God. But, for practical purposes, there is a real distinction. The lower Nature, that which we know and are and must remain so long as the faith in us is not changed, acts through limitation and division, is of the nature of Ignorance and culminates in the life of the ego; but the higher Nature, that to which we aspire, acts by unification and transcendence of limitation, is of the nature of Knowledge and culminates in the life divine. The passage from the lower to the higher is the aim of Yoga; and this passage may effect itself by the rejection of the lower and escape into the higher,—the ordinary view-point,—or by the transformation of the lower and its elevation to the higher Nature. It is this, rather, that must be the aim of an integral Yoga.

An excerpt from: Sri Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 23. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department (1999), p. 42-45.

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### **1. The divine insight produced by Sadhana made the Brahmani understand truly the state of the Master**

The Brahmani did not arrive at the above conclusion about the uncommon nature of the Master through reason and inference only. The reader may remember that she told the Master during her first meeting with him that she was to meet three persons, Sri Ramakrishna and two others, and help them in developing their spiritual life. She had that command from the Mother of the universe long before she had the privilege of meeting the Master. It is therefore clear that her divine insight produced by spiritual practices, brought her to Dakshineswar and helped her in understanding the Master. As time passed since her first meeting with the Master and as she became more and more closely associated with him, the clearer did it appear to her how far and in what way she was to render him assistance in his Sadhana. Therefore, she did not now spend her time in merely removing the erroneous conception of the people about him, but also engaged the Master in performing various disciplines according to the strict injunctions of the scriptures, so that he might have the perfect vision of the universal Mother and, endowed with Her infinite grace and favour, might become firmly established in his own divine power, that is, in his real nature.

### **2. The reason why the Brahmani asked the Master to undertake Tantric Sadhana**

When the Brahmani, herself an advanced aspirant, saw the Master and talked with him, it did not take her long to understand that the Master could not free himself from doubts regarding his own condition, because he had proceeded so far to attain the divine Mother's vision with the help, of his extraordinary devotion only, instead of strictly following the traditional paths of spiritual teachers. Therefore, the doubt was crossing his mind now and then whether his visions of the divine Mother were the results of a derangement of brain and whether his extraordinary physical and mental changes were the symptoms of a virulent disease. The Brahmani reflected on what has been mentioned before and induced the Master to follow the path of discipline prescribed in the Tantras. As soon as the Master followed the path of discipline trod by previous Sadhakas, and had experience of the spiritual states similar to those experienced by them, she knew, he would understand that those states of his were not produced by any disease. When he saw it already recorded in the Tantras that particular results were produced by the performance of particular rites, and when he himself obtained those results through the practice of those rites, he would gain a firm conviction that through discipline man had uncommon experiences by ascending to higher and higher planes of consciousness in the internal realm, and that his own physical and mental

states had been produced in that way only. The result would be that, whatever uncommon experiences he might have in future, he would know them all as true, and proceed towards his goal without being at all troubled by them. The Brahmani knew that the scriptures, therefore, advised the aspirant always to compare the experiences of his own life with the words of the Guru and the Sastras and see whether they tallied or not.

### **3. Why the Brahmani helped the Master in his Sadhana, even though she knew that he was an incarnation of God**

Why did the Brahmani, it may be asked, engage herself in making the Master practise these disciplines, though she knew that he was an incarnation of God? Does not one who understands the glory of the incarnations of God accept the conclusion that they are perfect, and that disciplines are altogether unnecessary for them? Had the Brahmani, it may be said in reply, been conscious at all times of that glory of the Master, she would have entertained that mental attitude; but that was not the case. We have already said that the Brahmani felt from the very first meeting a maternal affection for the Master. There is nothing on earth more powerful than love to obliterate in one the consciousness of power in the object of one's love and to impel one to do what one considers good for him. There is no doubt, therefore, that moved by a genuine affection for him she induced the Master to undertake spiritual practices. We come across the same thing in the lives of all god-men, the incarnations. Although the persons intimately related to such men are sometimes overawed by their knowledge of the extraordinary spiritual powers in them, they, it is seen, forget all about it the next moment, and, charmed with the attraction of their love, feel content with merely offering their heart's love to them and seeking their welfare. Similarly, the Brahmani, amazed time after time at the extraordinary ecstasies and the manifestation of powers in the Master, forgot them as quickly and as often, blinded, so to say, by maternal love. It is needless to say that the Master's genuine filial affection for her and his absolute dependence on and faith in her played no small part in raising waves of tender, though austere, maternal affection in the Sannyasini's heart and made her oblivious of his powers, thus impelling her to undergo endless troubles for making the Master happy even to the slightest degree, and protecting him from others' tyranny and helping him in his Sadhana.

### **4. The Brahmani was eager to make the Master experience all the results of the austerity practised by her**

When there is an opportunity of teaching an exceptionally brilliant pupil, there naturally arises in the Guru's heart a supreme contentment, and self-satisfaction. The Brahmani had never even dreamt that in the spiritual world such an excellent and very competent person as the Master could be born at the present time. Therefore we can very well infer that a wonderful joy filled her



heart when she got the opportunity of teaching the Master. It was no wonder, therefore, that she was eager to make the Master experience in a very short time all the results of her study and austerity.

**5. The Master undertook Tantric discipline with the permission of the divine Mother. The measure of his eagerness for this discipline.**

We sometimes heard from the Master himself that he had asked the divine Mother about the propriety and necessity of the disciplines according to the Tantras before he began to practise them, and that he undertook them with Her permission. It was, therefore, not merely the eagerness and inducement of the Brahmani that engaged him in those spiritual exercises, but also the divine insight born of sadhana that made him feel in his heart of hearts that the opportunity of attaining the immediate knowledge of the divine Mother by resorting to scriptural methods had arrived. Therefore, the concentrated mind of the Master now advanced fast with full eagerness on the path of Sadhana taught by the Brahmani. It is not possible for us, ordinary mortals, to feel the measure and intensity of that eagerness. For, where are that tranquillity and that one-pointedness in our minds, distracted as they are by many things from many directions? Where is that unbounded courage on our part to jump headlong in order to touch the very bottom of the sea of deep consciousness instead of being deluded by the wantonness of its surface waves, the objects of normal consciousness? Where is the power in us to eradicate the attachment to all the things of the world including our own bodies, and to plunge with utter abandon into the depths of spiritual inwardness, to realize which the Master urged us over and over again, saying, "Dive deep down, dive to the depths of yourself." Overwhelmed with the anguish of his heart, the Master, we were told, rubbed his face against the sandy bank of the Ganga under the Panchavati, saying, "Mother, reveal Thyself;" and was it a matter of a day or two? It went on unabated as days passed by. Those words only enter our ears, but do not rouse corresponding echoes in our hearts at all. And why should it be otherwise? Have we got that childlike all-consuming faith of the Master in the existence of the divine Mother and in the attainment of Her vision by renouncing everything and calling on Her with the eagerness of heart that was his?

**6. The Master spoke about his eagerness at the time of Sadhana**

One day while living at Kasipur, the Master astonished us by giving us a little indication of the measure and the intensity of his spiritual eagerness at the time of his Sadhana. We cannot say whether we shall be able to give the reader even a faint picture of what we then felt. However, we shall mention it here.

We were witnessing with our own eyes the intense eagerness of Swami Vivekananda for the realization of God, how the spiritual awakening came on

him when he went to deposit the fee for his Law examination; how, goaded to restlessness by it, he ran, oblivious of the world outside, barefooted and with only one piece of cloth on, through the streets of the city to the feet of Sri Guru at Kasipur and, like one mad, laid bare to him the anguish of his heart, and obtained his grace; how, since then he spent his time night and day in Japa, meditation, devotional songs and spiritual study; how on account of his boundless enthusiasm for Sadhana, his usually tender heart turned adamant and remained quite indifferent to the sufferings of his mother and brothers; and how, advancing with single-minded devotion on the path of Sadhana pointed out by his preceptor, he was having vision after vision, culminating at last in his first enjoyment of the bliss of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi in a short period of three or four months. All these things took place before our very eyes and completely struck us dumb. Greatly delighted, the Master used to praise highly the Swami's extraordinary devotion, eagerness and enthusiasm for spiritual practices. One day at that time the Master compared the Swami's love and enthusiasm for Sadhana with his own and said, "Narendra's devotion and enthusiasm are extraordinary indeed, but compared with the urge that came here (pointing to himself) at the time of Sadhana, his is most ordinary. It is not even one fourth of that." Understand, if you can, O reader, with the help of your imagination what feeling arose in our minds at those words of the Master.

Thus the Master took the hint from the universal Mother, forgot everything else and merged himself in Sadhana. And the learned and adroit Brahmani took endless pains to collect from various parts of the country, things specifically necessary for particular rites, and 'gave the Master instructions regarding their application at the time of Sadhana.

#### **7. The construction of the Panchamundi seat and the performance of all the Sadhanas according to the sixty-four Tantras**

The skulls of five dead beings, including that of a man, were brought from the parts of the country far away from the Ganga; and two altars propitious for Tantric Sadhanas were constructed, one, under the Vilva tree situated at the northern boundary of the temple garden, and the other, under the Panchavati planted by the Master himself; and sitting on either of these 'skull-seats', according to need, Master spent his time in Japa, meditation, etc. This extraordinary Sadhaka and his guide were not conscious, for a few months, of how days and nights slipped by. The Master used to say, "In the day-time the Brahmani went to various places far away from the temple, garden and collected and brought various rare articles prescribed by the Tantras. Placing them under the Vilva tree or under the Panchavati at night, she called me, taught me how to make use of those things, and helped me in the performance of the worship of the divine Mother according to

the prescribed rules with their aid, asking me at last to merge in Japa and meditation. I acted accordingly. But I had to perform almost no Japa; for, hardly did I turn the rosary once when I merged completely in Samadhi and realized the results proper to those rites. There was thus no limit to my visions and experiences, all very extraordinary. The Brahmani made me undertake, one by one, all the disciplines prescribed in the sixty-four main Tantras, all difficult to accomplish, in trying to practise which most of the Sadhakas go astray; but all of which I got through successfully by Mother's grace.

### **8. Seeing the Goddess in the form of the woman**

"On one occasion, I saw, that the Brahmani had brought at night—nobody knew whence—a beautiful woman in the prime of her youth, and said to me, 'My child, worship her as the Devi.' When the worship was finished, she said, 'Sit on her lap, my child, and perform Japa.' I was seized with fear, wept piteously and said to Mother, 'O Mother, Mother of the universe, what is this command Thou givest to one who has taken absolute refuge in Thee? Has Thy weak child the power to be so impudently daring?' But as soon as I said so, I felt as if I was possessed by some unknown power, and an extraordinary strength filled my heart. And no sooner had I, uttering the Mantras, sat on the lap of the woman, like one hypnotized, unaware of what I was doing, than I merged completely in Samadhi. When I regained consciousness, I saw the Brahmani waiting on me and assiduously trying to bring me back to normal consciousness. She said, 'The rite is completed, my child; others restrain themselves with very great difficulty under such circumstances and then finish the rite with nominal Japa for a trifling little time only; but you lost all consciousness and were in deep Samadhi.' When I heard this, I became reassured and began to salute Mother again and again with a grateful heart for enabling me to pass that ordeal unscathed.

On another occasion, I saw that the Brahmani cooked fish in the skull of a dead body and performed Tarpana. She also made me do so and asked me to take that fish. I did as I was asked and felt no aversion whatever.

### **9. Renunciation of aversion**

"But, on the day when the Brahmani brought a piece of rotten flesh and asked me to touch it with my tongue after Tarpana, I was shaken by aversion and said, 'Can it be done?' So questioned, she said, 'What's there in it, my child? Just see, I do it.' Saying so, she put a portion of it into her mouth and said, 'Aversion should not be entertained,' and placed again a little of it before me. When I saw her do so, the idea of the terrible Chandika Form of the Mother Universal was inspired in my mind; and repeatedly uttering 'Mother', I entered into Bhavasamadhi. There was then no aversion felt when the Brahmani put it into my mouth.

## **10. Other Tantric realizations and the Master's behaviour at the time of Tantric Sadhanas**

"Having initiated me thus in Purnabhisheka, the Brahmani made me perform daily Tantric rites too numerous to mention. I now don't remember all things at all times. But I remember the day when I was able by the grace of Mother to view with perfect equanimity, the supreme pleasure of a pair of lovers, seeing nothing in it but the blissful sport of the Divine; the mind instead of descending even to the neighbourhood of ordinary human feelings, soared higher and higher merging at last in deep Samadhi. After regaining normal consciousness, I heard the Brahmani say, 'You have reached the desired end of a very difficult Tantric Sadhana and become established in the divine mood. This is the ultimate Sadhana of the (heroic) mode of worship. '

"Shortly afterwards, when I performed the worship of the female figure according to the Tantra rites, I did it with the help of another Bhairavi in the open music hall of the temple in the presence of all, during the day-time. When it was over I saluted her according to Sastric prescription. This was the last rite connected with the heroic mode of worship, which I completed in that manner. Even as my mental attitude towards all women, namely, that of a child towards its mother, remained intact during the long period of the Tantric Sadhana, so also I could never take a drop of wine at that time. The mere mention of the name of Karana (wine) would inspire in me the immediate experience of the universal Cause and I lost myself in it completely. Similarly, as soon as I heard other words of that kind, the Cause of the universe would present Itself before me and I would be in Samadhi."

## **11. One story of Ganesh's filial attitude towards all women**

One day while living at Dakshineswar, the Master made mention of his lifelong filial attitude towards all women and told us a story from the Puranas. How firmly the knowledge of filial relation with all women without exception was established in the heart of Ganesh, the chief of the perfected persons of divine knowledge, was described in the story. Before we were told that story, we had no excess of devotion to and reverence for this pot-bellied, elephant-faced god with the exudation flowing from his temples. But, since we heard the story from the Master's holy mouth, we have the conviction that Ganesh was truly fit to be worshipped before all the gods, as indeed he is worshipped. The story is this:

One day, in his tender age, Ganesh, while playing, saw a cat, which he, in his boyish playfulness and restlessness, beat and tortured in various ways and covered with wounds. The cat escaped somehow with life, and limb. When Ganesh became quiet and came to his mother, he saw to his surprise marks of injury in various parts of the holy person of the Devi. Very much pained to see that condition of his mother, the boy asked her the reason of it. The

Devi answered in a melancholy mood, "You yourself are the cause of this sad condition of mine!" More afflicted than surprised at it, the devoted Ganesh said with tears in his eyes, "How strange! Mother, when did I beat you? And I don't remember that this child of yours, ignorant as he is, has done any wicked action for which you have to suffer such insults at the hands of anyone."

Parvati Devi, whose gross external form is the universe, said, "Try to remember if you have beaten any living creature today." "Yes," said Ganesh, "I did so; I beat a cat a short time ago." Ganesh thought that the person to whom the cat belonged, beat his mother that way. Ganesh's mother took the repentant boy to her bosom and consoled him saying, "It is not so, my child; nobody beat this body of mine; but it is I who have assumed the form of the cat; that is why you see the marks of your beating on my person. You have done so without knowing it; so, don't be sorry for it; but remember henceforward that all the Jivas of the world having female forms are parts of me and those having male forms are parts of your father. There are no persons or things in the world other than Siva and Sakti." Ganesh had faith in those words and enshrined them in his heart. When he reached the marriageable age, he did not consent to marry lest he should have to marry his mother. Ganesh thus maintained continence all his life and became foremost among the persons of divine knowledge, inasmuch as he always had the conviction in his heart that the universe was of the nature of Siva and Sakti, Brahman and Its Power.

After narrating the preceding story the Master told the following one, also indicative of the greatness of Ganesh's knowledge.

## **12. The story of the circumambulation of the universe by Ganesh and Kartik**

Showing once the precious garland of gems hanging from her neck to Ganesh and Kartik, Parvati Devi said to them, "I will give this garland of gems to the one who will circumambulate the universe comprising the fourteen worlds and come back to me first." Kartik, the commander of the celestial army, having for his vehicle a peacock, smiled a smile of derision thinking of his elder brother's fat and heavy body and pot-belly, and of the small power and slow movement of the mouse, his vehicle, and became cocksure that the garland had already become his, and started immediately on the circumambulation of the universe. Long after Kartik had started, the sedate Ganesh left his seat calmly and, seeing with the eye of knowledge the universe consisting of Siva and Sakti, situated in the body of Hara and Parvati, went round them with a gentle gait, worshipped them and took his seat. Long after this Kartik returned, when, pleased with the knowledge and devotion of Ganesh, Parvati Devi placed the garland of gems affectionately round his neck as a token of her grace.

Thus mentioning the greatness of Ganesh's knowledge and his filial relation with all women without exception, the Master said, "My attitude to



women is also the same; that is why I had the vision of the maternal form of the universal Cause in my wedded wife and worshipped her and bowed down at her feet."

### **13. The uniqueness of the Master in his Tantric Sadhana**

We have not heard of any other Sadhaka in any age who having kept intact that filial attitude towards all women, had resorted to the Tantric disciplines according to the prescribed rules of the heroic mode of worship. Following this heroic mode the aspirants have all along been taking a woman companion at the time of Sadhana. As they do not see any aspirant of the heroic mode deviate from that practice, people have got a firm conviction that the realization of the desired end of the discipline, that is, the attainment of the grace of the divine Mother, is quite impossible if that practice is not followed. It is doubtless that, under the influence of this conviction, people condemn the Tantra scriptures.

### **14. That speciality was the intention of the divine Mother**

It is only the Master, the incarnation for this epoch, who told us repeatedly that he never in his life kept the company of a woman even in a dream. That the accomplishment of a hidden purpose was the intention of the divine Mother is evident from the fact that She made the Master take up the filial attitude towards all women from the beginning and engaged him in the discipline according to the heroic mode.

### **15. What is proved by the Master's attaining success without taking a women**

The Master said, "It did not take me more than three days to succeed in any of the disciplines. When I took up a particular discipline and asked the divine Mother importunately with a glowing eagerness of heart for the realization of its result. She benignly crowned me with success in three days only." It is clearly proved that the company of a woman is not an indispensable auxiliary of those practices, inasmuch as the Master became successful in those disciplines in a very short time without taking a woman. It is by being overcome by his own weak nature, that an aspirant destitute of self-control acts in that way. It is only by way of a concession that the Tantras teach that an aspirant who takes a woman will be established in the divine state in future as the result of his repeated practice of discipline. This assurance of success to them shows only the supremely compassionate nature of the scriptures and not the obligatory character of those rites.

### **16. The purpose of the Tantric practices**

The common aim of all the Tantric practices, it is inferred, is to accustom the aspirant, through self-control and repeated efforts and perseverance, to the conviction that those very objects—sights, tastes, etc., which tempt human

beings, make them experience repeated birth and death, and prevent them from attaining self-knowledge by realizing God—are none other than the veritable forms of God. Taking into account the difference in the aspirants' self-control and conviction, the Tantras have dealt with three different modes of worship, namely the "animal", the "heroic" and the "divine", and have advised them to worship God according to the first, second or third mode. In course of time people almost completely forgot that the results of the Tantric practices could only be obtained if the aspirants resorted to austere self-control as the basis of those disciplines; they engaged themselves in many evil practices, for which the Tantras themselves were held responsible by all and were ridiculed by the common run of people. The success of the Master, remaining in full possession of the filial attitude towards all women throughout those practices, has been of immense benefit to both the true aspirants and the Tantric scriptures—to the former, by pointing out to them the right way to the goal of their lives; to the latter, by bringing out their real glory and firmly establishing their authenticity.

#### **17. Another reason why the Master undertook Tantric Sadhanas**

Although the Master practised the disciplines according to the Tantric mysteries for three or four years, he, it seems, did not tell any of us their consecutive order or give any one of us a detailed account of them. But in order to encourage us on the path of Sadhana, he told many of us of these facts on many occasions, or according to individual needs, and made a rare few of us perform some of those practices. The Mother of the universe, it appears, made the Master fully acquainted with this path at that time, because if he had not himself had the uncommon experiences resulting from the Tantric practices, he would not have been able to detect the mental states of the devotees of different nature who came to him in his later life, and to lead them forward on the path of Sadhana. We have elsewhere given a little indication of how the Master guided the devotees who came to him and took refuge in him along various paths of discipline. The reader going through them will easily understand the reasonableness of what we have said above. Therefore it is needless to mention that here again.

#### **18. The visions and experiences of the Master at the time of the Tantric Sadhanas**

##### **19. He took the remnants of food taken by jackals and dogs**

Besides telling us, in this manner, of the Tantric practices, the Master sometimes mentioned to us many of his visions and experiences. We shall now tell the reader a few of them. A root-and-branch change, the Master said, came over his former nature at the time of the Tantric Sadhana. When he was told that the divine Mother sometimes assumed the form of a jackal, and that the dogs were the carriers of Bhairava, he regarded the remnants

of food taken by those animals as pure and sacred and partook of them as Prasada without feeling the slightest hesitation.

#### **20. He saw himself pervaded by the fire of knowledge**

Offering heartily, as oblations to the lotus feet, of the divine Mother, his body, mind, life and all— the Master saw himself incessantly pervaded, inwardly and outwardly, by the fire of knowledge.

#### **21. He saw the awakening of the Kundalini**

The Master saw during this period that the Kundalini was awakened, and it proceeded upwards to the head. All the lotuses from the Muladhara, the basic centre, to the thousandpetalled Sahasrara in the head, turned upwards and opened fully. As soon as they did so one after another, he got strange and wonderful experiences.<sup>1</sup> He saw for example that a celestial luminous male figure went through the Sushumna, the Canal Centralis, to those lotuses, now turning upwards, and made them open by touching them with his tongue.

#### **22. His vision of the Brahmayoni, the divine womb**

At one time, when Swami Vivekananda sat for meditation, there appeared before him a very large, wonderful triangle of light which, he felt, was living. One day he came to Dakshineswar and told the Master this, when the latter said, "Very good; you have seen the Brahmayoni; while practising Sadhana under the Vilva tree, I also saw it; what was more, I observed it giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment."

#### **23. He heard the Anahata Dhvani**

At that time the Master heard, arising naturally and unceasingly everywhere in the universe, the Anahata Dhvani, the great Pranava sound, which is the aggregate of all the different sounds of the universe. Some of us heard this from the Master himself and also heard him say that he could at that time understand the meanings of the cries of all animals.

#### **24. The vision about the worthlessness of miraculous powers**

During that period, the Master saw the divine Mother Herself dwelling in the female form. In the latter part of this period the Master felt in himself the presence of the miraculous powers, like the one of becoming as small as an atom. One day he went at the instance of Hriday to the universal Mother to know, the propriety and utility of applying them and saw that they were to be shunned and discarded like excreta. The Master said that since then it appeared loathsome to him to hear the term "miraculous power".

#### **25. The Master's talk with Swami Vivekananda about the eight miraculous powers**

We are reminded of one thing about the Master's possession of the 'eight miraculous powers'. One day he called Swami Vivekananda privately to the

Panchavati and said, "Look here I have got the well-known 'eight miraculous powers'. But I decided long ago that I will never make use of them; nor do I see any need for applying them; you will have to do many things like preaching religion; I have made up my mind to give them to you; here they are." The Swami said to him in reply, "Sir, will these help me in any way in realizing God?" When afterwards he came to know from the Master's reply that, although they could be of some help in such activities as preaching religion, they would not in any way assist him in realizing God, he declined to accept them, at which, the Swami told us afterwards, the Master was highly pleased with him

## **26. His vision of the deluding power of the universal Mother**

There arose in the Master's mind during this period, a desire to see the deluding power of the Mother of the universe when he saw that a female figure of extraordinary beauty rose from the waters of the Ganga and came with a dignified gait to the Panchavati. Presently he saw that the said figure was in an advanced stage of pregnancy; a few minutes later he saw that she gave birth to a beautiful baby in his very presence and suckled the baby very affectionately; the next moment he saw that the same figure assumed a very cruel and frightful appearance and, taking the baby into her mouth, masticated it and swallowed it! She then entered the waters of the river whence she had appeared.

## **27. The beauty of Shodasi, the Mahavidya**

Besides the visions mentioned above, there was no limit to the number of the Devi's forms, ranging from the two-armed to the ten-armed, that he saw during this period. Again, some of those engaged themselves in conversing with him and gave him various instructions. Although all those forms of Hers were of extraordinary beauty, we were told by him that they were not worth comparison in that respect with that of Sri Rajarajeswari, otherwise called Shodasi. The Master said, "I saw in a vision the beauty of the person of Shodasi which melted, and spread all around illumining the quarters." At that time the Master had the visions of various male figures like Bhairava and also visions of celestial beings. From the time of his Tantric Sadhana, there were so many extraordinary visions and experiences in the Master's life day after day that it is beyond the power of man to mention all of them. It is therefore needless to spend any more time in making that attempt.

## **28. As the result of Tantric Sadhana, the Master became free from body-consciousness and attained a childlike nature**

We heard from the Master himself that from the time of his Tantric Sadhana, the orifice of his Sushumna was fully opened and his nature was permanently converted into that of a boy. From the latter part of that period,

he could not, in spite of his efforts, retain his cloth, sacred thread, etc., on his person for any length of time. He did not feel where and when all these things slipped off. It is needless to mention that this condition was caused by the absence in him of body-consciousness, on account of his mind remaining always absorbed in the lotus feet of the divine Mother. We have it from the Master himself that, unlike the ordinary Paramahansas he never practised wandering or remaining naked—it naturally came to him with his gradual loss of body-consciousness. The Master said that at the end of those disciplines his knowledge of non-duality with regard to all things increased so much that he felt that those things which he considered to be trifling and worth discarding from his childhood, now appeared to be as pure as the purest. He asserted, "The holy basil and the legumen of Sajina (drumstick)<sup>1</sup> were felt by me to be equally holy."

### 29. The splendour of the Master's person during Tantric Sadhanas

Again, the splendour of the Master's person increased so much for a few years from that time, that he became the cynosure of all eyes at all times. As he was devoid of egoism, he was so much annoyed at it that he prayed on many occasions to the divine Mother to be rid of that celestial beauty, and imploringly said, "Mother, I have not the slightest need of this external beauty; please take it away and give me instead the inward spiritual beauty." We have told the reader elsewhere that this prayer of his was fulfilled afterwards.

### 30. The Bhairavi Brahmani was a part of Yogamaya

Just as the Brahmani helped the Master in his Tantric Sadhanas, so did the Master help the Brahmani later in developing her spiritual life. We have already given an indication of the fact that, but for the Master's help, she could not have established herself in the divine mood. The name of the Brahmani was Yogeswari who, the Master said, was a part of Yogamaya (the mystic power of the Lord).

Attaining divine powers on account of his Tantric Sadhana, the Master came to know another thing. He came to know by the grace of the divine Mother that many persons would come in later days to him and get spiritual enlightenment from him and thus their life's purpose would be fulfilled. He told this to Hriday and also to Mathur, who was greatly devoted to him; Mathur replied, "How very good, Father! we shall all make merry in your company."

\* Title of this article is given by the editors.

Courtesy: <https://incarnateword.in/other-authors/sri-ramakrishna-paramahansa/the-great-master-by-swami-saradananda/11-tantric-sadhana>

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## “Hymns to the Goddess”

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Sri Aurobindo

This is one of a series of publications by Mr. Arthur Avalon consisting of texts and translations of the Tantras. The hymns collected and translated in this volume are, however, taken from other sources besides the Tantras. Many of them are from the considerable body of devotional hymns attributed by tradition to the philosopher Shankaracharya, a few from the Mahabharata and the Puranas. Most are well-known *stotras* addressed to the various forms and names of the female Energy, Mother of the worlds, whose worship is an important part of that many-sided and synthetic whole which we call Hinduism.

The work of translation has been admirably done. The one slight defect is the preservation untranslated of Sanskrit words other than names which might well have been rendered into English. The translation is at once faithful, simple and graceful in style and rhythm. No English version can reproduce the majesty of the Sanskrit rhythms and the colour and power of the original, but within the limits of the possible the work could hardly have been better executed.

The translation is accompanied by brief but numerous notes. Mr. Avalon has made a principle of submission to the authority of the Hindu commentators and learned men whom he has consulted or taken as his guides in the study of the Tantra. He writes, “It is necessary to study the Hindu commentators and to seek the oral aid of those who possess the traditional interpretation of the Shastra. Without this and an understanding of what Hindu worship is and means, absurd mistakes are likely to be made. I have thus, in addition to such oral aid, availed myself of the Commentaries of Nilakantha on the Mahabharata, of Gopala Chakravarti and Nagoji Bhatta on Chandi, and of Nilakantha on the Devibhagavata. As regards the Tantra, the great Sadhana Shastra, nothing which is both of an understanding and accurate character can be achieved without a study of the original texts undertaken with the assistance of the Tantric gurus and pundits who are the authorised custodians of its traditions.” This careful scrupulousness is undoubtedly the right attitude for the work which Mr. Avalon has set himself,—to present to the English-reading public the philosophy and worship of the Tantra and the way of the Shaktas as they have been traditionally practised and understood in mediaeval and modern India. The method followed assures a sound basis free from the vagaries of learned ignorance and unfettered ingenuity which render so much of the work of European scholarship on Indian subjects fantastic, unsound and ephemeral. It cannot, we think, be the final attitude; an independent scrutiny of the ancient scriptures and forms of philosophy and religion is needed through the whole range of Indian thought and devotion both to recover their more ancient and original forms and principles often concealed by later accretions and crystallisings and to separate from them

whatever is of imperishable worth and utility for the spiritual future of mankind. But meanwhile, and especially when a great and difficult subject is being for the first time brought forward in an adequate manner to general notice, the conservative method is undoubtedly the most desirable.

Commentators, however, even the most learned, are subject to error, as Mr. Avalon has had to recognise in his translation of the verse which declares that all women without exception are forms of the Great Mother. The commentator would have us believe that the phrase *striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu* means all women who possess the sixty-four arts and are devoted to their husbands, are modest, etc. The translator rightly rejects this conventional distortion of a great and profound philosophical truth; he translates "all women without exception throughout the world". We wonder whether the phrase does not admit of a different shade cutting deeper into the heart of things. The lines are,

*Vidyāḥ samastās tava devi bhedaḥ*

*Striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu.*

Is there not a hint of a distinction between the simple *bhedāḥ* and *sakalāḥ*? "All sciences, O Goddess, are different parts of thee, all women entirely in the worlds." The sense would then be that wherever the feminine principle is found in the living personality, we have the entire presence of the world-supporting maternal soul of the Divinity. The Devi with all her aspects, *kalās*, is there in the Woman; in the Woman we have to see Durga, Annapurna, Tara, the Mahavidyas, and therefore it is said in the Tantra, in the line quoted by Mr. Avalon in his preface, "Wherever one sees the feet of Woman, one should give worship in one's soul even as to one's guru." Thus this thought of the Shakta side of Hinduism becomes an uncompromising declaration of the divinity of woman completing the Vedantic declaration of the concealed divinity in man which we are too apt to treat in practice as if it applied only in the masculine. We put away in silence, even when we do not actually deny it, the perfect equality in difference of the double manifestation.

There are other instances in which the translators seem to us not to have escaped the misleading wiles of the commentator. We may instance the passage in the Hymn to Mahadevi in which the Goddess is described as being "both black and grey". "Smoke coloured" would be a closer rendering of the epithet *dhūmra*. We are told in the note that it means "that which is with smoke, the sacrificial rite, here the knowledge of the rites". This is a scholastic interpretation which we cannot accept. The different hues of the Goddess are always psychologically symbolic and Mr. Avalon has himself an excellent passage to that effect in his Introduction. But, although occasionally provoking dissent, the notes are throughout interesting and instructive and often throw a new light on the implications of the text.

Mr. Avalon in his publications insists upon the greatness of the Tantra and

seeks to clear away by a dispassionate statement of the real facts the cloud of misconceptions which have obscured our view of this profound and powerful system. We shall have occasion to deal with this aspect of his work when we come to speak of the Mahanirvana Tantra. In this volume he justifies against European prejudice the attribution of the feminine form and quality to God and against modern ignorance generally the image-worship which the Tantra in common with other Hindu systems makes part of the first stage in religious progress. On both points we are in general agreement with his standpoint, though we do not hold that religious evolution must necessarily follow the line laid down by the Tantra.

Human conceptions of the Divine divide themselves first into the worship of the formed and the aspiration towards the formless, secondly, into the adoration of the Qualified and the urge of the rarest spirits towards the Unqualified, the Absolute. For all these stages the Tantric worship and discipline provides. How can the Formless invest Himself with form, asks the religious rationalist. The universe is there to reply. Hinduism worships Narayana in the stone, the tree, the animal, the human being. That which the intellectual and spiritual pride or severity of other religions scorns, it makes its pride and turns into its own form of logical severity. Stocks and stones, the quadruped and the human being, all these are equals in God, our brothers in the Divine, forms that the Omnipresent has not disdained to assume. But beyond the material forms there are others that are ideal and symbolic, but not less, if anything more real, more full of divine power than any actual physical manifestation. These are the mental images in which we worship God. The Hindu believes that to whatever form he brings his devotion, the love of God is bound to assume and vivify it, and we cannot say that the belief is irrational. For if there is a Consciousness in the universe and transcending it which answers to the yearning of all these creatures and perhaps Itself yearns towards them with the love of the Father, the Mother, the Friend, the Lover, and a love surpassing all these, then it is idle to suppose that It would assume or create for its own pleasure and glory the forms of the universe, but would disdain as an offence to Its dignity or purity those which the love of the worshipper offers to It and which after all Itself has formed in his heart or his imagination. To these mental forms mental worship may be offered, and this is the higher way; or we may give the material foundation, the *pratiṣṭhā*, of a statue or pictured image to form a physical nodus for a physical act of worship.

In the formless also we worship God, in His qualities, in His Love, Power, Bliss, Wisdom, in the great cosmic Principles by which He manifests Himself to the eye of knowledge. We worship Him as the Impersonality manifested in these things or the Personality containing them. And we rise at the apex of the pinnacle into that which is not only formless, *arūpa*, but *nirguṇa*, qualityless, the indefinable, *anirdeśyam*, of the Gita. In our human ignorance, with our mental passion for degrees and distinctions, for superiorities and exclusions, we thus grade these

things and say that this is superior, that is for ignorant and inferior souls. Do we know? The Theist looks down with reprobation on the form-adoring man-worshipping idolater and polytheist; the Adwaitin looks down with a calm and tolerant indulgence on the ignorance of the quality-adoring personality-bemused Theist. But it seems to us that God scorns nothing, that the Soul of all things may take as much delight in the prayer of a little child or the offering of a flower or a leaf before a pictured image as in the philosopher's leap from the summit of thought into the indefinable and unknowable and that he does best who can rise and widen into the shoreless realisation and yet keep the heart of the little child and the capacity of the seer of forms.

At any rate, this is an attitude towards which these Hymns to the Goddess bring us very near. They are full of the glories of her form, her visible body; full of the thinker's perception of her in all the shapes of the universe; full of the power of her psychological aspects; pervaded too by a sense behind and often expressed of her final unity and transcendence. Mr. Avalon brings this out with great force and vividness in his Introduction. But it should be manifest even to a careless reader of the Hymns. Take the following passage:—

Reverence to Her who is eternal, Raudra,  
To Gauri and Dhatri, reverence and again reverence,  
To Her who is moonlight and in the form of the moon,  
To Her who is supreme bliss, reverence for ever.

That is from the famous hymn in the Chandi-Mahatmya, deservedly one of the best known in sacred literature; but everywhere we find the same crowding of different aspects. In a hymn of which the eleventh verse is a sensuous description of the physical goddess,—

O Gauri! with all my heart  
I contemplate Thy form,



<https://t.ly/LKYwR>



Beauteous of face,  
With its weight of hanging hair,  
With full breasts and rounded slender waist,  
Holding in three hands a rosary, a pitcher and book  
And with thy fourth hand making the jnanamudra,—

(mark how the close passes naturally into the psychological symbolism of the form), the ninth is a remarkable piece of Yogic imagery,—

O Mother! like the sleeping King of serpents  
Residing in the centre of the first lotus,  
Thou didst create the universe.  
Thou dost ascend like a streak of lightning,  
And attainest the ethereal region;—

and the opening is the highest philosophy expressed with great poetic force and interspersed with passages of the richest poetic colour—

The cause and Mother of the world,  
She whose form is that of the Shabdabrahman,  
And whose substance is bliss.  
Thou art the primordial One,  
Mother of countless creatures,  
Creatrix of the bodies of the Lotus-born, Vishnu and Shiva,  
Who creates, preserves and destroys the worlds...  
Although Thou art the primordial cause of the world,  
Yet art Thou ever youthful.  
Although Thou art the Daughter of the Mountain-King,  
Yet art Thou full of tenderness.  
Although Thou art the Mother of the Vedas,  
Yet they cannot describe Thee.  
Although men must meditate upon Thee,  
Yet cannot their mind comprehend Thee.

This hymn is quoted as culled from a Tantric compilation, the Tantrasara. Its opening is full of the supreme meaning of the great Devi symbol, its close is an entire self-abandonment to the adoration of the body of the Mother. This catholicity is typical of the whole Tantric system, which is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of a single human soul.

Article taken from: The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA) Vol.1, *Early Cultural Writings*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department (2003). p. 569-575.

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## *Integral Yoga: Fulfilment of Tantra Yoga*

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V. Ananda Reddy

For hundreds of years, the world has drunk the nectar of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita from the reservoir of the Indian knowledge system. The vastness, depth, and details of this reservoir are unfathomable to the ordinary mind caught in the rigours and struggles of everyday life. When you add Tantra Yoga to this storehouse of wisdom, things turn towards uncovering a fantastical, sometimes mysterious, yet practical school of knowledge that is not merely theoretical or scholarly but promoted by the living gurus throughout the Indian milieu. Whether this system is referred to as the original Tantra, Tantra Shastra, Tantra Vidya or Sri Vidya, there has been a parampara, a tradition of gurus who have followed one after the other and who have realised and explored the various aspects of the Tantra system, thus taking it even further in the realm of practical possibilities.

Something similar needs to happen in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga to move beyond the scholarly study and debate phase. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have often emphasised that unless and until we get into the practical realisation of some aspects of the Integral Yoga system, we will proceed only a little. Because after a while, scholarship and didactics become dry and mechanical, leaving the learner thirsty for more. This is precisely what happened with the Vedas. With too many rituals, rites, archaic symbolism, and pedantic functions, they needed more experience and knowledge. Fortunately, in due course, the Vedantic Rishis, through the authority and force of the Upanishads, connected humanity back to the indwelling knowledge and experience of Vedic wisdom for the upliftment of the general populace by the power of ethics, morality, and religious principles.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is thoroughly seeped in the wisdom traditions of prominent schools of Indian Yoga systems such as Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Raja Yoga, true to its name, "integrates" and reconciles the different systems to offer a contemporary system that has the potential and power to address sometimes divergent needs to today's world. In that sense, I am taking the liberty of calling Integral Yoga a "fulfilment" of Tantra Yoga. That begs the question—despite Tantra Yoga being 2,500 to 3,000 years old, has it not fulfilled itself through the advent of realised yogis, gurus, and practitioners? The answer is that due to historical, political, and philosophical reasons, various misunderstandings, misgivings, and falsifications have distorted the true message and significance of Tantra Yoga, thus impacting its fulfilment, whose ultimate aim is to enrich human life and alleviate suffering. This is where a more profound study and analysis of similarities and differences between Tantra Yoga and Integral Yoga becomes necessary.

Let's begin with a key similarity. I humbly conclude that Tantra Yoga is the

precursor of Integral Yoga. Philosophically, both Tantra and Integral Yoga have the same origin. Both believe, as Sri Aurobindo himself says, the key essentiality of Integral Yoga, “two poles of being whose essential unity is the secret of existence, Brahman and Shakti, Spirit and Nature, and that Nature is power of the spirit or rather is spirit as power”. (CWSA 24: 611) So, this single line is the basic philosophy. Brahman and Shakti are two powers, or in another book, he calls Brahman and Maya, Purusha and Prakriti. These two are separate, but as Sri Aurobindo and Tantra tell us, they are one. They are united in the one and are single. This unity is the strength of both Tantra Yoga and Integral Yoga.

Let’s shift gears and look at another key but nuanced similarity that, on one hand, highlights a similarity of purpose between the two but, on the other hand, also offers a significant difference. In most Yoga systems, the purpose has been liberation, as we say in common terms, Mukti. In Tantra Yoga, too, the aim is liberation, a union with the highest self and divinity. As with other yoga systems, Tantra Yoga also emphasises the methodology that leads to the dissolution of the human and individual ego into the silence of the self-being. In other words, the aim is to lead the individual towards inward withdrawal. Withdrawal is a precursor to egoic dissolution, a necessary step in Brahman’s realisation and eventual liberation. In many ways, this inward journey rejects the outer human existence. This has essentially been the idea of liberation or Mukti. Although the inward, contemplative journey leading to the liberation of the individual is also a key feature of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga, it is not its final aim. Whereas, in Tantra, it is the ideal and ultimate aim. One interesting feature of Tantra Yoga is that its path towards Mukti differs significantly from what the Vedanta and other systems have stated. The Tantra path is also a path of cosmic enjoyment and perfection. In Tantra, there are two terms to remember—Mukti and Bhukti. Bhukti is materialistic enjoyment; in other words, not rejecting this world or this life. While Vedanta and the other systems emphasise Mukti, which results in escaping from the clutches of the materialistic world, Tantra, on the other hand, states that this world and its enjoyments are to partake with equal vigour.

At this point, we must look at an essential difference between Tantra Yoga and Integral Yoga. While Integral Yoga starts with the Vedantic principles, it also integrates the Tantric viewpoints but goes beyond both and herein lies the significant difference. Tantra Yoga believes in this individual salvation, individual Mukti. In Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga, while it is essential to achieve individual salvation or liberation, a key focus is also on the acknowledgement of continuing the “journey” towards the transcendental being capable of a universal aspect. Integral Yoga believes that not only is there an individual Jivatman or Atman or the Psychic Being, but there is an equally important universal Godhead, a universal divinity. And beyond this universal divinity, there is a transcendental divinity. The individual in yogic sadhana progresses from the Atman to the

Jivatman and from Jivatman to the transcendent. Most of the Yogas skip this line of the universal cosmic divinity. However, one of the most significant emphases for Sri Aurobindo is this cosmic universal unity or divinity. Sri Aurobindo says this is of utmost importance because by realising this cosmic being, Yoga assumes the characteristic of being universal and collective—in other words, it benefits humanity. One can say that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is collective Yoga, unlike all the other Yogas, which are primarily individualistic.

Sri Aurobindo eloquently describes the collective Yoga of the divine nature, "The liberated individual being, united with the Divine in self and spirit, becomes in his natural being a self-perfecting instrument for the perfect out-flowering of the Divine in humanity. (CWSA 24: 613-14) It is this "out-flowering of the Divine in humanity" that leads us to posit that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is indeed the "fulfilment" of Tantra and even other Yogas because of its emphasis on the betterment and upliftment of entire humanity, not just at a particular point in time, but for times to come.

Therefore, the aim of Integral Yoga is not simply to achieve any Mukti for our self-ego or individual salvation but rather to work to actualise the Divine Will in our world. That means perfecting humanity upon the Earth itself. We do not just seek salvation for our benefit, salvation and liberation. This aspect is unique to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

Let's briefly focus on the earlier aspect of divine enjoyment through purifying the sense experience outlined in Tantra Yoga. Tantra says that we can enjoy this world, but not for blunt enjoyment per se of the sensual experiences. This aspect of enjoyment is combined with the aspect of purification. This aspect of purification in sensuality is the primary attempt at perfection. The pictures, paintings, and sculptures seen on the temple walls are mistakenly identified as erotic art depicting sensuous experiences. Instead, the true intent of such art is to magnify the inner experiences of divine beauty that can only come about by the twin bonding of the purification of our mind and senses with the perfection of our outer actions and responses.

An example of this is the famous story of Sri Ramakrishna, having mastered and experienced spiritual realisations of various schools of Yoga and religions, implored a Tantra Yogin, an accomplished but rare female Tantra teacher, to teach him the deeper secrets of Tantra Yoga. To test the spiritual discipline of her new student, the Yogin had Sri Ramakrishna sit on the lap of a beautiful woman. At that precise moment, Sri Ramakrishna went spontaneously into a trance of divine ecstasy, for, to him, every experience was simply the perfect manifestation of the Divine to be revered with devotion and bhakti. This is what is meant by purification and perfection. This is also why Sri Aurobindo says we must not misunderstand Tantra Yoga as mostly about sensuous enjoyment.

Integral Yoga does not shy away from the question of enjoyment and

experiences. However, it looks at these from a different perspective. When describing Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo says that in this Yoga, “all life is Yoga”. To better understand what he means, let’s cast an eye on the primary elements of human life as most people know it. First, there is this element of “enjoyment”—enjoyment at different levels of human existence—from the physical to the material, to the sensual, to the vital, and finally, to the mental. The next element is that of “possession”—the incessant need for possessing and wanting something or someone—a need that never ends. The final element is “conquest”—the constant battle for achievement and for winning no matter the costs. For the most part, these three elements define the majority of endeavours in a typical human life. Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga recognises the ironclad grip of these triple paradoxes on humanity. Still, it takes a quantum leap to exchange them with something that does not negate them but transcends them with greater, finer, and long-lasting results that are supremely more fulfilling.

In Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga, the sense of “enjoyment” is not sensual, physical, or emotional. Instead, Sri Aurobindo emphasises the enjoyment of “Ananda”—divine bliss that permeates every corner of the universe—in other words, to see the Divine, to feel the Divine, and to be divine-like in every experience. Recall Sri Ramakrishna’s experience in the earlier story. When it comes to possessions, Sri Aurobindo does not attempt to transform us into becoming ascetics and escaping into the forest. He says that if we must possess, then let’s possess the right thing; let’s possess that that will never lose value, never get stolen, never cause stress—if you must possess, then strive to acquire divine consciousness. Why? Once we have divine consciousness, the entire universe becomes part of us, and we relate to everyone and everything. The idea of physical possession becomes mundane and somewhat meaningless. That does not mean that we cease to “own” things, but what it means is that the sense of “ownership” is replaced with a sense of “stewardship”—we become the temporary “stewards” and caretakers who have been assigned the divine responsibility for partaking in this worldly life with a sense of non-attachment, dispassion, and divine love. Like Tantra, Sri Aurobindo also gives credence to the element of bhukti but at a spiritual level. Where there is Ananda, Bliss, and divine consciousness, where is the need for conquest and waging battle?

Let’s turn to another important element in the Tantra system—the significance of Shakti and its arousal from below, as it were, as she transverses her journey from the Kundalini to the Sahasradala. So, this ascent of the Shakti power is a critical imperative in Tantra Yoga. While Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga recognises and acknowledges the significance of Shakti, it does not begin with the awakening of this primordial feminine power. Instead, Sri Aurobindo takes a somewhat revolutionary approach and shifts the focus on the human soul, the atman or, as he calls it, the psychic being. Here’s a critical difference between Tantra Yoga and

Integral Yoga. Tantra emphasises awakening the Shakti coiled and dormant in the Kundalini to ascend through the various chakra centres into higher spiritual consciousness. Whereas, in Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo focuses on connecting to one's soul, the psychic being and using it to ascend to higher domains of consciousness so that the resulting realisations cause the pure consciousness to descend through the chakra centres, thus achieving the same goals as Tantra, but using an approach that is less risky with greater predictability if pursued with aspiration, purification, and complete surrender to the Divine Grace. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo emphasises the inclusion and integration of the three systems of Yoga into one's Integral Yoga practice—Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga. The reason for this is that the goal of Integral Yoga practice is not to escape from this world but to become an integral part of it, even when pursuing the lofty reaches of higher consciousness by contributing through our self-less work (karma), acquisition of greater self-knowledge (jnana), and offering our love and devotion in the service of the Iswara (bhakti).

Tantra Yoga emphasises effort, the immense tapasya towards Moksha, and liberation. Tantra Yoga's premise is that progress is only possible with this effort. This is yet another significant difference between Tantra and Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga believes in the power of surrender—self-surrender to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo asks us to escape from the clutches of the ego and let the Divine be our Master. Not only that, let the divine be the sadhak, the seeker in you. In Tantra and other Yogas, you are asked to do the work, the tapasya yourself. Whether meditating, engaging in rituals, studying scriptures, chanting mantras, or what have you. In other words, all progress is contingent upon ego-driven efforts. But in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, the effort is done by the divine Shakti invoked within you. What is your work? It is to implore, call upon, and surrender to the Divine Mother Shakti with an attitude full of aspiration for attaining higher and higher levels of consciousness. So, the sadhana of Integral Yoga is done by the Divine, for the Divine, of the Divine. While it is true that over the ages, several exalted Yogis and tapasavis have successfully attained Moksha and Mukti through different systems of Yogic abhayasas and practices, the one major drawback has been that the bulk of humanity has always been left behind to fend for themselves in the development and growth of consciousness. That is why, despite great yogis, massive temples, inspirational satsangs and religious discourses, Tantra art and architecture of stupendous proportions, humanity continues to be mired in the same age-old quicksand of despair, hopelessness, and scepticism.

Even scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Puranas, Tantra, and many, many others have not made appreciable differences to how we have evolved as human beings in our quest for greater peace, more profound compassion, better understanding, and more inclusivity. Certainly, intellectually and technologically,



we have made significant progress—space exploration, breakthroughs in healthcare, alternate energy sources, use of Artificial intelligence, etc. etc., but the fundamental problems that we face as a human race remain the same, if not compounded and made even worse over time. The reason is that, essentially, we have not changed or evolved. We are the same human beings. Because of our misguided faith in sheer human capabilities, we have tried to solve all problems piecemeal with a mindset that is not as holistic as it should have been. We have tried to do it ourselves using somewhat limited intellectual capacities that can never truly comprehend the entirety of our existence and interconnectedness. For that, we need to raise our consciousness and tap into the limitless wisdom of Divine Consciousness through Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga brings a unique perspective when he says that rather than struggling and going from pillar to post to make sense of different yogic practices, let the Divine do the Yoga Sadhana for you and show you the way. You only have to surrender to the Divine Will. This Divine Will will help you overcome the limitations of a very limited body with its diseases and ailments and all emotional and mental shortcomings. The fault does not lie in the human being per se. Still, it is the nature of limitation that exists in matter, our body, our mind, and our vital emotions, because of which our efforts alone cannot transcend the seemingly unsurmountable barriers to reach higher levels of consciousness.

The Vedas, Upanishads, and the Gita tell us we are the manifestation of the Divine in a human body. Sri Aurobindo describes it as "involution", which can be thought of, for the sake of simplicity, as the reverse of evolution. When the Divine "involute", He, in a manner of speaking, becomes a "limited" being in this human form, the body. But in this human form, there is also the "spark" of the Divine as the Soul, the Psychic Being. Because the Soul, the Psychic Being, is the Divine Spark, its essence is liberation and freedom from all ignorance. But being born in this limited universe, in a limited human body, its self-existing, pure Self Knowledge is "covered" in veils of distortion and ignorance. In traditional religions, the temples, pujas, ceremonies, rituals, offerings, etc., are the ways to remove the veils of ignorance so that the self-luminous, ever-pure Self, the Soul, the Psychic Being reveals itself in its true Glory. Unfortunately, as we can notice from the evidence, the bulk of humanity is far from progressing on this journey. This is where Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga offers a straight path that goes through the Grace of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo says this liberation, this freedom from all ignorance, can be done by the Divine, for the Divine, of the Divine. This is the beauty and revolutionary aspect of this approach.

In his epic poem, "Savitri", Sri Aurobindo says, "God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep". (CWSA 33: 55) In other words, it is not through intellectual discourses, seminars, and mental gymnastics that we shall come to the gates of liberation; it is through our continued aspiration and total surrender

to the Divine that these gates shall swing open. Since the words "Divine" or "God" are too abstract, we must beckon a "special" Being—a Goddess—the Shakti, the Divine Mother. This is how Sri Aurobindo takes us from the abstraction of scriptures to the practical aspects of our mental and spiritual evolutionary process, not just at an individual but also at a collective level.

So, Sri Aurobindo asks us to do the sadhana by surrendering—what is it that we need to surrender? Not money, possessions, property, or family, but "something" we have in greater abundance than anything else. Not only is it abundant, but it keeps growing throughout our lives! The wiser and more intelligent we think we have become, the more it grows. It is the world's most significant resource but has one of the smallest spellings—E-G-O—ego. In Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, our ego needs to be surrendered to the Divine. Because once the ego is surrendered, your aspiration for the Divine Will takes over. With total and unconditional aspiration and surrender, Divine Grace appears.

Sri Aurobindo says that a sincere call for surrender cannot be formulated from the mind and the intellect. The "true" call can only "well up" from the heart; in other words, it must come spontaneously and without mechanical or mental effort from the psychological centre of the heart, the Psychic Being. It must come from "within" without any action from the "head". An example of such a heartfelt plea and prayer can be seen in the Mahabharata, when Draupadi, in the middle of getting disrobed by Dushasana, one of the Kaurava princes, calls out in deep distress Krishna's name many times and in different ways—sometimes, she implores him by addressing him as "The King of Dwarka", sometimes, as "The friend of the Gopis", and sometimes as, "my brother and dear friend", but nothing happens, her humiliation continues. It is only at the end, in a state of utter surrender, that she calls out with a helpless plea that originates from the deepest recesses of her heart, "O Lord, O Divine, the one who resides in the depth of my heart, "Antaryami", rescue me!" At that moment, Lord Krishna appears in his divine Avataric form. He rescues her by covering her in immeasurable amounts of cloth that never ends, thus thwarting the disrobement. Only when we surrender, and the everyday egoic thoughts and wishes cease, do our prayers well up from deep within the heart centre, and does the Divine help appear. Sri Aurobindo says, "Divine help comes when all help fails". So, Sri Aurobindo makes it simple and tells us to surrender ourselves to the Divine and rely on the Divine.

Let's briefly return to Tantra Yoga and its significance in today's age. Tantra Yoga became popular at a time called Kali Yuga, our age. Although it is considered as important as the Vedas, Tantra is not from the Vedas. The Vedas were given to humanity in the golden age of Satya Yuga. In the later Dwapara Yuga, the ancient Sages and Rishis gave the Upanishads for further growth of humanity. The third age followed the Treta Yuga, which gave us the Puranas. In the fourth

age, the Kali Yuga came the Tantras. Every age is marked by the advent of a treasure trove of spiritual knowledge most appropriate for that age regarding human consciousness development. This is why Tantra Yoga has become popular in today's age of Kali Yuga. The reason is that Kali Yuga is the age of material prosperity. It is the age where human emotions come to the forefront. Where the lower nature of humanity comes up for fulfilment, all around us, we witness oppression, inequality, violence, materialism, and sexual themes in one form or another—this is not by chance—it is an indication of essential characteristics of this age. Because of this, Tantra Yoga has also appeared at this age. Tantra wants to bring out, relieve, and ultimately purify the lower instincts and nature so that these can be “given up” to the Sahasradala, to the Divine.

Nevertheless, Tantra Yoga, if not guided by an authentic, self-realized yogi-guru free from all ulterior motives, can lead a student to deception and even self-ruin. Herein lies one of the dangers of Tantra Yoga in today's age. Another critical challenge of Tantra Yoga for the current times and lifestyles is the humongous practices and the accompanying details that make it impractical for most people, especially householders and working professionals.

Sri Aurobindo offers a fresh perspective that juxtaposes the four Yugas with the three ages or periods in developing Indian philosophical and religious thought espoused by historical experts. The first age was the Vedic Age, where the realised Rishis uttered the “seen” and “heard” revealed Truths using highly symbolic and metaphorical verses that, on the face of it, were rooted at the physical and mental levels, but in reality, were describing the primordial reality of the divine manifestations including the Godheads—Indira—the Rain God, Agni—the Fire God, Vayu—the Wind God—all symbols of the elemental principles of Divine expressions. This was how the great yogis linked the physical nature of the “man” of that period with divinity. The succeeding Upanishadic Rishis brought the power of reason and philosophical thought, but these had to be studied by the chosen initiates in seclusion.

The second age was the Purano-Tantric Age. In this age, the “concentrated knowledge” of the Vedic Age was brought out into the open and distributed to the broader society. In some ways, this age was the decline of the Vedic Age because Symbols became transformed into stories and words. But this was inevitable because when concentrated knowledge available to only a few is distributed, some amount of truth and wisdom is lost. This age was aimed towards the commoners, and the dominant theme was embracing life. There was massive growth in language, literature, epics, arts, and sculpture. This age also gave rise to the concept of “Sampradayas”—Indian spiritual traditions. Each Sampradaya dealt with one aspect of Truth.

The third age was the Bhakti Age. This was the revival and emergence of regional religious movements that spread across India. Starting from the South

of India and gradually moving to the North, East, and West. This age had a dual character of religious and social reformation based on the path of Devotion as a path to Salvation. This was also a time of many invasions and strife. This led to assimilating the old and new and synthesising new philosophies and belief systems. This led to a tremendous change and churn in the very spirit of India and its people.

We can regard the current age as the post-Bhakti age—although there may not be a name for it, we may consider calling it the Integral Age. Sri Aurobindo saw the importance of this period with the birth of new religions, philosophies, and thoughts across the length and breadth of India. Why call this the integral Age? Because for the first time in all these yugas, in all these centuries, the time has come for humanity to believe in the totality of the divinity in the human being. The time has come to move beyond the long-held belief that the Divine is “up there” somewhere, in the transcendental divinity. We must realise that the Divine is there universally, collectively, in humanity, in every human being. The path to the Divine is not just through the mind, heart, meditation, or devotion; even the body is divine. That is the great strength of this Integral Age, where the body itself is acknowledged as a divine habitation of the Divine and must be honoured.

Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the future envisages two lines of thought that are intertwined and interconnected. The first is the belief that integrality is the future. Instead of dividing humanity, the different ideas, philosophies, and religions will reach a point of integration and commonality that highlights the common-running threads and universal principles. The second is the belief in the descent of the Divine—descent of the Divine Shakti. History is replete with examples of the descent of the avatars. But this time, it will be the descent of the divine consciousness that will change and transform the collectivity of humanity. In this “yuga”, salvation is not just at an individual level, but the collective consciousness that is uplifted and transformed. In his work, “The Renaissance in India”, Sri Aurobindo tells us about the “index vision” of this yuga. He says,

Its index vision is pointed to a truth that exceeds the human mind and, if at all realised in his members, would turn human life into a divine superlife. And not until this third largest sweep of the spiritual evolution has come into its own, can Indian civilisation be said to have discharged its mission, to have spoken its last word and be *functus officio*, crowned and complete in its office of mediation between the life of man and the spirit”. (CWSA 20: 215-216)

We all speak about the future of India; in the above lines, Sri Aurobindo describes the sweeping vision for the Integral Age that India will drive. The whole world is going through the throes of spiritual evolution, and until this is crowned and complete, India will not have fulfilled its function. In Sri Aurobindo’s “Five Dreams”, India’s spiritual message and destiny are described in stirring details and fixity. The last word of Sri Aurobindo is that until India has completed its



mission, its future is incomplete. So, that is the significant role that Sri Aurobindo has given to India.

For this reason, I have called Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga the fulfilment of Tantra Yoga. While Tantra Yoga offers the pathway for individual salvation, Integral Yoga speaks about collective salvation. Tantra imagines Mukti for the individual, and Sri Aurobindo speaks about the liberation of the collective. Tantra Yoga tries to overcome the difficulties through individual efforts and then tries to salvage humanity. Sri Aurobindo says it must be the fulfilment of the collectivity by the descent of the Divine Mother Consciousness so that the entire humanity and terrestrial life is uplifted.

In Integral Yoga, the Divine takes over as the sadhak whose primary endeavour is to be open to the Divine, aspire for the Divine, purify ourselves, and surrender to the Divine. If we can remember and practice the simple, three-word "mantra" of Integral Yoga—Aspire, Purify, Surrender—we can, in right earnest, begin our journey towards fulfilling the destiny of humanity.

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## *Sri Aurobindo and Tantra*

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*Pariksith Singh*

It may perhaps be said that the greatest discovery of the Indic civilization was that of the Purusha principle. Purusha is the principle of pure awareness, immobile, causeless, eternally free from all movements and manifestation. It is the Purusha that balances out the world of change, of flux, by its absolute stillness and indestructibility.

Contrast this with the principle of Prakriti, which is all manifestation, movement, and constant change. It is the Purusha principle that may be considered equivalent to the Shiva principle. It is to the credit of the Indic civilization that both Purusha and Prakriti were given equal status and equivalent importance. Only the path of liberation via the Purusha would go via Vedanta, while that via Prakriti would be that of Tantra or that of Shaktism.

What is the way of Tantra? The traditional ways are to use highly specialized or powerful formations of Prakriti, whether in form or sound or any other evocation or mastery of acts that release immense energy. These are traditionally the mantra, the yantra, and other practices such as mudras, puja, use of taboo substances, Nyasa, transgressive or antinomian acts, shmashana yoga, and ritual sexuality.

The Tantric age flourished from the 8th to the 14th century ACE. Eventually, Tantra was 'overshadowed by more popular Bhakti movements that swept through India from the 15th century onwards.' (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tantra>) Over time, a slow loss of purity in the tantric traditions happened due to abuse by its practitioners and the left path (vama marga). According to Geoffrey Samuel in *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, by the 19th century, there was a 'radical reframing of yogic practices from the Tantric context.' Thus, one of the most powerful means of meditation and liberation discovered by the Indic civilization fell into disrepute and large disuse.

According to Samuel, 'the new devotional styles of religion, with their emphasis on emotional submission to a supreme savior-deity, whether Saivite or Vaisnavite, were better adapted, perhaps, to the subaltern role of non-Muslim groups under Muslim rule. Saiva Tantra did remain an important practice among most Saiva ascetics, however. Tantric traditions also survived in certain regions, such as among the Naths of Rajasthan, in the Sri Vidya tradition of South India, and in the Bengali Bauls.'

Even Swami Vivekananda, the great revivalist of Vedanta and articulator of Indic darshana in the West, avoided discussions of Tantra. Although Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, his guru and adept in Shaktism, was a great siddha of Vedanta



and Tantra, Swami Vivekananda focused more on the rightist or dakshina panthi marg rather than the vama marga. It was Sri Aurobindo, however, who gave Tantra the philosophical basis and brought it into his Vedanta, making it purna. But he transformed the energies of traditional tantra into what may be called a higher Tantra or Vedantic Tantra.

In his magnificent essay *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo elevated Shaktism back to its original purity and puissance while bringing its intensity into his purna yoga. Thus, Shakti as executrix of Shiva is the intermediary power that must be evoked by any practitioner of his Integral Vedanta. According to him, this invocation needed three movements, 'a triple labor of aspiration, rejection and surrender,—

1. An aspiration vigilant, constant, unceasing the mind's will, the heart's seeking, the assent of the vital being, the will to open and make plastic the physical consciousness and nature;
2. Rejection of the movements of the lower nature rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind, rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth, so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being, rejection of the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, *tamas*, so that the true stability of Light, Power, Ananda may establish itself in a body growing always more divine;
3. Surrender of oneself and all one is and has and every plane of the consciousness and every movement to the Divine and the Shakti.'

The traditional practices of Tantra, such as ritual, transgressive, or antinomian acts, ritual music and dance, sexual practices, yatra or pilgrimage, etc., were no longer deemed important. Instead, a quiet and psychic remembrance, sincerity, and surrender were insisted on. Sri Aurobindo thus used the purity of the Chaitya Purusha or the psychic to cleanse the lower energies that the tantric attempts to transform in his practices.

The ancient aim of Tantra to transform the body into the Vajra-kaya or the Diamond Body was one that was not theoretical but realizable. Since Prakriti was not looked down upon or considered subservient or even secondary by the Tantriks and Shaktas and even considered the most primal and primary Power, the processes and movements of Prakriti were taken up in Tantra, and their energy used to effect the metamorphosis.

Sri Aurobindo, being a bhakta of Kali himself, brought into his Integral Yoga all the refined processes of Tantra but with a new orientation. The change would

not begin from the base of the spine as in traditional Tantra but from above the head. Shiva and Shakti are both of importance, and invocation of the Divine begins from a different center than the mooladhara. The dangers and pitfalls of the traditional vama marga are avoided.

Sri Aurobindo also brought in ancient discoveries of the Vedas into the nature of the reality, the Sun discovered in the nescient by the Vedic rishis, confirmed in his own sadhana, into the Integral understanding. Matter too houses the Sun in its depths and darkness, and it is the same Sun as seen above the head to use Vedic symbols. He called his yoga 'advaitic in principle, tantric in execution.'

By bringing Tantra into the sunlight of Vedanta, he kept the principle of tantric transformation but dropped its lower practices. The Mother of Pondicherry has said that what Sri Aurobindo represented was a complete departure from the past into new creation. Perhaps one may say that Sri Aurobindo brought about a metamorphosis in ancient traditions and gave them a new form and meaning that would be easily applicable in the new age. In the process, he also gave a new body to the ancient Tantra while retaining its spirit. And this integration, although attempted in the past by other great yogis like in the Nath Sampradaya, was never articulated with such clarity and precision and in such a modern language. The powers of Tantra, greater than that of nuclear explosions, restored to their ancient eminence, will continue to live as an integral part of Sanatana Dharma in Sri Aurobindo's darshana.

Contrasting the way of the Tantra with the schools of Vedanta in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo says: 'In all of them the lord of the Yoga is the Purusha, the Conscious Soul that knows, observes, attracts, governs. But in Tantra it is rather Prakriti, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in- Power executive in the universe. It was by learning and applying the intimate secrets of this Will-in- Power, its method, its Tantra, that the Tantric Yogin pursued the aims of his discipline-mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude. Instead of drawing back from manifested Nature and its difficulties, he confronted them, seized and conquered. But in the end, as is the general tendency of Prakriti, Tantric Yoga largely lost its principle in its machinery and became a thing of formulae and occult mechanism still powerful when rightly used but fallen from the clarity of their original intention.'

But why is Tantra necessary if the yogi can simply withdraw from the world into the world of nirvana and bliss? Sri Aurobindo answers thus, 'If indeed our aim be only an escape from the world to God, synthesis is unnecessary and a waste of time; for then our sole practical aim must be to find out one path out of the thousand that lead to God, one shortest possible of short cuts, and not to linger exploring different paths that end in the same goal. But if our aim be a transformation of our integral being into the terms of God- existence, it is then

that a synthesis becomes necessary.... For the supreme Spirit is one as Purusha or as Prakriti, conscious being or power of conscious being, and as the Jiva in essence of self and spirit is one with the supreme Purusha, so on the side of Nature, in power of self and spirit it is one with Shakti, *parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*. To realise this double oneness is the condition of the integral self-perfection. The Jiva is then the meeting-place of the play of one ness of the supreme Soul and Nature.'

In a letter to a disciple, he says, 'It is only if you approach the Supreme through his double aspect of Sat and Chit- Shakti, double but inseparable, that the total truth of things can become manifest to the inner experience. This other side was developed by the Shakta Tantrics. The two together, the Vedantic and the Tantric truth unified, can arrive at the integral knowledge.'

Sri Aurobindo brought together a synthesis of these two ancient paths, superficially separate and distinct, yet in essence eternally one, of Vedas and Vedanta and of Tantra and Shaktism, and made them one in theory and practice as part of the completion of an ancient cycle. This fulfillment of each path in the other is a critical step for all seekers of truth and spirit, as significant as what Sri Krishna accomplished in the Gita.

Mircea Eliade in *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* has stated that Tantra flourished in outer parts of Indic civilization, in Assam and in the Northwest, along the Afghan border. But this may be true only partially for the knowledge of the tantric processes and truths appears in the Vedas and the Upanishads. And he also notes that 'the Tantric writers present the doctrine as a new revelation of timeless truth, addressed to the man of this "dark age" in which the spirit is deeply veiled under the flesh. The doctors of Hindu tantrism regarded the Vedas and the Brahmanic tradition as inadequate for "modern times". Man no longer possessed the spiritual spontaneity and vigor that he enjoyed at the beginning of the cycle; he was incapable of direct access to Truth; he must, then, "stem the current", and, to do so, he must set out from the basis and typical experiences of his fallen condition that is, from the very sources of his life.' It may perhaps be said here that Sri Aurobindo accepted both traditions as valid and brought them together in a vyavharic unity by discovering their inner and essential oneness.

The Mother in *Prayers and Meditations* describes an experience she had on 26 November 1915, 'The entire consciousness immersed in divine contemplation, the whole being enjoyed a supreme and vast felicity.

'Then was the physical body seized, first in its lower members and next the whole of it, by a sacred trembling which made all personal limits fall away little by little even in the most material sensation. The being grew in greatness progressively, methodically, breaking down every barrier, shattering every obstacle, that it might contain and manifest a force and a power which increased ceaselessly in immensity and intensity. It was as a progressive dilatation of the cells until

there was a complete identification with the earth: the body of the awakened consciousness was the terrestrial globe moving harmoniously in ethereal space. And the consciousness knew that its global body was thus moving in the arms of the universal Being, and it gave itself, it abandoned itself to It in an ecstasy of peaceful bliss. Then it felt that its body was absorbed in the body of the universe and one with it; the consciousness became the consciousness of the universe, immobile in its totality, moving infinitely in its internal complexity. The consciousness of the universe sprang towards the Divine in an ardent aspiration, a perfect surrender, and it saw in the splendour of the immaculate Light the radiant Being standing on a many-headed serpent whose body coiled infinitely around the universe. The Being in an eternal gesture of triumph mastered and created at one and the same time the serpent and the universe that issued from him; erect on the serpent he dominated it with all his victorious might, and the same gesture that crushed the hydra enveloping the universe gave it eternal birth. Then the consciousness became this Being and perceived that its form was changing once more; it was absorbed into something which was no longer a form and yet contained all forms, something which, immutable, sees, the Eye, the Witness. And what It sees, is. Then this last vestige of form disappeared and the consciousness itself was absorbed into the Unutterable, the Ineffable.

‘The return towards the consciousness of the individual body took place very slowly in a constant and invariable splendour of Light and Power and Felicity and Adoration, by successive gradations, but directly, without passing again through the universal and terrestrial forms. And it was as if the modest corporeal form had become the direct and immediate vesture, without any intermediary, of the supreme and eternal Witness.’

This is a letter which the Mother sent to Sri Aurobindo and to which he answered on 31 December 1915 as follows: ‘The experience you have described is Vedic in the real sense, though not one which would easily be recognised by the modern systems of Yoga which call themselves Vedic. It is the union of the “Earth” of the Veda and Purana with the divine principle, an earth which is said to be above our earth, that is to say, the physical being and consciousness of which the world and the body are only images. But the modern Yogas hardly recognise the possibility of a material union with the Divine.’

In my opinion, this is a significant statement-That the Vedic understanding had been forgotten and was brought back by Sri Aurobindo in Integral Yoga. And that this Vedic knowledge may not have been entirely separate and apart from the knowledge of Tantra that developed later.

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# *The Chakras in the Transformative Paradigm of Sri Aurobindo*

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Soumitra Basu

Out of the Inconscient's soulless mindless night  
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. (*Savitri*: 528)

It would be interesting to study the leverage Sri Aurobindo gave in his integral paradigm to the much-eulogized activation of the Chakras and the corresponding awakening of the Kundalini Shakti in the conventional Indian tradition. Sri Aurobindo views that the Chakras are located in the inner being, "belong organically to the subtle body", and "by their opening that the Yogic or inner consciousness develops". (CWSA 28: 231) The Chakras act as communication channels between the inner and outer beings. (CWSA 30: 325) As the inner being is linked with the cosmic consciousness, forces and influences from the cosmic consciousness enter the inner being and then, through the Chakras, enter the outer being. Hence, the Chakras link the cosmic consciousness and the individual consciousness. However, Sri Aurobindo stressed that the channels are usually closed or partly open, and even then, a trickle of the cosmic forces that seep into the outer being is responsible for the great universal works of art, literature and intuitive outpourings produced by humanity. (*Ibid*)

## **Origination of Chakras**

It would be interesting to consider the origin of the Chakras and how they are represented in the individual in the Aurobindonian paradigm, where the manifestation is a play of descending involutory or typical (archetypal) worlds and ascending evolutionary worlds. By progressive condensation, several parallel lines of consciousness descend from the Transcendent to produce a hierarchy of involutory (non-evolutionary) worlds until the trajectory reaches the Inconscience from where an evolutionary journey starts. However, the present evolutionary world of human beings manifests in the matrix of matter. The involutory worlds stationed prior to the Inconscience do not have matter as the starting point and hence are inaccessible to the outer senses (which are entangled in the material schemata), they can only be perceived by the subtle senses located in the inner or subliminal being. Not all the descending lines of consciousness end in the Inconscience but remain active only in subtle realms.

One line of consciousness not deformed by the Inconscience but gets

concealed by it is that which descends from the SAT, the "Existence" aspect of the Absolute. This line ends up as the soul-spark or essence of every form and hides in the Inconscience; it acquires a soul-personality through evolution and becomes more and more differentiated in the human being than other forms in the manifestation.

There is another line of "conscious-force" that descends from the Chit-Shakti or "Consciousness-Force" aspect of the Absolute which actually creates all the involutory worlds and after descending into the Inconscience, it propels the forces of evolution to become active and progress upwards. Evolution is propelled by the evolutionary nisus activated by the "Conscious-Force" and is further accentuated by forces acting from the involutory worlds. The involutory worlds of the different planes of consciousness, viz the worlds of subtle physical, life-energy and mind-plane exert corroborating influences at optimal points of the evolutionary trajectory to manifest the physical, vital and mental parts of the being thus constituting the structure of the being as we know it.

All the involutory worlds are supported by different denominations of Conscious-Force that have descended from the Absolute. In the emergent structure of the being, these denominations of conscious-force poised in different planes or typical worlds project vortices or whorls of consciousness-energy at corresponding planes of consciousness in the inner being. Presumably, these vortices of conscious-force become dynamic centres transmitting the subtle pranic energies (the energies of the subliminal plane) through subtle channels (called nadi) and are the Chakras. In a way, the Chakras are junctional zones of energy-transmitting channels gathered classically into seven centres. These centres, called technically lotuses, "rise in an ascending scale to the summit where there is the thousand-petalled lotus from which all the mental and vital energy flows. Each of these lotuses is the centre and storing-house of its own particular system of psychological powers, energies and operations,— each system corresponding to a plane of our psychological existence,— and these flow out and return in the stream of the pranic energies as they course through the nadis". (CWSA 23-24: 537)

Therefore, the Chakras or centres are present not in the real soul-substance but in Nature. (A.B.Purani, *Evening Talks*: 40) They act as communication channels between the inner and outer beings. Sri Aurobindo explained that they are not present in the subconscious, where the consciousness becomes rather vague. "There is no subconscient centre...the subconscient is too vague to have a centre. It has a level—below the feet as the superconscient is above, but from there it can surge up anywhere". (CWSA 28: 245) Likewise, the chakras are not present in the superconscious realms where the consciousness is no longer embodied, and there is no Kundalini Shakti. "There is no Kundalini Shakti above the head. Above the head is the universal or Divine Consciousness and Force. The Kundalini is the



latent power asleep in the chakras". (CWSA 29: 461) Sri Aurobindo also pointed out that these centres are usually closed or partly open in the ordinary individual due to being shut into their own occult energies by the Ignorance (CWSA 10-11: 1340) arising from the Inconscience. As a result, only a fraction of the powers and forces needed to maintain the external life pass through these partly open channels. Neither the powers of the soul nor the secret powers of the mind can be ordinarily activated in the physical body. The physical body per se cannot take the full inrush of the Conscious-Force from the cosmic spheres; it has to receive the Force in a regulated way through conduits which transmit as much energy as the physical body can receive. This is the reason why, though the human being is sustained both by subtle and gross dimensions of consciousness, the gross physical is taken to be authentic while the subtle planes remain surreal. "This is the real reason, looked at from the mechanical point of view, why the embodied soul seems so dependent on the bodily...life". (CWSA 23-24: 537)

### Chakras and their Correspondences

The Chakras have been viewed in archetypal symbolic forms as lotuses of different colours and petal compositions with respective presiding deities in the conventional Indian tradition. Still, Sri Aurobindo was primarily concerned with the planes of consciousness where they operate. He charted the corresponding planes of consciousness in the structure of the being, which are sub-served by the Chakras (Figure 1). His focus was on the central truth of the Chakras without subjection to the old forms and symbols. (CWSA 29: 459) A pertinent question may be raised: if the Chakras are located in the inner being or subtle body, how can they be related to physical centres like the heart, navel, etc? Sri Aurobindo explained that such figurative ways of description arose because the subtle body penetrates and is interfused with the gross body, resulting in "a certain correspondence between these chakras and certain centres in the physical proper". (CWSA 28: 232)

Figure 1:

**Correspondence of Chakras with planes of  
Consciousness as presented by Sri Aurobindo (Ibid: 229):**

Chakras	
The thousand-petalled (head) lotus	Chakra or centre of the higher will and knowledge
The lotus in the forehead	Will, vision, mental dynamism
The lotus in the throat	Expression — external mind
The lotus of the heart	Emotion, dynamic vital feeling (behind the heart is the seat of the psychic being)
The lotus of the navel	Higher vital
The lotus of the abdomen	Lower vital
The lotus at the end of the spine (Muladhara)	Physical consciousness



[[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human\\_chakras\\_mandala.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Human_chakras_mandala.jpg)]

There have been also attempts to locate neurophysiological correlates of Chakras. It has been claimed that the seven main chakras correspond to seven main nerve ganglia emanating from the spinal column. Sri Aurobindo, in his personal logbook of sadhana, noted that there were certain centres in the physical body with which the chakras corresponded, which was logical as otherwise, Hath Yoga would be impossible. Yet he was also emphatic that these centres were not the Chakras. (CWSA 10-11: 1388) It would be naïve to impose neurophysiological attributes to what are basically entities of the subtle dimension.

It would be interesting to study why Sri Aurobindo did not give central leverage to the Chakras as found in conventional Indian systems (In fact, though he answered many queries about Chakras in numerous letters, his personal logbook of sadhana carries only eight references to the chakras). This is because the conventional system, especially the Tantric, has attempted to activate the Chakras from below upwards so that the dormant Kundalini Shakti rises up and spirals its way by opening successive Chakras, experiencing and subsequently surpassing and detaching itself from the rungs of consciousness one after another till it shifts to the thousand-petalled Sahasrara at the crown of the head to realise Godhead at the plane of the spiritualised mind.

The Kundalini is thus the real energy "asleep and inconscient in the depths of our vital system...In its expansion, it opens up all the centres of our psychological being in which reside the powers and the consciousness of what would now be called perhaps our subliminal self; therefore, as each centre of power and consciousness is opened up, we get access to successive psychological planes and can put ourselves in communication with the worlds or cosmic states of being which correspond to them; all the psychic powers abnormal to physical

man, but natural to the soul develop in us. Finally, at the summit of the ascension, this arising and expanding energy meets with the superconscient self which sits concealed behind and above our physical and mental existence; this meeting leads to a profound Samadhi of union in which our waking consciousness loses itself in the superconscient". (CWSA 23-24: 538)

### **Chakras in Sri Aurobindo's paradigm**

Sri Aurobindo's integral paradigm necessitates a different approach for several important reasons unique to his world-view:

- (a) Firstly, the aim here is at a realisation not only at the plane of the spiritualised mind (though that is not excluded) but at the plane of Supermind, which is much higher than the plane of the thousand-petalled lotus-chakra (Sahasrara). The older traditions wanted to surpass the ordinary consciousness to get absorbed in the Superconscious. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga aims to make the Superconscious operative in the matrix of ordinary consciousness. Sri Aurobindo states, "the old Yogins when they went above the spiritual mind, passed into Samadhi, which means that they did not attempt to be conscious in these higher planes—they aim to pass away into the Superconscient and not to bring the Superconscient into the waking consciousness, which is that of my Yoga". (CWSA 35: 286)
- (b) Secondly, in the conventional system, there is an increasing detachment from the planes of consciousness as the corresponding Chakras are activated one after another during the ascent of the Kundalini. However, Integral Yoga aims to conquer and control the centres of dynamism at each level so that the corresponding planes of consciousness are not detached or made to pale into insignificance; instead, they are transformed.
- (c) Thirdly, the Aurobindonian paradigm is integral and comprehensive. "In other words, it aims at a realisation of the Divine not on the basis of an entire dissolution of the empirical consciousness, but in such a comprehensive sweep as includes the empirical as well as the transcendent, the manifestation as well as the unmanifest background". (Chaudhuri, Haridas: *Sri Aurobindo—The Prophet of Life Divine*: 93)
- (d) Fourthly, in the absence of purification of the lower nature and without replacing the ego with a deeper soul principle, the awakening of Kundalini from below upwards may have disastrous and disruptive consequences. (This must have been one of the prime causes of the degeneration of Tantra when expert guidance was no longer available).
- (e) Fifthly, the aim of Integral Yoga is transformation; an activation of the Chakras from below upwards, as in the conventional systems, would not be fully justified. This is because it is traditionally believed

that the Kundalini Shakti lies dormant and asleep in the otherwise outwardly active and awake individual. The rise of the Kundalini corresponds to phenomenal consciousness becoming increasingly dormant and "asleep" in the bosom of the "causal body" (in Tantra) or in the non-phenomenal, "formless consciousness" (in Yoga). (Ibid: 56) Integral Yoga, on the other hand, aims at a total transformation where consciousness becomes operative in higher and different levels at all parts and planes of the being.

Sri Aurobindo had, therefore, to chart out a different way of activating the Chakras. This he did by activating the Force of Transformation above the being. The Power of the Supreme Mother-Principle mediates between the Force of Transformation and the embodied world. A submission and holistic surrender to the Force of Transformation brings about the required changes from above. In this scheme, the Transforming Force acts on the centres or chakras necessary for the individual's growth, which varies from individual to individual. The risks involved in activating Chakras from below are overcome with greater gains. Sri Aurobindo elaborated, "There is [in the Integral Yoga] no willed opening of the chakras; they open of themselves by the descent of the Force. In the Tantrik discipline, they open from down upwards, the Muladhara first—in our Yoga, they open from up downward". (CWSA 29: 460)

Thus, in this scheme, it is not the willed activation of the Chakras to awaken the Kundalini Shakti from below upwards but a spontaneous surrender to the Transforming Power that works. In the Aurobindonian paradigm, an integral surrender to the Divine is the prime mover; one need not concern oneself with the technicalities, delicacies and intricacies of working through the Chakras. The main law of this Yoga is a perfect trust in the Supreme Creatrix or Mother-principle and a will to repel all wrong movements. (Ibid: 462) An integral surrender to the Divine Power of transformation automatically activates the necessary Chakras without the subject concerning oneself about it. In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things, a quiet ascent of the Kundalini Shakti and a spontaneous descent of the Force of Transformation can even occur without the instrumentation of the Chakras. Sri Aurobindo clarified: "The ascent of the Kundalini—not its descent, so far as I know -- is a recognised phenomenon, there is one that corresponds in our Yoga, the feeling of the consciousness ascending from the vital or physical to meet the higher consciousness. This is not necessarily through the chakras but is often felt in the whole body. Similarly, the descent of the higher consciousness is not felt necessarily or usually through the chakras but as occupying the whole head, neck, chest, abdomen, body". (CWSA 35: 142).

This does not mean there is no ascent of consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's schemata. It is the Descent of the Force of Transformation which is unique in his system, but there is an ascent too, not the forceful ascent of conventional systems

but a peaceful uprising; both the Descent and ascent do not follow mechanised trajectories but traverse pathways that vary from individual to individual. (CWSA 29: 462) The Descent is the main key to the spiritual transformation (Ibid: 460), but when each Chakra is worked upon from above, an ascending force is unleashed to join with the higher consciousness. The aspirant experientially perceives the ascent but, at times, can also feel the Descent.

Instead of arousing the Kundalini Shakti by putting willed pressure of vital energies on the lowest basal Chakra, the Aurobindonian paradigm focuses on the bringing of the Psychic Being or the soul-principle at the forefront of consciousness to replace the ego and integrate the diverse strands of the being around its luminous presence. Instead of the forceful, arduous, painful and risky process of awakening the Kundalini Shakti, the Integral paradigm of Sri Aurobindo achieves higher goals by pursuing the less risky but joyful and spontaneous awakening of the Psychic Being, the pure Being of light and love. As the Psychic Being is a projection of the Jivatman, it does not arise per se from the Inconscience and is thus untainted by the forces of Ignorance and Falsehood. The Psychic Being gathers all parts of the being around itself, and this integrated being is then ready to be receptive to the downpour of the higher transforming processes. Sri Aurobindo explains, "the Power from above has in its descent to open all the centres (including the lowest centre) and to bring out the psychic being; for until that is done, there is likely to be much difficulty and struggle of the lower consciousness obstructing, mixing with or even refusing the Divine Action from above. If the psychic being is once active, this struggle and these difficulties can be greatly minimised". (Ibid: 307) Chaudhuri elaborated, "Inspired by the ideal of divine transformation of the lower nature, Purnayoga (Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo) concentrates not so much upon the awakening of the Kundalini as upon the coming to the front of the Psychic being". (*Sri Aurobindo—The Prophet of Life Divine*: 93) In this whole venture, the Chakras may or may not be worked upon, and even if they are activated, they are worked upon automatically and spontaneously by the Higher Transforming Forces regardless of whether the seeker is aware or not.

The awakening of the Kundalini in traditional Tantra became extremely arduous and risky with the gradual non-availability of external guides. The awakening of the Psychic Being in the Integral paradigm of Sri Aurobindo is significant because it can act as the inner guide and facilitate the Descent of the Force of transformation. As a result, the unleashed ascending forces of consciousness activated by the Chakras can rise above and widen out into the cosmic consciousness and the universal self. (CWSA 29: 461) The consciousness can rise further up, and using the chakra above the head as the base, it can consolidate itself into a spiritual person who can finally merge into the Supramental being. (*Seven Quartets of Becoming*: 244) However, the Psychic Being per se can act directly to guide the Descent of the Transforming force and the ascent of the evolutionary consciousness. It can also act as a template for the Supramental Being. The Descent or ascent doesn't need to be felt from chakra to chakra



but from level to level of consciousness, with the Force descending to envelop the whole being. Sri Aurobindo stresses: "In these things our sadhana does not cleave to the knowledge given in the books, but only keeps to the central truth behind and realises it independently without any subjection to the old forms and symbols". (CWSA 29: 459) "Our yoga is meant to be plastic and allow all necessary workings of the Divine Power according to the nature, but these in their details may vary with each individual". (CWSA 28: 574)

Thus, even without one's specific awareness of the Chakras or even involvement of the Chakras, the Force of Transformation invoked and activated descends from the superconscient realms to work on the structure of the being integrated around the ego-surpassing principle of Psychic Being, readying it to act as a template for the future evolution of consciousness and the appearance of the gnostic being.

In the brief stade between a death and birth  
A first perfection's stage is reached at last;  
Out of the wood and stone of our nature's stuff  
A temple is shaped where the high gods could live.  
Even if the struggling world is left outside  
One man's perfection can still save the world. (*Savitri*: 531)

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# *Worship of the Divine Mother in Integral Yoga*

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Beloo Mehra

## **Introduction**

The eternal quest of Indian sages and seers has been a progressive march through the epochs of Veda and Upanishads to the age of Darshana-s, and to Puranic and Bhakti and Tantra—each dealing with the conscious shaping and perfecting of one or the other layer of human consciousness. The Tantric discipline concerns itself with illumining the very physical layer, the material nature of consciousness. While there are also Vaishnava, Shaiva, Buddhist and Jaina Tantra, the focus in this paper is on the Shakta Tantra.

Divine Shakti or Divine Mother is essentially the Executive Power of the Supreme Being or the Supreme Creatrix Consciousness which is truly in-charge of all the manifestation. And Prakriti or Nature is, in truth, the lower and limited form of the Divine Shakti, which is also known as the *Para Prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is a synthesis of both the Vedic-Vedantic and Tantric lines of spiritual realisation but also transcends them both by bringing in the element of Transformation. Sri Aurobindo writes that the synthesis he presents in Integral Yoga "starts from the method of Vedanta to arrive at the aim of the Tantra." (*The Synthesis of Yoga*: 612)

Contrasting the way of the Tantra with the schools of Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo says:

In all of them the lord of the Yoga is the Purusha, the Conscious Soul that knows, observes, attracts, governs. But in Tantra it is rather Prakriti, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe. It was by learning and applying the intimate secrets of this Will-in-Power, its method, its Tantra, that the Tantric Yogin pursued the aims of his discipline—mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude. Instead of drawing back from manifested Nature and its difficulties, he confronted them, seized and conquered. But in the end, as is the general tendency of Prakriti, Tantric Yoga largely lost its principle in its machinery and became a thing of formulae and occult mechanism still powerful when rightly used but fallen from the clarity of their original intention. (CWSA 23: 43)

Tantra, in simple words, is a worship of Shakti, power, or energy. In traditional Vedanta, however, Shakti is generally seen as the power which helps us overcome the deceptions of active energy. But in the integral conception of existence, Sri Aurobindo explains, the Conscious Soul or Purusha is the Lord, and the Nature-Soul (Prakriti or Shakti in a higher sense) is his executive Energy. "Purusha is of the nature of Sat, the being of conscious self-existence pure and infinite; Shakti or Prakriti is of the nature of Chit, — it is power of the Purusha's

self-conscious existence, pure and infinite. The relation of the two exists between the poles of rest and action." (Ibid)

This means there need not be any ascetic denial of the world for an aspirant on the path of Integral Yoga. Rather, the aspirant is asked to face and overcome the pains and sorrows and all other challenges life and world offer through the play of Nature or Prakriti. The emphasis is on transforming one's lower nature that clings to worldliness and all the outer vicissitudes of the worldly play, while one's higher nature continues to seek deeper knowledge and grow in devotion and love for the Divine. It is for achieving an inner harmony and for that Sri Aurobindo worked out a synthesis of the Vedantic yoga systems with Tantra as the instrument to organise an individual's approach to yoga. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

But the movement of Nature is twofold, higher and lower, or, as we may choose to term it, divine and undivine. The distinction exists indeed for practical purposes only; for there is nothing that is not divine, and in a larger view it is as meaningless, verbally, as the distinction between natural and supernatural, for all things that are are natural. All things are in Nature and all things are in God. But, for practical purposes, there is a real distinction. The lower Nature, that which we know and are and must remain so long as the faith in us is not changed, acts through limitation and division, is of the nature of Ignorance and culminates in the life of the ego; but the higher Nature, that to which we aspire, acts by unification and transcendence of limitation, is of the nature of Knowledge and culminates in the life divine. The passage from the lower to the higher is the aim of Yoga; and this passage may effect itself by the rejection of the lower and escape into the higher,—the ordinary view-point,—or by the transformation of the lower and its elevation to the higher Nature. It is this, rather, that must be the aim of an integral Yoga. (CWSA 23: 23-24)

As per the Tantric approach to the Divine, there is nothing in Life which should be rejected because all is the creation of the Supreme Shakti, the Divine Mother. Even that which the Bhagavad Gita and other Vedantic scriptures enjoin upon all seekers to reject, the *bhoga*, need not be given up. The idea is that after all the world is for the *bhoga* or enjoyment of the Ishwara or the Ishwari; and man at his highest represents an effective portion of Him or Her, and so must enjoy the *bhoga*, conscious of his part as the vehicle or centre of the Enjoyer. This *bhoga-mārga*, or left-handed path or *Vāmamārga* as it is called, later fell into disrepute and degeneracy. But that need not detract from the sublime conception which is at the base of Tantric discipline, namely, the high standard of purity and sincerity that was expected of man if he was to discharge conscientiously his responsibility as a pure channel for the joy of *bhoga* or *bhukti*.

Tantric discipline, therefore, requires a tremendous labour of discipline and self-exceeding, in one's own personal and inner, and the outer and collective life—continuous action, tantra, on so many planes. It focuses on release of the very energies and forces of *Prakriti*, Nature, and their mastery through their purification and opening into the consciousness of the Divine Shakti, or what is also spoken of as the Divine Mother.

In many writings of Sri Aurobindo, we find deep insights into how one can grow in a conscious relation with the Divine Mother which is the essential foundation of adoration of the Divine Mother. Given that Sri Aurobindo speaks of yoga as practical psychology and a systematic effort to evolve in consciousness, these practices are new inward-oriented forms for the essential spirit behind the more outward Shakti Upasana practices in the traditional Tantric sadhana. This paper highlights some of these practices which carry the essence of the worship and adoration of Divine Mother through helping the aspirant connect with the force of the Divine Shakti. These practices are integral to Integral Yoga, though there may be many others aspirants on this path follow depending on their inner temperament and soul's turning. As Sri Aurobindo reminds us, Integral Yoga uses all methods and no method in particular.

### The Mother in Integral Yoga

"The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures." (*The Mother*: 14)

On April 4 in 1910, Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry, his "cave of tapasya." And in 1920 on April 24<sup>th</sup>, Mirra Alfassa, whom Sri Aurobindo later called 'The Mother' arrived in Pondicherry to be always with Sri Aurobindo and collaborate in the Supramental Yoga. Their yogic work was to bring down a new consciousness on the earth, which is the key to unlocking the evolutionary crisis facing humanity.

After his siddhi in 1926, Sri Aurobindo had retired into a near-seclusion, meeting only a handful of people. The Mother was asked to take charge of the Ashram, of the inner and outer lives of the *sādhakas*. When a slender book titled *The Mother* came out in 1928, T V Kapali Sastri, one of his disciples, asked Sri Aurobindo whether the book was about 'our Mother.' The answer was 'yes.' This book is a seminal document which reveals the combination of Vedanta and Tantra in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. In its pages, he speaks of the Transcendent and

Universal and Individual poises of the Divine Mother. Because majority of the humanity is not capable of envisioning the Supreme Mother at the Transcendental level, Sri Aurobindo clarifies when speaking of 'Our Mother' — "Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature." (*The Mother*: 14) This is why Sri Aurobindo insisted that the *sādhakas* walk the path of Integral Yoga with the Mother as their sole refuge, guide and support. To grow closer to the Mother inwardly, to aspire to become a sincere child of the Mother—these are the steps on the path. It is in this light we understand the various ways in which the Mother through her various powers and personalities dealt with the *sādhakas* in the Ashram, and continues to guide millions across the world through her subtle presence.

It must also be emphasised that Integral Yoga aims at transformation of life, not merely a release from life. Such work required the collaboration of Ishwara and Shakti on the earth. This is the real significance of the collaborative yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and of the Mother's final coming to India on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920. In one of the "Evening Talks" dated 18 May 1926, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the inner, truer nature of collaboration that was necessary for their Yogic work. When asked whether complete transformation is possible without having a Shakti, he noted something fundamental about the Mother's yogic work:

The function of the Shakti is something special. In my own case it was a necessary condition for the work that I had to do. If I had had to do my own transformation only or give a new yoga or a new ideal to a select few people who came into personal contact with me I could have done that without having any Shakti. But, for the work that I had to do, it was necessary that the two sides must come together. By the coming together of Mira and me certain conditions are created which make it easy for you to do the transformation. (Chidanandam, V., "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk." *Mother India*, XII, 3: 148)

### Tantra in Integral Yoga

Like Vedanta, Tantra also aims at liberation, but simultaneously also aspires for a cosmic enjoyment of the power of the Spirit. The other yogic paths may also accept this '*bhukti*' in part and mostly as something on the way, but generally avoid making it as a motive or object of the path. Tantra, however, is a bolder and larger system, says Sri Aurobindo. This '*bhukti*' aspect necessitates intense purification of the outer instrumentation of physical, vital and mental parts of the being.

Some of the fundamental aspects of the Tantric Yoga are fundamental to Integral Yoga, though always presented in new forms and without elaborate external acts which constitute the greater part of Tantric practices. These aspects



include: the ascent of the consciousness, and that nothing can be done except through a descent of the force of the Divine Mother, the Shakti. Furthermore, opening to the Force of the Divine Mother is the key to the transformation that is the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

### Opening to the Mother's Force

The dominant approach in Tantric discipline involves the opening of the subtle energy centers, called *chakras*. These chakras reside within our energetic body and control the various functions of powers of body, life and mind. The energy, known as the *kundalini*, which lays sleeping like a coiled serpent at the base of our being in the *mulādhara chakra*, rises up with the sincere practice of Tantric discipline. And so gradually open the higher chakras until the energy reaches the *sahasrara*, the thousand-petaled lotus at the top of the head.

A key principle behind this ascent is that of inner purification of the various parts of the being through a disentangling of the pulls of ego-gratification. The expected gain is the development and mastery of the physical body, the vital being and the mental activities of the developed human being. However, there is a danger involved here, especially if suddenly there is an outburst of powers emanating from the lowest chakras without any moderating influence from higher centers which are already partially or wholly open. With the opening of the lower chakras, which govern powers that include sex and the will to power, among others, an aspirant can be easily distracted from the actual original goal.

In Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga there is a recognition of the locked forces held within the blocked chakras and the need to open up these energies for a higher and more powerful action. But instead of starting from below, the emphasis is on descent of higher force of the Mother to help open the lower energy centers. Thus the movement of Shakti generally starts from above and with an opening of the being to the divine force of the Mother, the opening of the chakras can occur with potentially far less risk.

Additionally, in traditional Tantra, while the goal of the rising of the *kundalini* is the eventual liberation of the human individual into the divine consciousness; in Integral Yoga, the goal is the transformation of life on earth through the descent and action of the next evolutionary level of consciousness. The descent of powers of higher consciousness is the key to transformation in Integral Yoga. For this, a great emphasis is given to developing the *ādhār*, the foundational base—the instrumentation of body, vital and mind—which can gradually be made more receptive to the descending higher forces.

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in several letters and conversations emphasise that a solid and settled basis of peace is essential if one aspires to become receptive to the divine force, light and inspiration. Having a sense of peace and calm descending into oneself is one of the indications that one is

ready for the spiritual path, says the Mother. One of the most practical advice the Mother gives on how to keep one's peace is called 'stepping back' which is a conscious way of opening to and connecting with the Shakti above. She guides:

Most of you live on the surface of your being, exposed to the touch of external influences. You live almost projected, as it were, outside your own body, and when you meet some unpleasant being similarly projected you get upset. The whole trouble arises out of your not being accustomed to stepping back. You must always step back into yourself—learn to go deep within—step back and you will be safe. Do not lend yourself to the superficial forces which move in the outside world. Even if you are in a hurry to do something, step back for a while and you will discover to your surprise how much sooner and with what greater success your work can be done. If someone is angry with you, do not be caught in his vibrations but simply step back and his anger, finding no support or response, will vanish. Always keep your peace, resist all temptation to lose it. Never decide anything without stepping back, never speak a word without stepping back, never throw yourself into action without stepping back. All that belongs to the ordinary world is impermanent and fugitive, so there is nothing in it worth getting upset about. What is lasting, eternal, immortal and infinite—that indeed is worth having, worth conquering, worth possessing. It is Divine Light, Divine Love, Divine Life—it is also Supreme Peace, Perfect Joy and All-Mastery upon earth with the Complete Manifestation as the crowning. When you get the sense of the relativity of things, then whatever happens you can step back and look; you can remain quiet and call on the Divine Force and wait for an answer. Then you will know exactly what to do. Remember, therefore, that you cannot receive the answer before you are very peaceful. Practice that inner peace, make at least a small beginning and go on in your practice until it becomes a habit with you. (CWM 3: 160)

### Use of Flowers by the Mother

How do we open ourselves more and more to the Light and Force of the Divine Shakti? How do we develop within us a greater peace and calm and receptivity to allow this Light and Force to work within? The Great Masters everywhere have emphasised several ways; foremost among them are: sincere and patient one-pointed aspiration, genuine humility, unyielding faith and complete trust in the Divine, elimination of ego-insistence in all forms, and self-offering and surrender to the Divine.

Eliminating ego-insistence of course takes immense *tapasya*, but becoming more conscious of when we resist to something because of our egos can gradually help us become more open. We close ourselves to the Force when we fill ourselves tightly with ego and its countless demands. We carry too much

burden and weight of our egos which leaves little open space within for the Light and Force from Above to enter. Be humble, be sincere, be receptive—this is the key. Like a flower. Opening itself to the Light above and receiving the Force to help grow and spread its self-existent beauty and joy, even when no one is looking.

We know from the Mother's own accounts that she had deep kinship with the world of plants and flowers. She had a deep love towards the natural world, and she has spoken of how the trees, flowers and vegetables even communicated with her in their language. She brought this deep, inner communion she had with the world of flowers in her approach to the inner work she did for the progress of *sādhakas* at Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Through an inner communion with the soul of the flower, the Mother had identified the specific spiritual or occult force for more than 850 flowers. Flowers are extremely receptive, said the Mother. She added:

All the flowers to which I have given a significance receive exactly the force I put into them and transmit it. People don't always receive it because most of the time they are less receptive than the flower, and they waste the force that has been put in it through their unconsciousness and lack of receptivity. But the force is there, and the flower receives it wonderfully. (CWM 6: 229)

The Mother said that on the material plane, flowers are most open to the influence of the Divine Shakti, because flowers represent the soul-element in the plant kingdom and the pure psychic consciousness is instinctive to a flower. This is why when she had to transmit a certain state of consciousness to a *sādhaka*, she would often do it through a flower. She would give them a specific flower which she said carried a specific spiritual force or vibration. She explained that depending on one's inner receptivity, one would be easily able to absorb the message she put in the flowers. She also said that when an aspirant offers flowers to the Divine, his or her state of consciousness also determines the outer condition of the flowers. A purer and truer inner aspiration will be expressed through flower-offerings that remain fresh for a longer time. (CWM 3: 132)

For many aspirants on the path of Integral Yoga working with flowers in the light of their spiritual significances as given by the Mother has been an important practice of their sadhana. Whether it is arranging the flowers in a specific pattern, growing them and looking after them, or simply gathering them for other uses—many people have been practicing their inner sadhana through their outer work with flowers. The right attitude, as the Mother reminds us, to cultivate within all the qualities that flowers represent—openness, frankness, equality, generosity, and gentleness.

It is interesting to note that the 'spiritual significance of flowers' has also been researched and experimented upon by thousands of aspirants. The experiments

include not only studying the effect of these flower-powers on the emotional or mental well-being but also in curing several physical ailments. The results indicate that the Mother through her work with the flowers in the Ashram has indeed given to the world another unique approach to concentrate and apply the immense healing powers of Prakriti, Mother Nature. One can speak of it as another new form given to the ancient Tantric approach to master the powers of Nature.

### Mantra in Integral Yoga

In the traditional Tantra, specific Mantras are used as means to invoke particular deities through the practice of outer *kriya*, such as a ritualistic *pūjā*. In the Integral Yoga, the emphasis is on inner call to the Divine Mother. It is, however, important to note that in Integral Yoga, the power of mantra is also duly recognised. We have several mantras which are powered by the Shakti of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, notable among them are—*Om Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame;* *Om Namō Bhagvate Sri Aravindaya;* and Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra. There are also Mother's '*Prayers and Meditations*' which according to Sri Aurobindo are prayers from the Divine to the Divine.

The Prayers are mostly written in an identification with the earth-consciousness. It is Mother in the lower nature addressing the Mother in the higher nature, the Mother herself carrying on the Sadhana of the earth-consciousness for the transformation, praying to herself above from whom the forces of transformation come. This continues till the identification of the earth-consciousness and the higher consciousness is effected. (CWM 1: 383)

Concentrating and meditating on any of these mantric prayers in a conscious way, referring all the movements in all parts of our being to this *dhyāna-mantra*, can become our offering into the inner *yajñá* in which not only the Mind but the entire Life begins to experience the touch of the Spirit.

But the most powerful Mantra we have in Integral Yoga is *Savitri*, the 24000-lines epic poem of Sri Aurobindo, a sincere reading of which with the right attitude of self-surrender and receptivity, is akin to the practice of Integral Yoga, as per the Mother. *Savitri* is the mantra of Transformation, says the Mother, everything else is preparation. In *Savitri*'s own language, it may be spoken of as "Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps." (*Savitri*: 383) It is a poem whose making was Yoga sadhana, an intense ascension of consciousness, and thus its reading too is sadhana. While the whole of *Savitri* is a mantric poem, there are several lines which are constantly invoked by many as mantras. Artists have meditated upon selected passages and expressed their inner visions through various forms of artwork. Particularly, the recitation of *Savitri* passages in the voice of the Mother are regularly used as part of daily practice by many *sādhakas* on the path of Integral Yoga. A few of the mantric lines constantly invoked regularly by aspirants are:

All can be done if the god-touch is there.  
Our life is a paradox with God for key.  
Always we bear in us a magic key  
Concealed in life's hermetic envelope.  
A deathbound littleness is not all we are:  
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses  
Await discovery in our summit selves;  
Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.  
Whatever the appearance we must bear,  
Whatever our strong ills and present fate,  
When nothing we can see but drift and bale,  
A mighty Guidance leads us still through all.  
Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;  
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;  
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.  
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone  
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life  
And break the seals on the dim soul of man  
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things. (*Savitri*: 314)

There is also the simplest Mantra for an aspirant on the path of Integral Yoga—that is a two-letter word—MA! A conscious and soulful *japa* of this simple word can be a most effective force of protection and source of light for a *sādhaka*. A sincere call to the Divine Mother is sometimes all that is needed for the aspirant to come out of the biggest obstacle on the path. In one of his letters to a *sādhaka*, Sri Aurobindo reminded that to get rid of obstacles in sadhana such as vital dissatisfaction and restlessness, or inertia of the physical consciousness, the “first thing to do is to keep detached from them, not to identify yourself mentally with these movements—even if you cannot reject them—next to call on the Mother’s force quietly but steadily for it to descend and make the obstacles disappear.” (*The Mother*: 216)

Another difference we find in Integral Yoga and the traditional Tantra Yoga is with regard to initiation on the path. When a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo for a formal initiation in the path of Integral Yoga, in a letter dated 30 November, 1934, Sri Aurobindo replied:

There is no method in this Yoga except to concentrate, preferably in the heart, and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness; one can concentrate also in the head or between the eyebrows, but for many this is a too difficult opening. When the mind falls quiet and the concentration becomes strong and the aspiration intense, then there is a beginning of experience. The more the faith, the more rapid the result is likely to be.



For the rest one must not depend on one's own efforts only, but succeed in establishing a contact with the Divine and a receptivity to the Mother's Power and Presence. (*The Mother*: 217)

Again we find a great emphasis on the power of receptivity to the Mother's Force working from above and behind, and the value of complete faith and surrender. Before we speak more about the place of surrender in Integral Yoga, it is important to recall here the words of the Mother about initiation:

When I say that I have initiated someone, I mean that I have revealed myself to this person, *without words*, and that he was capable of seeing, feeling and knowing What I am. (CWM 13: 84)

### Surrender to the Divine Mother

Surrender to the Divine Mother is at the heart of the practice of Integral Yoga. But what is true surrender and how to practice it? "Surrender is the decision taken to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine." (CWM 3: 126) Here is an image to help us. When a drop decides to become the Sea, the Grace of the Sea devours it, and in that devouring the drop is born anew, as the Sea—that is surrender.

A genuine surrender is built on a strong foundation of faith and sincerity. Absolute, unflinching, uncompromising faith in the Divine and trust in the Divine Plan and Will. True faith is much more than a mental conviction and intellectual belief. It is a deep and quiet illumined feeling of conviction arising from the depths of the consciousness when our outermost mind and heart are stilled and are purified of all admixture of egoistic desires and expectations. Thus, a prior work of purification is essential for a true surrender. True faith is never misled by the adverse appearances of the moment.

If we can develop and always keep this kind of genuine faith in the Divine Mother, never waver from this faith, no matter how difficult the present moment may become for us, and always rely completely on Her and truly know that all that is happening at the moment is as per Her Will and that She alone knows the purpose behind it and is gradually leading us to a higher and truer harmony, then alone we can say we have a pure, candid and perfect Faith. Surrender to the Divine Mother does not automatically protect us from any misfortunes or difficulties. Instead, when one truly surrenders and has a true and sincere faith in the workings of the Divine Shakti, one is not disturbed by the transitory difficulties on the path, one develops a sense of calm equanimity towards the good and the bad times on the journey, towards ups and downs, pains and pleasures, and sees it as part of the natural course of life. One also begins to see such difficulty and struggle as an opportunity for further growth, the darkness is seen as a prequel to the light that is waiting at the end. One begins to accept all

that happens as the Supreme Will and can see the adverse circumstance as part of the divine guidance working in one's life.

Complete and true surrender is also progressive. It does not happen at the turn of a switch. Sincere personal effort, aspiration, rejection of all that takes us away from the path, and constant invoking of Divine Grace—all are needed. With a greater turning to the Divine for the necessary aid and intervention and growing in our faith and trust in the Divine Plan with no regard to our egoistic preferences, we begin to advance on the path of true self-surrender.

### The Mother's Symbol as Yantra

The best means to practice surrender is through a practice called "Remember and offer" (CWM 3: 26), considered an integral practice in Integral Yoga. With a calm confidence and complete trust in the Supreme Power, aspirants are asked to make a sincere offering to the Divine of all the movements happening within all parts of their being. All the actions, all the choices one makes, all difficulties that arise in the path, the results of one's efforts, any successes and failures one faces—all must be offered to the Divine Mother. If one can remember to do this, and if one can do this with as much sincerity and humility as one finds within, one can go through all conflicts or dilemmas with a sense of calm equanimity.

But what prevents an aspirant from sincerely practicing the advice of "remember and offer" is the mixed-up, egoistic outer nature. This is where the Tantric practice of Yantra can come to one's aid. A Yantra is a geometrical pattern or a figure used to invoke the presence of a particular Deity who can help us work through a specific problem. In Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, we have two important Yantras—Sri Aurobindo's symbol and the Mother's symbol.

The Mother's symbol, in particular, can be used as an effective Yantra invoking all the twelve powers—symbolized by the 12 soul-powers in the outermost ring—which are necessary for the manifestation of Her work. These are: Sincerity | Humility | Gratitude | Perseverance | Aspiration | Receptivity | Progress | Courage | Goodness | Generosity | Equality | Peace. If we truly aspire to become true instruments of the Divine and offer all our work to Her, we must cultivate in us these 12 qualities. In the Mother's conversations with the disciples and several writings of Sri Aurobindo, we find detailed descriptions of the inner meaning of these qualities, and also a great many practical approaches to cultivate these within. Several important notes of caution are also given. Working on any one of these twelve qualities or soul-powers is an immense *tapasya*, but an integral development and transformation requires the aspirant to cultivate all these because only then full manifestation of the Mother's force is possible for a complete transformation of the being. By sincerely invoking the higher powers in this way, an aspirant tries to connect with the Divine Mother through offering all of oneself, all movements within, all works without. Only through such an

inner sacrifice, one can cultivate a right yogic attitude toward life and work, and genuinely practice “remember and offer.”

### All is the Working of the Shakti

Cultivating a right attitude also means that we must spontaneously remember that it is not the separate ‘I’ that is doing all this work, but that all this is part of the Larger Work of the Divine, and that I am only a mere instrument through which it is being done. While the synthesis in Sri Aurobindo’s yoga involves an integration of *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*, it is in the element of the yoga of self-perfection where we find a great deal of incorporation of this aspect of transformation of the lower nature by understanding the working of the Shakti.

In the chapter titled ‘The Action of the Divine Shakti’ in Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga* we are given an important lesson that in truth we are not the doers of any action, it is rather Shakti who is the doer. The I-ness or the sense of doer-ship must be completely eliminated for an integral self-perfection. Only through a complete realization of this truth, an aspirant can enter a vaster consciousness. The ‘I’ and the ‘You’ may remain for practical purposes of acting in the world, but a separate sense of ‘I-ness’ or ‘You-ness’ must be given up. Only when a sādhanika acquires a universal consciousness, he or she feels one with the total power of the Spirit in Nature or Purusha in Prakriti—who are not separate to begin with as they are both part of the One Supreme.

Sri Aurobindo also cautions that even after we gain this plane of consciousness, we must remain wary, for at any time our lower nature, guided by the strong pull and push of ego-centeredness, may bring us down from the higher poise of consciousness. The ego and its prejudices and preferences must be constantly swept aside. And we must learn to see the entire world and all phenomena as having the presence of Prakriti but with Purusha in the background. It is they who activate everything—within us and around us—this should be the true approach of the aspirant. This implies that even behind all that seems ugly and horrible in the creation, one must rise in consciousness to see the working of the Divine.

In this regard, it is educative to reflect on a conversation of the Mother dated July 12, 1960. While recounting an experience, she emphasises an important truth of Tantra that is at the core of Integral Yoga—

“I had a startling experience one day when X was doing his pujas to encircle the titans. He was in difficulty and I was about to intervene to help him when I was abruptly stopped. I was faced by a massive blackness (blacker than the blackest physical thing) and suddenly, right at its center, I saw the Divine Love shining with such a splendor—I had never seen it so splendid.

“And now it has become constant; each time I hear or see something ugly or horrible, or each time something ugly or horrible happens, something which

is a negation of the divine life... just behind is this flame—so wonderful. And then the effect is annulled.

“There is a magnificence of realization which could not have been had this evil, this horror and this negation not been.

“Our consciousness shrinks from these things which belong to the past and which are no longer in their place, so we feel disgust and revulsion—because we are ignorant. But if we can raise ourselves above and be in contact with That—the supreme Light—which is ALWAYS just behind, then this Light seems all the more supreme because it is so much its own opposite.

“Then you know.

“You know, so there is no longer this uneasiness, this shrinking. You feel carried more and more by all that you reject; you are in a forward movement, further and further, higher, constantly further.” (*Mother's Agenda 1951-1960*: 393)

#### Four Powers of the Mother and Inner Worship

As mentioned earlier, in the book *'The Mother'* Sri Aurobindo speaks of the Transcendent and Universal and Individual poises of the Divine Mother.

There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch of oneness with the Conscious Force that upholds us and the universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme. Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.” (*The Mother*: 14)

Majority of the humanity is not capable of envisioning the Supreme Mother at the Transcendental level. So the Mother makes herself manifest through her various Powers and Personalities, four of which have stood in front in her guidance of this universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. These four great aspects are Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati. It is interesting to note that the chapter in which this description appears in the book *'The Mother'* was originally written as a reply to Kapali Sastri who had asked questions about the place of various deities in Integral Yoga.

“One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and

harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhuti and shall found in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother. To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati." (*The Mother*: 17-18)

Sri Aurobindo's detailed descriptions of these four powers in chapter VI of '*The Mother*' combined with his chapter titled 'Soul-Force and the Fourfold Personality' in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, give important hints on the true, inner worship of the Divine Mother. This worship is not the external puja but an inner yogic cultivation of qualities that will gradually make one grow in nearness to any one and/or all of these four powers.

### **Maheshwari**

Cultivation of soul-powers which can make one grow in intimacy to the Maheshwari aspect of the Divine Mother are:

- a mind increasingly open to all ideas and knowledge and incomings of Truth;
- hunger and passion for knowledge, for its growth in ourselves, for its communication to others, for its reign in the world, the reign of reason and right and truth and justice and, on a higher level of the harmony of our greater being, the reign of the spirit and its universal unity and light and love;
- a power of light in the mind and will which make all the life subject to reason and its right and truth or to the spirit and spiritual right and truth and subdues the lower members to their greater law;
- a poise in the temperament turned to patience, steady musing and calm, to reflection, to meditation, which dominates and quiets the turmoil of the will and passions and makes for high thinking and pure living, founds the self-governed *sāttwic* mind, grows into a more and more mild, lofty, impersonalised and universalised personality.

### **Mahakali**

The soul-powers that a *sādhaka* must cultivate in his or her effort to grow in intimacy with the Mahakali aspect of the Divine Mother include:

- The high fearlessness which no danger or difficulty can daunt and which feels its power equal to meet and face and bear whatever assault of man or fortune or adverse gods,



- the dynamic audacity and daring which shrinks from no adventure or enterprise as beyond the powers of a human soul free from disabling weakness and fear,
- the love of honour which would scale the heights of the highest nobility of man and stoop to nothing little, base, vulgar or weak, but maintains untainted the ideal of high courage, chivalry, truth, straightforwardness, sacrifice of the lower to the higher self, helpfulness to men, unflinching resistance to injustice and oppression, self-control and mastery, noble leading, warrior-hood and captainship of the journey and the battle,
- the high self-confidence of power, capacity, character and courage indispensable to the man of action.

### Mahalakshmi

The power of Mahalakshmi works through a largeness of mutuality, a generous fullness of the relations of life, a lavish self-spending and return and ample interchange between existence and existence, a full enjoyment and use of the rhythm and balance of fruitful and productive life. Thus an inner worship of this power of the Divine Mother requires cultivation of the following inner capacities and soul-values:

- a skill, *kaushala*, which fashions and obeys law,
  - recognises the uses and limits of relations, adapts itself to settled and developing movements,
  - produces and perfects the outer technique of creation and action and life,
  - assures possession and proceeds from possession to growth,
  - is watchful over order and careful in progress and makes the most of the material of existence and its means and ends;
- a power of self-spending skilful in lavishness and skilful in economy,
  - which recognises the great law of interchange and amasses in order to throw out in a large return, increasing the currents of interchange and the fruitfulness of existence;
- a power of giving and ample creative liberality, mutual helpfulness and utility to others which becomes the source in an open soul of just beneficence, humanitarianism, altruism of a practical kind;
- a power of enjoyment, a productive, possessive, active opulence luxurious of the prolific Ananda of existence.

### Mahasaraswati

Mahasaraswati or the Power of Perfection necessitates the cultivation of some of the most necessary and beautiful elements which can bring about an aspirant's greatest perfection and highest spiritual evolution. The soul-powers that belong to the full development of this force in us include:

- the power of service to others,
- the will to make our life a thing of work and use to God and man,
- to obey and follow and accept whatever great influence and needful discipline,
- the love which consecrates service, a love which asks for no return, but spends itself for the satisfaction of that which we love,
- the power to bring down this love and service into the physical field,
- the desire to give our body and life as well as our soul and mind and will and capacity to God and man, and,
- as a result, the power of complete self-surrender, *ātma-samarpaṇa*, which transferred to the spiritual life becomes one of the greatest most revealing keys to freedom and perfection.

Such is the vast and integral development of the being that Yoga of self-perfection requires.

This yoga has all the key elements of Tantric *upāsana* of the Shakti—devotion and dedication, steadfastness and surrender,—but presented in new forms that are more in correspondence with the evolving need of the human mentality in an age that is more and more inward-turning and subjective. Integral Yoga, with its ultimate goal of transformation of outer nature and making earthly life a Divine Life could not have aimed for any lesser perfection of the being. Through sincere pursuit of such inner perfection grows the real, truer adoration of the Divine Mother which leads to a closer intimacy with Her making the *sādhaka* ready for the spiritual release, the *mukti*, while at the same time experiencing the true enjoyment of the world, '*bhukti*' through a growing perfection of the Nature-given powers and faculties of the outer instrument of body, vital and mind.

### Put Oneself in the Hands of the Mother

These Four Great Powers which have stood so far in much prominence in the evolution of the earth-spirit, however, do not exhaust the facets of the Divine Mother, reminds Sri Aurobindo. There are other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, among them Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation, who will come down only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body. Only then can those other rarer Powers manifest in the earth movement and the supramental action become possible, says Sri Aurobindo.

For this earth-nature has to become ready. For an individual aspirant seeking transformation on this path of Integral Yoga which is the Yoga for the earth, the requirement is to put oneself in the hands of the Mother and her Powers without cavil or resistance and let her do unhindered her work within oneself. Sri Aurobindo explains the core of Integral Yoga practice:

Three things you must have, consciousness, plasticity, unreserved surrender.

For you must be conscious in your mind and soul and heart and life and the very cells of your body, aware of the Mother and her Powers and their working; for although she can and does work in you even in your obscurity and your unconscious parts and moments, it is not the same thing as when you are in an awakened and living communion with her. All your nature must be plastic to her touch,—not questioning as the self-sufficient ignorant mind questions and doubts and disputes and is the enemy of its enlightenment and change; not insisting on its own movements as the vital in man insists and persistently opposes its refractory desires and ill-will to every divine influence; not obstructing and entrenched in incapacity, inertia and tamas as man's physical consciousness obstructs and clinging to its pleasure in smallness and darkness cries out against each touch that disturbs its soulless routine or its dull sloth or its torpid slumber. The unreserved surrender of your inner and outer being will bring this plasticity into all the parts of your nature; consciousness will awaken everywhere in you by constant openness to the Wisdom and Light, the Force, the Harmony and Beauty, the Perfection that come flowing down from above. (*The Mother*: 24-25)

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## *Union of Man and Woman in Red Oleanders and Vasavadutta*

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In the Modern Age, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore were two of the earliest Indian dramatists to envision man's and woman's bond of the future, founded on a higher aspiration. India's colonisation, since the sixteenth century, brought in its wake a social, religious and political regression, especially vis a vis the position of woman in society and her role in the family. Sri Aurobindo and Tagore spoke of the ideal union of man and woman in the early 1900s when the urban Indian woman could attend school and educate herself. In ancient India, she could select her life partner in the practice of *svayamvara*. The union was of love and ideology. Thus, Sri Aurobindo's and Tagore's dramatic works recaptured the essence of the relationship of man and woman in ancient India in an effort to remind their generation and others to come of their glorious but forgotten past and anticipate a future that could be if there were those who sought to unite based on higher ideals. Their dramatic works pay homage to India and her erstwhile values, encouraging generations to recognise her truth. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, the genre of the drama must capture

...great spiritual ideals and their action on the mind and lives of human beings that are put before us and all that matters is how they are presented and made living in their appeal. Here there is, I think, full success and that entirely justifies the method of the drama. (CWSA 27: 469-70)

Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore wrote, "It is the aim of art and literature to realise and communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth." (qtd. in Ghosh 113) Both Sri Aurobindo and Tagore encapsulate their ascent to a higher inspiration, be it "great spiritual ideals" or "the essential joy and immortality of Truth", making the characters archetypal and idealistic.

Tagore's keen interest in philosophy and criticism on nationalism, education, aesthetics, women emancipation, and others establish his singular seeking of, what he calls "the true-self", that ultimately unites art with life for he says, "It is the aim of art and literature to realise and communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth." (qtd. in Ghosh 113) All his life, Tagore pursued to appreciate and convey "the essential joy and immortality of Truth." His dramatic body stands witness to the aforementioned aim. Some of Tagorean characters do "communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth" (qtd. in Ghosh 113) as ideal union of man and woman in love and romance, pity and empathy, sacrifice and self-surrender, equality and freedom, to name a few.

In Sri Aurobindo's words, "I tried to realise what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact I was never satisfied till experience came

and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy, not on ideas by themselves." (CWSA 36: 113) As a poet, short story writer, dramatist, journalist, educationist, philosopher, politician and nationalist, yogi and so forth, he recorded his spiritual experiences. With a "clairvoyant self-sight", he moulded every discipline to express the truth of the Spirit that he experienced by practicing the Integral Yoga. He applied the genre of the drama to explain his philosophy of an evolution of human consciousness that marks a distinct shift from the 'outward' to the 'inward'. In his words, the genre of the drama must capture "great spiritual ideals and their action on the mind and lives of human beings that are put before us" (CWSA 27: 469-70). The characters in Sri Aurobindo's plays typify ideal bond in love and romance, beauty, bravery, sacrifice and self-surrender by rising above the weaknesses of the lower nature to manifest an original truth of the higher nature.

Rabindranath Tagore mentioned two types of bonds between man and woman. As the youngest member of the prestigious Tagore family, noted for its path-breaking contributions to culture and society, he grew up seeing his eldest sister, Swarnakumari Devi, attend school and become a poet and one of the earliest women novelists just not in Bengal but in India. But at the same time, being a landlord, he spent much of his time at the family estates of Shilaidaha and Patisar in rural East Bengal, where he saw the reality of marriage between man and woman. He saw woman being dominated by man, her lifelong struggle and sacrifice unacknowledged. Without receiving love or respect, she was his physical and social inferior, often subjected to abuse. According to Tagore, the *Manu Samriti* seemed to have given man a sense of self-entitlement, leading to imposition of power on woman:

...where Manu explicitly states that women are solely responsible for the cardinal passion of man, viz, sex passion, anger, greed, infatuation, vanity and envy. They have no real identity of their own. (qtd. in Soni 15)

This shows that Tagore identified union of man and woman as vital and physical. He condemned Manu's take on woman as man's object of "cardinal passion". She was born to cater to his vital and physical desires. This distorted treatise led Tagore to observe "true power of our society can be unleashed only when we seek woman's blessings in all forms without any false assumption of power to rule her" (qtd. in Soni 15). "A believer in totality" (Ghosh 18), he also ideated a world where woman was free and the relation between man and woman was based "upon the self-surrender" (qtd. in Soni 14). By practicing self-surrender man and woman would become equal.

Sri Aurobindo identified three kinds of union between man and woman:

The first is the vital and the physical bond... The second type of union between man and woman is the psychic bond... The spiritual bond is the third and the highest and is for him who feels the true call for spiritual life... (qtd. in Champaklal 224-225)



He elaborated, saying that the first kind was common as "ninety nine out of every hundred marriages result in this type of union." (qtd. in Champaklal 224) This bond was possible among couples of "ordinary type". He said there was nothing wrong in this union as it was indispensable on two accounts: "for gaining experience in their progress of life", and for "reproduction or the continuity of the race" (qtd. in Champaklal 224).

The second kind was uncommon. Men and women "of rare refinement and culture and have a call for a greater ideal in life" in the form of "art, music, poetry, patriotism" tended to form a union from "a higher outlook", resulting in a "pure and psychic bond" (qtd. in Champaklal 224). Couples, forming a union based on their psychic, did so by rising above sexual desires. Hence, they could help each other to fulfil their purer aspirations by channelling their inner force that was otherwise spent on fulfilling lower passions.

The third kind was the rarest and the highest as it was spiritual. Only those, who had an unswerving call for a spiritual life, must find their "complementary soul" or soul mate who would be their "partner and guide" in Yoga: a spiritual companion hastening their "speed of progress tenfold" (qtd. in Champaklal 225).

Sri Aurobindo's observation on three kinds of union between man and woman reiterates his philosophy of an evolution of human consciousness that marks a distinct shift from the 'outward' union to the 'inward' union. He coined the term the psychic being to explain the evolution of the human being from birth to birth. The psychic being is a portion of the Divine in manifestation that grows from birth to birth. It is deathless and has a memory and carries its memories from birth to birth, thus handholding an individual in their journey towards the Self.

Unlike Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore did not practice Yoga and such fine discernments between the Self and the psychic being were not addressed by him. He used the umbrella term "the true-self" and yet, he meant the same thing when he said that a union between man and woman must be based on their singular seeking of "the true-self". Both emphasise on a union that has its basis on a higher seeking or outlook that is free and noble, spanning the collective, and transformative. They speak in one voice: a shift from the 'outward' to the 'inward' in Sri Aurobindo's words and "to realise and communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth" (qtd. in Ghosh 113) in Tagore's words!

Since Tagore did not distinguish between the Self and the psychic being, he suggested a binary approach to the union of man and woman: woman as man's object of "cardinal passion", and a union of man and woman based on their singular seeking of "the true-self". He criticised man's sense of self-entitlement that necessitates a union as vital and physical with a "false assumption of power to rule her" (qtd. in Soni 15). For man and woman to engage in a relation beyond the oppressor and the oppressed, he ideated a world where woman was free

and the relation between man and woman was based on the higher code of self-surrender (qtd. in Soni 14). By practicing self-surrender could man and woman relate to "the 'true self' one in all, the same in everything and always, some irreducible unity of man, nature and spirit" (Ghosh 113).

As Sri Aurobindo differentiated between the Self and the psychic being, he proposed three kinds of union of man and woman: "the vital and the physical bond", "the psychic bond" and "the spiritual bond" (qtd. in Champaklal 224-225). The "spiritual bond" entails a couple's steadfast pursuit of a spiritual life: "It is really the Purusha and Prakriti fulfilling themselves in their world and raising themselves to the Divine plane by their united power." (qtd. in Champaklal 225) This is the rarest and highest of unions. Sri Aurobindo's dramatic pieces do not mention this union, and it can be supposed that it is because such a union is yet impossible at the level humanity is. Sri Aurobindo called humanity a thinking animal, and this implies that it is beyond its ken to gage a union of this supernal order. This also explains his position on "the vital and the physical bond" for he did not belittle such a bond, rather pointed out its indispensability: "for gaining experience in their progress of life" and for "reproduction or the continuity of the race" (qtd. in Champaklal 224). He recognised a gradual progression in the union of man and woman in three stages: "the vital and the physical bond", "the psychic bond" and "the spiritual bond" (qtd. in Champaklal 224-25).

Let us study *Raktakarabi* or *Red Oleanders* (1925) by Rabindranath Tagore and *Vasavadutta: A dramatic romance* (1916) by Sri Aurobindo to unveil each of the dramatist's take on the nature of relationship between man and woman. *Red Oleanders* demonstrates that human beings' lower needs and passions are invariably tied to "the separative ego". But if humanity can relate to "the 'true self' one in all, the same in everything and always, some irreducible unity of man, nature and spirit" (Ghosh 113), then an ideal union is not only desirable but possible. It illustrates two types of bond between Ranjan and Nandini, and the King and Nandini. Ranjan's and Nandini's union frees the people of Yakshapuri from the King's *adharmic* rule. The King desires Nandini against her will and that shows a man's passion for a woman as vital and physical. *Vasavadutta: A dramatic romance* exemplifies "the vital and the physical bond" as gratifying Vuthsa's and Vasavadutta's curious senses, emoting passion in each other, but this bond is superseded by a union from "a higher outlook" in the form of "patriotism" (qtd. in Champaklal 224) that ultimately brings two enemy kingdoms together. By making changes in themselves, they become instrumental in alliancing Avunthy and Cowsamby.

To Nandini, Ranjan is like the "river, Sankhini, -it can laugh and yet it can break." (Tagore 10) The river is a force of nature that washes away anything that hinders its flow towards the sea. In her aspiration to merge with a deeper and wider waterbody, she breaks resistances and yet rejoices as she nurtures fertile

lands that shelters and feeds a people and animals. And at the same time, he is the boat that ferries her across "stormy waters". Ranjan is an integral part of Nandini and flows to the universal rhythm of "the All" that moves life.

Despite being forcefully removed from her village and separated from Ranjan only to join the King's labour force, Nandini does not break down. Until her arrival in the town, the King's workers labour like machines. Belonging to the subaltern part of the community, they are dominated by the powerful. She makes them aware of their due, that they too can become free and live like equals. It is small wonder that to Ranjan she is a red oleander: "Wake, Ranjan, it is I, your Red Oleander!" (Ibid: 165) The flower is unexceptional, easily found all year round. Its redness symbolises courage, despite its small size. It is a metaphor for Nandini, thus emphasising her courage as she is not afraid of anyone, not even the King who appears to be a Machiavellian.

Similarly, Ranjan is made to work in the tunnels of Vajragarh from where he escapes. He breaks through the wall to enter the city centre in his efforts to locate Nandini. In fact, throughout the play, Nandini is sparkling in anticipation of meeting Ranjan. And he is depicted as this madman whose contagious laughter dispels the diggers' solemnity and work-related pressure. Unfortunately, he is hoodwinked by the Governor into believing that the King has taken Nandini as his slave girl. He willingly enters the King's chamber to rescue her and dies at the King's hand (the King does not know who Ranjan is and is deceived into killing him) while taking her name with a reverence that sets the King's body on fire. (Ibid: 167) Soon after, Nandini dies fighting to free her people.

Vuthsa has no plans of marrying immediately. When asked by Yougundharayan, "And what of marriage? Is it not desired?" (Ibid: 631), he replies:

O no, not yet! ...

I shudder, I know it is with rapture, at the thought

Of women's arms, and yet I dare not pluck

The joy... (Ibid: 631-32)

Before meeting Vasavadutta, he is portrayed as a charmer who "trad'st in honey to deceive the world." (Ibid: 647) Vasuntha calls him "the rose/ That from the heavens of desire was born/ And men call Vuthsa." (Ibid: 647) Vuthsa is desire personified in his ability to entice people like the rose attracts honey bees. And like the rose, he remains unaffected and indifferent to the ceaseless buzzing of adulation: "Love itself is sweet enough/ Though unreturned" (Ibid: 646).

Instructed by her father, King Mahasegn of Avunthy, to captivate Vuthsa into making her his queen and her father's "slave" and "subject king", Vasavadutta's dutiful answer proves her love for her nation:

I choose, my father, since it is thy will.

That thou shouldst rule the world, is my desire;

My nation's greatness is my dearest good. (Ibid: 667)

This shows beyond doubt her call for a higher ideal in life in the form of "patriotism" and prophesies the possibility of her forming a psychic union with Vuthsa. Even as she vows to her father never to "act as common natures do" (Ibid: 666), that of yielding to her heart, she wonders what Vuthsa is like:

...What is the man?  
A flame? a flower? High like Gopalaca  
Or else some golden-fair and soft-eyed youth?  
I have a fluttering in my heart to know. (Ibid: 669)

On beholding Vuthsa, Vasavadutta realises that there is "something more" to him than his bravery and surreal beauty, and his kingdom's riches. And this "something more", which she is yet to fathom, Vuthsa identifies as "The deepest things are those thought seizes not;/ Our spirits live their hidden meaning out." (Ibid: 680) As days pass by, her resolve slackens. Her ambition to humiliate him takes on a new direction as she realises that he is a force of nature that cannot be tamed:

I govern no longer what I speak and do.  
Is this the fire my mother spoke of?...  
O, I have forgotten almost my father's will;  
...Before I lose it quite,  
I will compel a promise from the boy....  
I forget That I am Vasavadutta, that he is  
My house's foe and only Vuthsa feel,  
Think Vuthsa only, while my captive heart  
Beats in world-Vuthsa and on Vuthsa throbs.  
This must not be. (Ibid: 687)

She secures "a promise" from him to take and rule Cowsamby as its queen and for him to live as her servant. But there is a catch in his promise; that if she desires to rule as his queen and expects him to obey her, she must accompany him to Cowsamby. He refuses to be her father's "slave" and "subject king" (Ibid: 665). Vasavadutta admits to losing to him, admiring his diplomatic acuity to checkmate her in her own game. She is not averse to accompany him to Cowsamby as her heart and body are already seized by him:

O joy, if he and all were only mine.  
O greatness, to be queen of him and earth.  
I grow a rebel to my father's house. (Ibid: 692)

In the course of the play, they acknowledge their love for each other; and Vuthsa, who like the rose once attracted honey bees, becomes a honey bee himself in his love for her for he says:

O honey of thy mouth! The joy, the joy  
Was sweeter. I have drunk in heaven at last,  
Let what will happen. (Ibid: 700)

In both couples' cases, adversity strengthens their resolve, and in their love for each other, they find the strength to pursue a path of righteousness in two distinct ways. The King of Yakshapuri is the anti-hero who fuels Nandini's and Ranjan's aspiration to free their land and people. By denying his people liberty, equality and living comforts, the King enforces deprivation on his subjects, thus necessitating Nandini's and Ranjan's and others' intervention to enter into a warlike situation to take back what is rightfully theirs. Similarly, Mahasegn, the King of Avunthy is the antagonist who stokes Vasavadutta's love for Vuthsa, enabling her to repudiate his lesson of statecraft, founded on the calculating mind. As she concedes to her honest and surrendering heart, she commits to securing peace for her kingdom, as her father wanted but in a way that respects human life. Let us address this similarity in both couples in greater detail.

Ranjan and Nandini face hardships that accompany the fight for freedom with honour and courage, and remain happy; thus, their love is not shown as weak, weepy and clingy. It is a love that is not bound by the demands and comforts of the individual. Such a love nurtures freedom and harmony in a relationship that is beyond "*knowing*, but in *being*". (Tagore 253) By "*being*", they help each other to fulfil themselves in their quest for an ideal society based on the *mantra* of freedom and equality. And to achieve it, they do not shy away from a righteous battle. Ranjan and Nandini embody communal love and self-sacrifice that is born of "the joy that is at the root of all creation" (Tagore 88) by "*being*". And this makes them the archetypes of a higher love that demands freedom as a prerequisite towards an equal and fuller life.

*Red Oleanders* is a creative treatise on "equality and love which should form the basis of married life and the relationships surrounding this institution." (Tagore 88) And "equality and love" are possible with the singular seeking of, what he calls "the true-self". Through this dramatic piece, Tagore unites art with life, "It is the aim of art and literature to realise and communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth." (qtd. in Ghosh 113) Ranjan and Nandini do "communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth" (qtd. in Ghosh 113) in their love for each other that recognises freedom and equality as the basis of an ideal society. By initiating a revolution in Yakshapuri through love, sacrifice and self-surrender, they impart the wisdom of tuning to "the true-self" because one is not possible without the other. This is Tagore's message to the world.

Vasavadutta is momentarily blinded by her father's cold rationality born of fear and dominance. Vuthsa, who sees in her devotion, redirects her towards building an alliance that is mighty, peaceful and prosperous. She overthrows cold rationality and explores her heart and offers it to him. And she recognises him as "my king", accepting "Thy service and thy homage and thy love." (Ibid: 703) She, who once proudly promised her father that she would never to succumb to her heart and emotions ("Let the thinking mind prevail" (Ibid: 665), yields to Vuthsa,



filial pledge forgotten. Thus, she liberates herself from her father's unhealthy influence. From humiliating and enslaving Vuthsa to humbly accepting to be his queen, she personifies growth:

I accept, my king,  
Thy service and thy homage and thy love.  
If in return the bounty of myself  
I lavish on thee, will it be enough?  
Can it hold thy life as thou wilt fill all mine? (Ibid: 703).

She rejects her father's conniving mind for her honest and surrendering heart that promises to serve Vuthsa, and she wonders aloud if "the bounty of myself" would be enough to fill his life for she is sure that he "wilt fill all mine".

Sri Aurobindo writes of the psychic nature as yearning for "an absolute, an imperative of love, sympathy, compassion, oneness" (CWSA 19: 566). In Act I, scene 2, Yougundharayan is shown as perturbed by Vuthsa's attitude regarding women and shares his concern with Roomunwath, "One only lives/ So absolute in her charm that she can keep/ His senses from all straying" (Ibid: 628). Vuthsa, who once desired "every woman" but was committed to none, is transformed on seeing Vasavadutta for he pledges to her his unwavering love, loyalty and service, including his kingdom. This marks his growth from a carefree charmer to an enraptured lover. And as noted, Vasavadutta not only becomes a loving consort from a submissive daughter and princess but proves herself to be a worthy representative of the royal family of Avunthy by befriending Cowsamby to protect the interests of her people. Sri Aurobindo points out that there are two ways of securing peace: one is by force and the other is by love. Vasavadutta, under that guidance of her father, first tries force but learns the value of love and secures peace. This shows beyond doubt that both of them choose abiding love. The dramatist views love as a divine and transformative Force. And as the psychic nature is to yearn for "an absolute, an imperative of love, sympathy, compassion, oneness" (CWSA 19: 566), both possess a psychic nature.

Vuthsa's and Vasavadutta's psychic nature seeks "a greater ideal in life" in the form of "patriotism" as their love guarantees a strong partnership between Avunthy and Cowsamby, making them invincible in the face of an attack. Their internal change concludes in "a higher outlook" of "patriotism" (qtd. in Champaklal 224), securing their nations' interests. We see a shift in their consciousness from the 'outward' to the 'inward'.

Let us take a minor diversion to discuss how Ranjan and Vuthsa are taken captive. The former is lured into the King's chamber by some of Governor's men on the pretext of Nandini being taken captive: "The King can't possibly have understood. Some lie told by our men has goaded Ranjan to frenzy, and he's rushing to the usual fate of-". (Tagore 147) Similarly, Vuthsa is apprehended by Prince Gopalaca of Avunthy on the advice of Mahasegn and brought to Ujjayiny:

Brought to the eagle's nest  
For the eagle's child thou giv'st him her heart's prey  
To Vasavadutta! (Ibid: 626)

Nandini and her people fail to save Ranjan, but Vasavadutta's brother Vicurna helps Vuthsa to elope with her to Cowsamby. Gopalaca, who at the beginning approves of his father's scheme to trick Vuthsa into captivity, joins hands with his younger brother to help the couple escape from Avunthy. The untimely deaths of Ranjan and Nandini in the hand of the King seem to suggest that they belong to a time that is yet to come when society will accept and emulate their ideals of a higher life, of "equality and love which should form the basis of married life and the relationships surrounding this institution." (Tagore 88) *Red Oleanders* is a tragedy or a "conflict-driven play"; and Tagore, albeit a dreamer, remains true to its nature. *Vasavadutta* is "a dramatic romance", and Sri Aurobindo remains true to its optimistic nature. Romance means adventure, and indeed Vuthsa and Vasavadutta embark on an adventure to build unity based on love.

Coming back to the key concept of the union of man and woman, let us analyse the King of Yakshapuri's and Nandini's relation. The former symbolises absolute greed: be it possessing Nandini or exploiting nature. He is brutally honest about desiring to possess Nandini. This uncontained desire manifests as his physical strength that demands her subjugation to him: to "pluck", "grasp", "handle", "scrutinise" and "break" her to pieces. She describes his strength in the lines, "his forehead like the gateway of a tower, his arms the iron bolts of some inaccessible fortress." (Tagore 71) He professes his love to her in the lines, "I want to pluck you out of it, to grasp you within my closed fist, to handle you, scrutinise you, or else to break you to pieces." (Tagore 23) Hungering to plunder and possess Nandini, who is also his subject, makes him an "unmitigated king" (Ibid: 9).

He asks her if she likes him as much as Ranjan. She replies, "Again the same question! I tell you, you don't understand these things." (Ibid: 26) To this the King responds, "I do understand, a little. I know what the difference in between Ranjan and me. In me there is only strength, in Ranjan there is magic." (Ibid: 26) This shows that Tagore identified union of man and woman as vital and physical, as shown in the King's vain and envious passion for Nandini. However, by the end of the play, his plundering passion transforms into love for her.

The entire play focuses on his transformation from a despot to a generous giver and protector. He acknowledges "how overgrown power crushes itself inwardly by its own weight" and that in Nandini he sees "something quite opposite" (Ibid: 29). To him, she represents "The dance rhythm of the All... The rhythm that lightens the enormous weight of matter." (Ibid: 29) The King overcomes his greed and strength or "the enormous weight of matter" by loving Nandini and thus to "the All" in an act of selfless love, following her in death. In

poem or Chapter 36 (*Gitanjali*), Tagore describes the act of surrender as "And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love." (29) By renouncing his strength to her "will with love", he aspires to the codes of a higher self that direct him to fight for her ideal of freedom and equality. The play illustrates the King's self-determination to change as he frees himself from his perverse nature, no longer contained by his fragile ego.

In the beginning of the play, the King is the "Voice" as he hides himself from everyone. To Nandini, he gives a glimpse of his hand and later reveals himself to get to know her. From the "Voice", he becomes the tangible and verifiable "King", the ideal protector, sacrificing his life for her sake as he forges a pure bond with her. Nandini is his catalyst as she redirects his power towards a higher ideal of love, life and sacrifice. She hones and improves him, making him a fitter instrument to serve "the All" that is present in humanity and nature.

Despite the King's growth, his bond with Nandini is of the first kind. Initially, she likes his strength and thinks that she can change him and to an extent she succeeds but when he kills Ranjan, she invites him to fight one last time. She does not see him as her ideal companion but her enemy, and the King is aware of her sentiments for he says:

To fight against me, but with your hand in mine. That fight has already begun. There is my flag. First I break the Flagstaff-thus! Next it's for you to tear its banner. Let your hand unite with mine to kill me, utterly kill me. That will be my emancipation. (Tagore 169-70)

The only time she requests his help is when Ranjan dies: she asks him to bring Ranjan back to life. Of course, the King cannot. Since Tagore believed that a relationship must be based on the ideals of "equality and love" and consequently, self-surrender, the King and Nandini do not belong to the second kind of union between man and woman. But Ranjan and Nandini do, as previously mentioned:

For love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us. It is not a mere sentiment, it is truth, it is the joy that is at the root of all creation . . . It is equality and love which should form the basis of married life and the relationships surrounding this institution. (Tagore 88)

The King belongs to the present, with a faint idea of what Nandini represents: "The dance rhythm of the All... The rhythm that lightens the enormous weight of matter." (Ibid: 29) He is aware of his dense nature, that of matter. In a weak effort to change himself, he seeks Nandini who is "the rhythm that lightens the enormous weight matter" or him. It can be surmised that having unwittingly killed Ranjan, he realises that he is no closer to change than he was at the beginning of the play and appeals to Nandini, "Let your hand unite with mine to kill me, utterly kill me. That will be my emancipation." (Tagore 169-70) This is

symbolic because he hopes that in dying at her hands lies his salvation. She is his deliverer, freeing him from a life of lesser or flawed desires.

Similarly, Vasavadutta is Vuthsa's deliverer. Since hear Vsavadutta's charm and beauty, Vuthsa is smitten, but it is after meeting her that he hails her as "Luxmie" in Act V, scene 6: "Thou beside me, Fate/ And Fortune, peace and battle must obey" (Ibid: 743). Physical desire/attraction transforms into a higher aspiration:

Nature must flower into art  
And science, or else wherefore are we men?  
Man out of Nature wakes to God's complexities  
Takes her crude simple stuff and by his skill  
Turns things impossible into daily miracles. (Ibid: 629)

Vasavadutta shakes him wake "to God's complexities" because since meeting her, he set aside the warrior's impulse to go to war (he is depicted as taking pleasure in war):

... War is beautiful  
And the bright ranks of armoured men and steel  
That singing kisses steel and the white flocking  
Of arrows that are homing birds of war.  
When shall we fight again? (CWSA 4: 631)

Love makes him wish to live a peaceful life. Consequently, his subjects can live peacefully. With the alliance of Avunthy and Cowsamby, he secures prosperity for his subjects. History records that in times of peace, art and literature flourished in ancient kingdoms. Vuthsa, wishing to live a life of conjugal happiness, confirms his kingdom flourishing materially and culturally: "Nature must flower into art/ And science, or else wherefore are we men?" (Ibid: 629) Already a fierce warrior, he finally embraces his soft other-half nature, becoming a well-rounded personality: a worthy ruler and a complete man.

Let us compare the King of Yakshapuri to Vuthsa, King of Cowsamby. The former is sketched in the image of Louis XVI. And Ranjan and Nandini, much like the French proletarians, fight against monarchy to gain freedom, equality and democratic rights. Ranjan is Nandini's catalyst as his death cements her resolve to secure Yakshapuri's freedom. To stand united, Tagore believed that freedom was vital: "The strongest barrier against freedom in all departments of life is the selfishness of the individuals or groups." (qtd. in Ghosh 115) Without freedom, there is no equality, thus enforcing hierarchy and subjugation of "individuals or groups." This view underlines *Red Oleanders*.

The King of Yakshapuri sees an uprising that he cannot dam like Louis XVI did of Bastille. But Vuthsa faces no backlash from his subjects. This shows that Sri Aurobindo and Tagore considered that to be a worthy ruler (a king must follow the *dharma* of a king), one must be a sincere servitor of the people, and a man with a higher ideal that checks the lowers passions of the vital: a message

imparted by *Mahabharata* (the Pandavas versus the Kauravas). Besides, any change worth its salt must be initiated by those in power. Unlike Vuthsa, the King of Yakshapuri fails to fulfil his duty as a king and that is why his people challenge him.

Mahasegn, King of Avunthy, is alike the King of Yakshapuri. He is apprehensive of Vuthsa Udaian's growing fame and success as an astute warrior of the enemy kingdom of Cowsamby. He does his duty by worrying about the safety of his kingdom. But he goes about it in an unfair way. With Gopalaca's help he schemes and tricks Vuthsa into captivity in the city of Ujjayiny:

Brought to the eagle's nest  
For the eagle's child thou giv'st him her heart's prey  
To Vasavadutta! King, thy way is good. (Ibid: 626)

Mahasegn apprises Queen Ungarica of his plan and bids Vasavadutta to obey his orders:

...Now is thy hour to pay the long dear debt  
Thou ow'st thy parents by whom thou wast made.  
Vuthsa, Cowsamby's king, my rival, foe,  
My Fate's high stumbling-block, captive today  
Is brought to Avunthy. I mean he shall become  
Thy husband, Vasavadutta, and my slave.  
By thee he shall become my subject king.  
Then shall thy father's fate outleap all bounds,  
Thy house and nation rule the prostrate world.  
This is my will, my daughter; is it thine (Ibid: 665)

But his family opposes him like the King of Yakshapuri's subjects do. Queen Ungarica, happy at the prospect of her daughter gaining an empire, does not support her spouse in his blinkered view of "O, the heart, it is a danger,/ A madness! Let the thinking mind prevail." (Ibid: 665) She is wishful that her daughter finds love and happiness with Vuthsa and makes her unsuspecting daughter aware of its relentless and persuasive seizing of "a woman's heart and body" (Ibid: 668). Mahasegn tells her that she is not his advisor. Vicurna is exiled for helping Vuthsa elope with Vasavadutta to Cowsamby. In this manner, Mahasegn's desire is not entirely fulfilled: his daughter becomes Vuthsa's husband, thereby gaining a nation to rule; but Vuthsa does not become his "slave" and "subject king". (Ibid: 665) Even though father and daughter differ, they remain on the same team as they need never fear Vuthsa occupying Avunthy. In his ambition to enslave Vuthsa, he is similar to the King of Yakshapuri who subjected his people to forced labour, poverty and inequality.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Aurobindo stated that the genre of the drama must encapsulate "great spiritual ideals and their action on the mind and lives of human beings that are put before us and all that matters is how they are presented and



made living in their appeal. Here there is, I think, full success and that entirely justifies the method of the drama." (CWSA 27: 469-70) And to this extent, it can be said that Sri Aurobindo, the unparalleled yogi and visionary, optimised the dramatic genre to creatively address the pioneering spiritual ideal of a psychic union between man and woman founded on the "higher outlook" of "patriotism", as exemplified by Vuthsa and Vasavadutta, and their action on the minds and lives of the readers. And Tagore maintained, "It is the aim of art and literature to realise and communicate the essential joy and immortality of Truth." (qtd. in Ghosh 113) Ranjan and Nandini do convey "the essential joy and immortality of Truth" (qtd. in Ghosh 113) by renouncing their lives for an ideal. Thus, they transcend the 'I' to relate to the other or the many. This marks a widening of consciousness. Tagore's message to the world is humanity must let go of the ego-self to commune with "the true-self" so that the aforementioned ideals manifest.

To conclude, at a time when marriage as an institution is fast losing its charm and value, it is crucial to remember the significant reasons behind its obsolescence. If marriages are taking place solely because of sexual desires, resulting in "the vital and the physical bond" (qtd. in Champaklal 224-25), then it is obvious that such a bond breaks once sexual desires wear off. After all, the vital craves novelty and is easily bored and loses interest once it has indulged. Since desire cannot be annihilated, it can only be transformed, and here lies Sri Aurobindo's one of many revolutionary contributions, that of the evolution of the human consciousness. If we were to realise the instability and wretchedness of the vital, it is only logical to transcend to a plane of consciousness that would offer us respite from the tantrums of the vital and offer peace, stability and perpetuity. Hence, the shift to a greater ideal or ideology in the form of "art, music, poetry, patriotism" that can help form a union from "a higher outlook" (qtd. in Champaklal 224). These ideals are founded on the psychic principles of selflessness, equanimity or *samata*, absolute devotion and surrender, the sense of being deathless, to name a few. Hence, a couple's purer aspirations can be fulfilled, and they partner for a lifetime because it is based on something so pure and eternal. The conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi comes to mind: the former tells his spouse that she is dear to him because of the Self that resides in her. The ancient Indians knew of this truth, and the current generation must look into the past, rediscover the truth of their spiritual heritage and redefine 'union' of man and man in the light of Rabindranath Tagore and especially, Sri Aurobindo!

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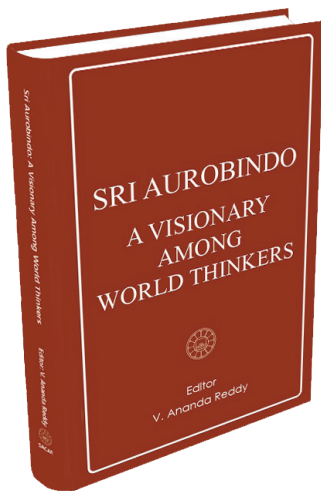
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Dr. Ananda Reddy is the Chairman of Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad and the Director of Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Puducherry. He is an alumnus of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Puducherry and has received his doctorate on Sri Aurobindo's concept of Physical Transformation from Madras University. He has travelled across India and to USA, Europe and far East to disseminate the thought and vision of Sri Aurobindo. He continues to work and inspire the younger generations. He has authored about ten books on the work and vision of Sri Aurobindo and has delivered about 2000 hours of talks.

### **Dr. Beloo Mehra**

Dr. Beloo Mehra felt a divine love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sometime in the summer of 2004. On the intellectual side it was primarily the cultural, social and educational thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which first drew her in. It was the love of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that brought Beloo back to India in 2007 after having studied, lived and worked for more than 14 years in the US. She writes regularly for several journals and magazines and also for her blogs.

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### **Dr. Pariksith Singh**

Dr. Pariksith Singh is a medical doctor by profession, but also a scholar with a deep interest in philosophy, literature, and poetry. In addition to medicine, Singh has published works in various fields, including essays, poetry collections (in Hindi and English), translations, and works on medical education. His book, "Sri Aurobindo and Philosophy," is a key indicator of his expertise in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. This book explores Sri Aurobindo's unique perspective on various philosophical topics. Dr. Singh compares Sri Aurobindo's philosophy with other prominent thinkers. His book contrasts Sri Aurobindo's ideas with those of fifteen philosophical titans, including figures like Nietzsche and Derrida. His work appears driven by a passion

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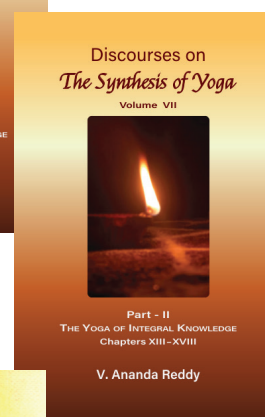
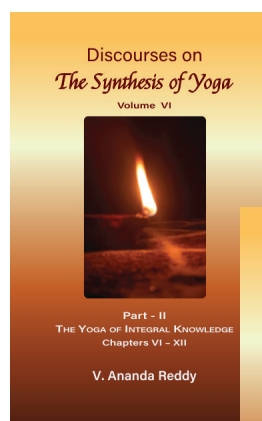
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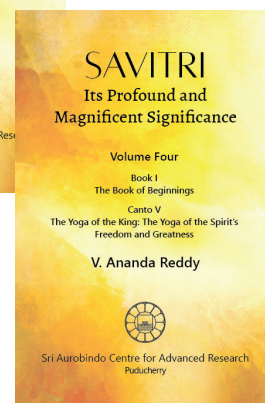
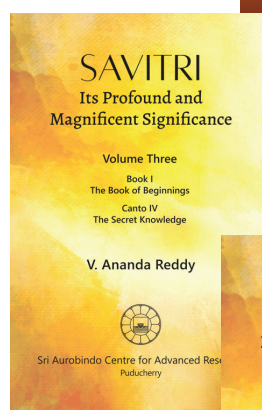
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