

**Georges Van Vrekhem**

# **The New Spirituality**



**Stichting Aurofonds**





# The New Spirituality

Essays and Articles by  
Georges Van Vrekhem



Stichting Aurofonds

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## *Introduction*

When Georges Van Vrekhem passed away on 31st August, 2012, he left behind a number of unpublished essays and articles. Some of these essays were based on his talks in Auroville at the end of 2011, when he embarked on a second series of eleven lectures on a wide variety of topics related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was the intention that these lectures would be published as a sequel to the book *Preparing for the Miraculous*, which contains his first series of lectures at Auroville.

Cyclone Thane, which hit Auroville on 30th December, 2011, disrupted these plans and his talks were postponed; they were delayed again in the second quarter of 2012, due to health problems. Georges planned to restart the lectures in September 2012 but, unfortunately, his passing away decided differently.

In publishing these essays, we want to honour Georges and his immense work in helping to understand the life



and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We also felt it worthwhile to include in this compilation several articles that have been published in various magazines, such as *Auroville Today*, *Mother India* and *The Advent*, and in the book *The Journeying Years* by Dianna Bowler.

Like in *Preparing for the Miraculous*, most essays in this compilation are not polished-up nor aim at exhausting their subject. The reader may also find that repetitions occur occasionally. We have kept these repetitions as each is an integral part of a specific talk or essay.

Unless otherwise mentioned, all quotations of Sri Aurobindo in this book are from the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*; those of the Mother are from the *Collected Works of The Mother – Centenary Edition*.

All of Georges' books and their translations, as well as his talks, video lectures and the interviews are available online from [www.beyondman.org](http://www.beyondman.org) and [www.georges-van-vrekhem.org](http://www.georges-van-vrekhem.org).

We hope that this posthumous publication will inspire all his readers within and outside Auroville.

Carel Thieme  
Guy Ryckaert

## *Note on Terminology*

For a better understanding of the terminology used in this book, we publish below a few quotations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the words Supermind, Supramental, Overmind and “*Surhomme*” (literally translated by Georges Van Vrekhem as “Overman”).

Editors

**Sri Aurobindo in *Letters on Yoga*,**  
(*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 28, pp. 147-149)

It is hardly possible to say what the Supermind is in the language of Mind, even spiritualised Mind, for it is a different consciousness altogether and acts in a different way. Whatever may be said of it is likely to be not understood or misunderstood. It is only by growing into it that one can know what it is and this also cannot be done until after a long process by which mind heightening and illuminating becomes pure Intuition (not the mixed thing that

ordinarily goes by that name) and Intuition widens and masses itself into Overmind; after that Overmind can be lifted into and suffused with Supermind till it undergoes a transformation.

In the Supermind all is self-known self-luminously, there are no divisions, oppositions or separated aspects as in Mind whose principle is division of Knowledge into parts and setting each part against another. Overmind approaches this at its top and is often mistaken for Supermind, but it cannot reach it – except by uplifting and transformation.

\* \* \*

The Supermind is the One Truth deploying and determining the manifestation of its Powers – all these Powers working as a multiple Oneness, in harmony, without opposition or collision, according to the One Will inherent in all. The Overmind takes these Truths and Powers and sets each working as a force in itself with its necessary consequences – there can be harmony in their action, but the Overmind's harmonies are synthetic and partial rather than inherent, total and inevitable and, as one descends from the highest Overmind, separation, collision and conflict of forces increase, separability dominates, ignorance grows, existence becomes a clash of possibilities, a mixture of conflicting half-truths, an unsolved and apparently unsolvable riddle and puzzle.

\* \* \*

The Supermind is the Truth-Consciousness; below it there intervenes the Overmind of which the principle is to receive the powers of the Divine and try to work them out separately, each acting in its own right and working to realise a world of its own or, if it has to act with others, enforcing its

own principle as much as possible. Souls descending into the Overmind act in the same way. The principle of separated Individuality is from here. At first still aware of its divine origin, it becomes as it descends still more and more separated and oblivious of it, governed by the principle of division and ego. For Mind is farther removed from the Truth than Overmind, Vital Nature is engrossed in the realisation of ignorant forces, while in Matter the whole passes into what seems an original Inconscience. It is the Overmind Maya that governs this world, but in Matter it has deepened into Inconscience out of which consciousness reemerges and climbs again bringing down into Matter life and mind, and opening in mind to the higher reaches – which are still in some direct connection with the Truth (Intuition, Overmind, Supermind).

\* \* \*

At the time when these chapters [the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*] were written, the name “overmind” had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in these chapters is the action of the supermind when it descends into the overmind plane and takes up the overmind workings and transforms them. It was intended in later chapters to show how difficult even this was and how many levels there were between human mind and supermind and how even supermind, descending, could get mixed with the lower action and turned into something that was less than the true Truth. But these later chapters were not written.

\* \* \*

The supramental is simply the direct self-existent Truth Consciousness and the direct self-effective Truth Power. There can therefore be no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not supramental.

\* \* \*

## **The Mother to Satprem**

(in *Mother's Agenda*, vol I, May 10, 1958)

“To do Sri Aurobindo’s work is to realise the Supramental on earth. So I began that work and, as a matter of fact, this was the only thing I asked of my body. I told it, ‘Now you shall set right everything which is out of order and gradually realise this intermediate supermanhood<sup>1</sup> between man and the supramental being’ or, in other words, what I call the overman.’ And this is what I have been doing for the last eight years, and even much more during the past two years, since 1956. Now it is the work of each day, each minute. That’s where I am. I have renounced the uncontested authority of a god, I have renounced the unshakeable calm of the sage ... in order to become the overman. I have concentrated everything upon that.”

## **The Mother to the children of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram**

(in *Questions and Answers*, 1957-58, p. 313, ff.)

On 16th April, 1958, the Mother announced as an existing fact what Sri Aurobindo had foreseen in *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. She affirms that “there is already a beginning of realisation. We have the proof that in certain conditions the ordinary state of humanity can be exceeded and a new state of consciousness worked out which enables at least a conscious relation between mental

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1 The Mother used the words ‘*surhumanité*’ and ‘*surhomme*’. These words have, in the thirteen volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, as well as in the six volumes of the *Questions and Answers* [the talks Mother gave at the Playground of the Ashram from 21st December, 1950 till 26th November, 1958] consistently been mistranslated as ‘supermanhood’ and ‘superman’ instead as ‘overmanhood’ and ‘overman’. This is a mistake because ‘supermanhood’ and ‘superman’ refer to the supramental being. See also the article “Overman – the Transitional Being”, pp. 31-36.

and supramental man. It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of overman who will still have the qualities and in part the nature of man, which means that he will still belong in his most external form to the human being [*i.e.* species] of animal origin, but that he will transform his consciousness sufficiently to belong, in his realisation and activity, to a new race, a race of overmen. This species may be considered a transitional species, for it is to be foreseen that it will discover the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method, and it is these beings — who will have a truly spiritual birth — who will constitute the elements of the new race, the supramental race. So we could call overmen those who, because of their origin, still belong to the old method of generation but who, because of their accomplishment, are in conscious and active contact with the new world of supramental realisation.”

\* \* \*



## **In the Market Square**

Silent he stood in the market square  
day after day after dusty day,  
his right forefinger stretched out,  
mocked by the loud market crowd.

Then, on a day after many long days  
– nobody looked at him anymore –  
see, on his right forefinger  
a golden butterfly descended, and sat still.





**Articles about  
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**



# 1

## *The New Spirituality or the Aurobindonian Revolution*

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo quotes the triple statement of the *Upanishads*: “Brahman is in all things, all things are in Brahman, all things are Brahman.”<sup>1</sup> The *Upanishads*, the foundation of Vedanta, have been a living source of spiritual inspiration since they were formulated some three thousand years ago; yet the full scope of their significance was not put into practice until Sri Aurobindo dedicated himself to the implementation of their unadulterated message.

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 149.

In the meantime there had been Mahavir and the Buddha, Shankara and Christ, and a multitude of great saints and realized souls; but no religion or spiritual path teaches that Brahman, the Omnipresent Reality, is “this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect”<sup>2</sup> – and this shopping housewife, this jetliner, this cancer tumour and this self-immolating fanatic... All spiritual paths and all churches point toward a hereafter, *moksha*, *nirvana*, and teach how to get out of this life or cycle of lives by what they suppose to be the shortest way possible.

Matter is the anti-Divine, the body is a burden, a prison, a tomb. Individual escape out of this bad or illusionary sub-lunar world is the direct goal, after which all will be happiness and ecstasy in eternity. Yet to Sri Aurobindo, from the very beginning of his *sadhana*, “a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful.”<sup>3</sup> And he wrote about his Yoga: “Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfillment of life.”<sup>4</sup>

In the course of his *sadhana* he gradually became aware of the dimensions of the spiritual innovation to be brought about by him. Firstly, matter and the Earth were no longer seen as something despicable in which the soul had descended by some accident or other. The statement of the *Upanishads*: “Matter also is Brahman” was to be taken literally, and the physical universe was seen as ‘the external body of the Divine Being’.<sup>5</sup>

He wrote: “Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some

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2 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 508.

3 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 107.

4 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 155.

5 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 8.

Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it: [on the contrary] it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through its contradictions and perplexities ...”<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the ‘evolutionary unfolding of the being’ became more than a naturalist scientific theory, it became a spiritual fact directly significant for the effort of the Yoga. Much of our bodies, life forces and mental capacities is shaped by evolution. We carry the development of life on the Earth not only in our visible body but deep in ourselves, where the past continues to be present and must be overcome if we want to advance into the future. The *chakras* represent the earthly and therefore cosmic evolution in us and are hierarchically ordered from below upwards, toward the levels which are worlds of consciousness above our present human rationality, to be integrated in the bodies of the future.

True, in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga one has first to realize the psychic and overmental, spiritual realizations, but then, strengthened with these realizations, one has to descend into the nether regions of the subconscious, where are the dark roots of humanity.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo had the revelation of the Supermind, the divine Truth-Consciousness. This is the consciousness in which all is one and is experienced as one, in the timeless immensities as well as in the time-bound sub-atomic materializations; it is the consciousness which eternally

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6 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 706.

contains all in itself, manifests all out of itself and then takes all again into its bosom. This is the true 'mind of God' behind the mysteries of the infinite and the infinitesimal, confounding present-day science because it is incapable of widening its vision beyond the physical realm. And Sri Aurobindo saw that this Truth-Consciousness, however high or far or deep beyond our present mind, was the only basis to realize the next step in evolution for which the time had come. "This knowledge first he had of time-born men."<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, to work out his vision and his personal realizations of it, he had to establish a method which could be followed by others, a spiritual path which he called the 'Integral Yoga'. For it had to contain the essence of humanity's spiritual achievements in the past in order to integrate them into a vision of the future. In this spiritual undertaking, in the working out of this 'new spirituality', he and the Mother stood alone. Time and again they have compared their pioneering effort to hewing a path in the jungle, advancing through constant danger into the unknown. For the mighty Powers-that-be, hostile to any new spiritual acquisition or change, become merciless when their reign is threatened and their dominant position on the Earth might come to an end. "*My gaping wounds are a thousand and one / And the Titan kings assail ...*" wrote Sri Aurobindo in his marvelous autobiographical poem 'A God's Labour'.<sup>8</sup>

All this together was – and is – the Aurobindonian revolution. 'Revolution' is often nothing more than an overblown word. But if initiating a new step in the terrestrial evolution, based on the materialization of a consciousness beyond our present mind and even imagination, and to be incorporated into a material being on the Earth – if this is not a revolution, then what is?

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 74.

8 Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*, p. 534.

It is but seldom realized that at the time of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's early lives the coming of the 'superman' was felt by many to be necessary and even imminent. The name of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose thinking Sri Aurobindo was very familiar with, will come to mind. But there was also Marx' new *homo economicus*, there was the new atheistic and humanitarian man of August Comte, the Freudian and Jungian new man, and several more. Those were indeed the decades of an intense reaction of discontent against the dry rationality of the Enlightenment. This reaction would lead to fascism, with its own ideal of the new man, the man of the deed, and ultimately to Hitler's ruthless superman, the 'blonde beast'.

Still the historical perspective should be extended much farther backwards in time. For if this was, and is, the moment of a new evolutionary creation which is the fulfillment of the evolutionary past and makes a quantum leap beyond it, it must mean that Nature had worked out all the preliminary stages on the Earth to their utmost possibilities. As the Mother said, there are long periods of preparation, but then there is the moment in which the evolutionary *saltus* happens. Today's humanity in upheaval is certainly significative of such a critical moment in its evolution.

The 'procession' of avatars is well-known in Hinduism and, as Sri Aurobindo remarked, pictures the successive evolutionary stages perfectly.<sup>9</sup> Sri Krishna declared in the *Bhagawad Gita* that the avatar comes at times when humanity is in crisis.<sup>10</sup> The materialization of a new step in the evolution, like every birth, is a time of intensest crisis, qua importance exceeding by far the 'axis-times' as defined by Karl Jaspers. The beings of an established level of evolution are themselves incapable of piercing the ceiling of their

9 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 487.

10 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita*, p. 169.



species, of going beyond the highest stratum of their materialization. Such a breakthrough can be effected only by a direct intervention from 'above', materially incarnated in a being which in India is known as avatar. Sri Aurobindo argues in one of his letters that between the hominids and *homo sapiens* there had to be an avatar, in that case Lord Rama. If so, there had to be an avatar to initiate the still greater leap between *homo sapiens* and the supramental being – and we know the name of that avatar: Sri Aurobindo-Mother,

*A single being in two bodies clasped,  
A diarchy of two united souls.*<sup>11</sup>

For the first time in the history of humanity a complete, double-poled avatar incarnated representing He and She, the male and female principle on all levels of existence and manifestation.

The Divine takes on a material body in what could be called metaphorically an 'avataric field'. This consists of a preparatory period leading up to his appearance. Then there is his presence on earth when he lays the foundations of the change he has come down to bring about, always against impossible odds because he has come to do the impossible. While the decisive change is taking place only a few humans are aware of his presence, and fewer still are aware of the implications of his work. When the avatar has left his earthly body a transitory period follows, often of great confusion. And finally comes the time of the accomplishment of the evolutionary or spiritual change, perceptible to all and having a permanent impact on the destiny of humanity as a whole.

We are in the transitory period between the presence of the avatar and the concrete realization of his purpose. Our strength is in our faith, unreasonable or maybe grotesque in the eyes of those who do not have the call to participate

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11 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 295.

consciously in the Great Change. One of the keywords of the Integral Yoga is 'surrender' because, having dedicated our lives to the Work, we accept that the ultimate realization – the transformation of the body -- will not be ours in this life. But to support our faith there is the presence of Sri Aurobindo and of the Mother – for the task of the avatar is not limited by his and her physical incarnation; and we can inwardly open to the supramental force, manifested in the Earth-atmosphere in 1956, and its deputy, the force descended in 1969 to enable the realization of the overmental, transitional or intermediary being. Trying to become intermediary beings ('overwomen' and 'overmen' – *surhommes*) is, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the task given to us.<sup>12</sup>

In the physical sciences it is a rule that a theory should prove its validity by making predictions that can be tested. Is Sri Aurobindo's theory of the supermind only a grandiose illusion, or will humanity die out before anything like the apparition of the supramental being can happen on our planet? Sri Aurobindo has made predictions. In his writings in the *Arya*, later published in book form, one can read that: 1. India had to become free; 2. Asia had to awake; 3. humanity had to become one; 4. the Indian spirituality had to spread in the whole world; 5. the humans species would be succeeded by a new species of supramental beings. It should be borne in mind that these predictions were made during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, when reasonable people could only consider them as chimaeras. In 1947, in a text to be broadcast on the occasion of India's freedom, Sri Aurobindo summarized these predictions himself and called them his 'five dreams'.

When one considers what has become of these 'dreams' at present, one cannot but agree that all five have been realized to a considerable degree. Thus they may be held

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12 The Mother: *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, pp. 190-191.

to be a rational justification of Sri Aurobindo's previsions of the future. He wrote that a next evolutionary step is *inevitable*, a statement which, considering the evolutionary process, can only be doubted for fear that our Earth might not survive its present predicament. But the fundamental cause of this predicament is precisely the *Umwertung aller Werte*, the revaluation of all values required to create the new, as yet unknown ones. In this so-called post-modern period of a humanity caught in the vortex of its unification, Sri Aurobindo's vision provides us with the interpretation of the apparent chaos.

Mentally conditioned by the physical sciences, few people still believe in miracles, but I know of two which are historically proven. The first is Joan of Arc, the young French village girl who, at the head of rowdy medieval armies, defeated the English, put her king on his throne, and told her judges frankly: "*Je suis venue de par Dieu*" – "I have come from God." The other miracle is Auroville, the utopia of all utopias, which after forty years in quasi impossible circumstances and despite all ordeals, is still there – and growing.

\* \* \*

*(This text was read on 17 February 2008, at the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Human Unity, on the occasion of the symposium held to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Auroville and published in Mother India in June 2008.)*

## 2

### *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Humanity*

“The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman.”<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo wrote these words almost a century ago in what is generally considered his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*. Today his name is not unknown, but the contents and significance of his vision and spiritual work undoubtedly are. His philosophic vision was and remains revolutionary.

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 6.

All past and present spiritual and religious efforts are directed towards a Hereafter – Heaven, Nirvana, *brahma-loka*, etc. – but Sri Aurobindo stuck to the fundamental meaning of the *Upanishads*: if all is That, then matter, the earth and our physical body also are That. “Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.”<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s vision is also evolutionary. If Brahman (the Absolute) is All, and if there is nothing but Brahman, then everything that is, wherever or whenever, must be Brahman. This means that all the gradations of being are the Divine himself – although Brahman also exists beyond his emanations as the silent Brahman, ‘self-absorbed’. In the gradations of the manifestation, which are as many levels of worlds encompassing the Divine Being, Brahman incorporates Itself in various degrees of substance, from the highest planes of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss down to the lowest of Matter and the Inconscient. Evolution can only happen if there is something to evolve from. If evolution as we know it started with matter, then all that developed out of it must already have been involved in it. “Matter also is Brahman.”<sup>3</sup> “Present in every atom of Matter all this is necessarily present in everything which is formed by the aggregation of those atoms, and they are present in the atom because they are present in the Force which builds up and constitutes the atom.”<sup>4</sup>

The human being stands somewhere halfway on the evolutionary ladder, between the material, vegetable and animal kingdom, and the reaches above the human mind. “This Man is the Manu, the thinker, the *manomaya purusha*,

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2 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 38.

3 *Id.*, p. 8.

4 *Id.*, p. 196.

mental person or soul in mind of the ancient sages. No mere superior animal is he, but a conceptive soul basing itself on the animal body in Matter.”<sup>5</sup> Far from seeking a means to escape the stringent conditions of the earth and the earthly body, Sri Aurobindo, together with his co-seeker known as The Mother, tackled the human condition head-on. This meant a revaluation of human life and its evolutionary environment. “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness ... when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing’, says the *Upanishad* whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe.”<sup>6</sup>

One problem with which philosophy and psychology have been wrestling since their beginning, and of which one finds traces on every page of the writings on these subjects, is the image of the human being. The testimony of a ‘divination’ of something better, higher, deeper, more beautiful, truer, crops up everywhere. Yet the opinions about the means of the realization of those supremely desirable things differ with each and every authority. For these means are inherent in the human being itself. And how shall it find its accomplishment if it has no clear idea of how it fits together and how it functions, physically, psychologically and spiritually? For instance, does the human have a triple soul, as we read in Plato, or is his nature a duality of a physical body and the ‘epiphenomenon’ of a rational soul, as we find in Descartes? How can the human being know itself, master itself and work out its potentialities if it has no clear idea of its own constitution?

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5 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 51.

6 *Id.*, p. 13-14.

A second fundamental problem is the gap supposedly existing between the human being, child of the Earth, and God. It is dogmatically taught that God sits too high to be met by a lowly, earthly creature, and many mystics who experienced otherwise have paid dearly for their unorthodoxy. But the evolutionary ladder or 'chain of being' is a reality according to which we live, whether we look down or up from our rung on that ladder. Sri Aurobindo was the first to describe accurately the levels above our rational mind, basing himself on hoary scripture and on his own thoroughly tested experience. It is from those levels that descend our inspirations and aspirations (from where else?), and so did the riches of the 'golden ages' which ornate, on rather rare occasions, the history of mankind. And above that he discovered, glorious intermediary between us and the Divine, the Sun of the Supermind.

The Supermind is not an inflated mind, as readers of Friedrich Nietzsche might suppose. It is a supra-mind, the manifesting power of the Divine, the Real-Idea, the reality behind and in all, because its stuff is the Godhead itself. "We have to regard this all-containing, all-originating, all-consummating Supermind as the matter of the Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God."<sup>7</sup> The Supermind is the executive power of the divine manifestation as a whole and a unity; it is the essential reality of the galaxy and the grain of sand, neither of which could exist without it. Thus we are back at our first quotation, announcing the evolution of the superman, the incarnation of the Supermind on earth. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the superman as a race is the future of humanity, and his realisation the rationale of the world and its creation.

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 141.

Yes, we are still far from the apparition of such a god-like being. Therefore Sri Aurobindo's vision is one of the very few that does not predict or promise an immediate completion. But the signs that the Earth is 'in travail', as he writes, have become unmistakable. In 1947 he formulated what he called his 'five dreams', key-notes which he had expounded in his writings during the First World War, at a time when their fulfilment looked improbable, not to say impossible. They were: the freedom of India, which has an important role to play in humanity's future; the awakening of Asia; the formation of supranational conglomerates, like the European Union and ASEAN, which would lead to the unification of humankind; world-unity; and the spreading of the Indian spirituality and its techniques of self-realization, necessary for the change in the human being without which a better future is not feasible.

None of these five dreams is fully realized, but all five have arrived at a substantial degree of elaboration, and this in an amazingly short time when compared to processes of a similar importance in the human past. No doubt, the world is growing one, and behind this decisive evolution there may well be what Sri Aurobindo foresaw in his writings a century ago, for instance in his essay *The Ideal of Human Unity*. The post-modern professional philosophers have come to doubt the workings of the mind and the visions or fantasies it has produced. But for the ancient Greeks philosophy was much more than a way of thinking, it was a way of being, and so it has always been for the true sages in East and West. Ultimately, what is of importance is not what humans think, but what they inwardly become. And the true evolution, the evolution of matter *and* spirit, will never cease pushing humanity towards its goal. This may well be the equation behind the universe: that in the end the happiness, or joy, or ecstasy, or bliss, should at least be equivalent to the suffering required to arrive there. The



secret soul in the humans will give them no repose, says Sri Aurobindo, for it is the Godhead working out Its cycles.

*All shall be done for which our pain was borne.  
Even as of old man came behind the beast  
This high divine successor surely shall come  
Behind man's inefficient mortal pace ...  
Inheritor of the toil of human time  
He shall take on him the burden of the gods;  
All heavenly light shall visit the earth's thoughts,  
The might of heaven shall fortify earthly hearts;  
Earth's deeds shall touch the superhuman's heights,  
Earth's seeing widen into the infinite.<sup>8</sup>*

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8 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 344.

# 3

## *The Metamorphoses of an Avatar*

As Sri Aurobindo remarked later in his life, he realized the Supramental or Truth-consciousness<sup>1</sup> in his mind around 1919, and in his vital in 1921: this was the reason he gave for stopping writing the periodical, the *Arya*. In 1926, the Overmind<sup>2</sup> or Krishna consciousness descended into his body, something which The Mother described as very

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1 By a Truth Consciousness is meant a knowledge consciousness which is immediately, inherently and directly aware of Truth in manifestation and has not to seek or it like Mind. (Sri Aurobindo)

2 The overmind is the highest of the planes below the supramental. (Sri Aurobindo)

important for the Creation, and immediately afterwards Sri Aurobindo retired into his room for reasons connected with his yoga. The task ahead was the supramental transformation of the physical, the divinization of matter and of the body, the mutation of animal man into the supramental being. In this, he was joined by The Mother who, after 1920, fully shared his work and realizations.

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

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

Thus, for practical reasons unknown to us but connected with the Work, one of them had to go and work 'behind the veil', probably to hasten the result of the Work, certainly because Death and everything related to it could only be transformed by confronting it with the full avatic consciousness [an avatar is, according to Sri Aurobindo's definition, "The Divine manifest in human appearance" – eds]. This is

what Sri Aurobindo has done. Far from being a failure, this was a conscious, super-conscious yogic Act: as The Mother said shortly after his passing away, "He was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality."

### **The work continues**

In fact, the work had never been interrupted. For, as the Mother recalled later, after the doctors had declared that Sri Aurobindo had left his body, she came several times and stood at his feet, and all the supramental force he had accumulated in his body poured into hers, so concretely that she felt it enter through the pores. "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realized in me." The Supermind had descended long ago, into the mind and even into the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly, through those intermediaries. The question was about the action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the Supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.

Sri Aurobindo had written about the Mind of Light in 1950 in his last prose writings, later published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. In those same articles he had also written for the first time about the need for the appearance of intermediary beings between man and the superman. The Mother would call these intermediary beings *surhommes* (often incorrectly translated as 'supermen') and define them as human beings conceived in the normal biological human way but having acquired a supramental consciousness. The supramental species, on the other hand, would originate in a yet unknown, occult way. In October

1958 she talked again about the *surhomme* and said: "There will certainly be a considerable quantity of partial realizations ... There will be a considerable number of essays, more or less fruitful or more or less unfruitful, before arriving at something that will resemble the superman ..."

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

Then came a crucial event in the evolution of consciousness on earth. Sri Aurobindo's conscious entrance into Death and the unrelenting effort of the Mother in the years thereafter meant that the Manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness in the earth atmosphere could take place only six years later. It was the 29th February 1956: "This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was

there present amongst you", wrote the Mother later. "It had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that 'the time has come', and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow."

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

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

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

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

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

## The cornerstones of the Mother's yoga

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

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



Another important factor in the understanding of that terrible and glorious transformational yoga of the Mother is the 'positional duality' in which she was existing. "There is the Mother who is carrying on the *sadhana* and the Divine Mother, both being one but in different poises", Sri Aurobindo had written in a letter many years before. The Mother as a body in transformation did not know what was awaiting her the next moment or at the end of her adventure, but her soul, her higher consciousness (supramentalized and therefore divine) and her inner being as the Great Mother knew everything.

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

### **A new body**

And so, thanks to the published conversations in the *Agenda*, we get some idea of the astonishing ordeals that the Mother was subject to in her last years. Often they seemed to be cyclic, a new transformatory phase announcing itself, the crisis developing its full force. And then the Mother recovering from it, recuperating, assimilating what had been gained

– and time and again wondering about the miraculous way in which the strength of the transforming forces was ‘closed by the Lord’. Now it was this body function or organ on which the transformative process was focused, now it was another. And the function or organ that had been allowed some rest for some time was suddenly taken up again for the transformative work.

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

From then on she moved, in the beginning rather abruptly, between these two worlds. Parts of her physical being belonged to both – a strange way of existing. Then in 1962 she underwent one of the great crises of her *sadhana*. Outwardly, she seemed on the verge of death, so much that her entourage started preparing for the fateful event. “I am no more in my body, I have left it to the Lord to take care of, to decide if it is to have the Supramental or not ... If the purpose for which this body is alive is to be fulfilled, that is to say the first steps taken towards the Supramental transformation, then it will continue today ... If the body is incapable of bearing the fight, if it has to be dissolved, then humanity will pass through a critical time ... ” But a couple of days later came the proclamation of the victory bulletin.

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

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

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

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

In the Mother there was now a lot of transformed, supramentalized, divinized matter. "The cells are conscious", she said simply, not all the cells but a sufficient number to begin forming what she termed "an independent conscious entity ... capable of being conscious of Matter as well as conscious of the Supramental." And so we begin to hear about signs of a new body in her body. As early as 1961, the Mother had talked about a greater being in her body. "It was as if it could hardly fit into it: it exceeded its limits. And it had such a compact power that it was almost annoying." "I am not very sure that I do not already physically exist in a true body", she said in August 1963. And in April 1969: "During the night, the body is tall and active, it does things. It is the subtle body that is doing things. That is active, that has an existence that is fully conscious. And it is different from this [the Mother touches the skin of her hands]." And then in March 1972: "For the first time, early in the morning, I have seen myself, my body. I do not know whether it is the supramental body or – how to say it – a transitional body." Later she will confirm that it was a supramental body. "But I had a completely new body, in the sense that it was asexual, it was neither woman nor man ... Really a harmonious form. So, this is the first time ... I was like that, I had become like that."

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

The Mother put off her gross material body on 17 November 1973. Can one call this 'death'? She existed, and therefore exists, in a subtle-physical body more 'concrete'

than gross matter. What she has put off, and what rests there in that simple tomb in the courtyard of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is what she called 'the residue', the untransformable part of her human body, one could metaphorically say "the outer shell". For her body too had been born from a human father and mother, and remained therefore in its gross material elements indelibly marked as animal-human.

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

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

And Auroville? Auroville, the Mother said, will be 'the cradle of the superman'. Here, as elsewhere in the world, the preparation of matter for the supramental manifestation will take place through what the Mother described as 'apprentice-supermen', all those "... who make an effort to surpass materially ordinary nature, all those who try to

realize materially the profound experience that has put them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning their attention to the Hereafter or Above, try to realize physically, externally, the change of consciousness which they have realized inside themselves."

*As published  
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February 1997.*



# 4

## *Overman: the Transitional Being*

Sri Aurobindo's concept that the mental being is a transitional species and will, in time, be surpassed by a being of a higher consciousness, is well-known. Those who have studied Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's writings know that they considered it their work to bring that higher consciousness down on earth, and thus to found on earth the Life Divine. This consciousness was termed by Sri Aurobindo 'the Supramental Consciousness', or 'the Supermind', and he named the future being the 'Superman'. This was a term he first used in the *Arya*, the philosophical magazine



in which he published his major works in monthly instalments from 1914 onwards.

In December 1948, Sri Aurobindo dictated, at the explicit request of the Mother, a series of eight articles for the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, later published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. The series was probably left unfinished when Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5th December 1950. The articles are often seen as a sequel to Sri Aurobindo's philosophical *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*.

These articles are of great importance. Already in *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo had indicated that the transformation of man to superman could take place through a transitional being, or through several kinds of transitional beings. In these later articles Sri Aurobindo indicates how this transitional being, can come into existence. This new humanity would be "a race of mental beings on the earth and in the earthly body, but delivered from its present conditions in the reign of the cosmic Ignorance so far as to be possessed of a perfected mind, a mind of light ..." <sup>1</sup>

### **The mind of light**

The 'mind of light' is a new term coined by Sri Aurobindo in these series of articles. Sri Aurobindo defined it as a subordinate action of Supermind, the lowest level of Supermind. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been supramentalized many years ago in the mental and vital parts of their earthly personality. From then onwards their whole effort consisted in bringing a supramental degree of consciousness down in matter by bringing the supramental consciousness into the cells of their bodies, as through them there is a direct influence upon matter.

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 578.

Sri Aurobindo had, at the time of writing these articles, realized this mind of light in the cells of his body. Mother recalled in 1958 that, as soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body in December 1950, this mind of light was transferred from Sri Aurobindo's body cells directly into hers, and that he told her, "You will continue, you will go right to the end of the work." And Mother explained, "And actually, to do Sri Aurobindo's work is to realize the Supramental on earth. So I began that work and, as a matter of fact, this was the only thing I asked of my body. I told it, 'Now you shall set right everything which is out of order and gradually realize this intermediate supermanhood between man and the supramental being' or, in other words, what I call the overman. And this is what I have been doing for the last eight years, and even much more during the past two years, since 1956. Now it is the work of each day, each minute. That's where I am. I have renounced the uncontested authority of a god, I have renounced the unshakeable calm of the sage ... in order to become the overman. I have concentrated everything upon that."<sup>2</sup>

### Mistranslation

In this respect it should be noted that Mother used the words '*surhumanité*' and '*surhomme*'. These words have, in the thirteen volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, as well as in the six volumes of the *Questions and Answers* [the talks Mother gave at the Playground of the Ashram from 21st December, 1950 till 26th November, 1958] consistently been mistranslated as 'supermanhood' and 'superman'. This is a calamitous mistake because 'supermanhood' and 'superman' refer to the supramental being.

A careful reader of the *Questions and Answers* will notice how often Mother spoke about the experiences of her body.

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2 *Mother's Agenda I*, May 10, 1958.

As early as 4th January, 1951, a month after Sri Aurobindo's passing, she mentioned that the work of physical transformation was the most difficult of all works. A few months later she said that what had been until then a 'psychological' yoga had now become a material yoga, a yoga of the cells of the body. Now the consciousness in the cells themselves began to aspire and surrender to the Divine. On 24th February, 1954, she mentions the enormous work which has to be done if one hopes to transform one's body, for each cell has to be worked upon. On 21st April, 1954 she states that the transformation of the body has begun. In the *Bulletin of Physical Education* of that month Mother published an article called "Some Experiences of the Body Consciousness and New Experiences of the Body Consciousness".

The descent of the Supermind into the earth-consciousness on 29th February, 1956, must certainly have hastened the work in her body cells. On 10th July, 1957, in another talk at the Ashram Playground, Mother explained how a new world had been born. "What has happened, what is really new, is that a new world is born, born, born. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world that is born. And we are now right in the middle of the period of transition in which the two are intermingling — in which the old world still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but the new one is slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed — unnoticed in so far that outwardly it does not disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing — until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly."<sup>3</sup>

Shortly afterwards, on 25th September 1957, she expressed a certainty. "It is quite obvious that intermediate beings

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3 The Mother: *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, p. 150.

are necessary, that it is these intermediate beings who must find the means of creating beings of the supermind, and, undoubtedly, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this: 'From the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature'<sup>4</sup>, he was convinced that this is what we must do [to become the new race]. I think — I know — that it is now certain that we shall realize what Sri Aurobindo expects of us", she said to the children assembled at the Playground, and added, "Let each one do his best and it may be that not many years will have to go by before the first visible results become apparent to all. It is for you to know whether this interests you more than anything else in the world ... There comes a moment when the body itself finds that there is nothing in the world so much worth living for as this, the transformation; that there is nothing which can have as great an interest as this passionate interest for the transformation. It is as though all the cells of the body were thirsting for that Light that wants to manifest; they cry out for it; they find an intense joy in it and are sure of the Victory. This is the aspiration that I am trying to share with you, and you will understand that everything else in life is dull, insipid, futile, worthless in comparison with that: the transformation in the Light."<sup>5</sup>

### Defining the Overman

On 16th April, 1958, the Mother announced as an existing fact what Sri Aurobindo had foreseen in *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. She affirms that "there is already a beginning of realization. We have the proof that in certain conditions the ordinary state of humanity can be exceeded and a new state of consciousness worked out which enables

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4 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p 585.

5 The Mother: *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, pp. 190-191.

at least a conscious relation between mental and supramental man. It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of overman who will still have the qualities and in part the nature of man, which means that he will still belong in his most external form to the human being [i.e. species] of animal origin, but that he will transform his consciousness sufficiently to belong, in his realization and activity, to a new race, a race of overmen. This species may be considered a transitional species, for it is to be foreseen that it will discover the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method, and it is these beings — who will have a truly spiritual birth — who will constitute the elements of the new race, the supramental race. So we could call overmen those who, because of their origin, still belong to the old method of generation but who, because of their accomplishment, are in conscious and active contact with the new world of supramental realization.”<sup>6</sup>

We may assume that the Mother fully realized the overman consciousness by about 1958. In 1959 she withdrew into her room, and from the conversations recorded in *Mother's Agenda* we may deduce that from that time onwards she worked to create the archetype of the supramental being. On 1st January, 1969, the Mother announced that a new consciousness had manifested — “It spread out and went in search of people who could receive it” — which she defined a few days later as the consciousness of the overman.<sup>7</sup> What the Mother had realized in her own body in 1958 now, on 1st January 1969, became an integral part of humanity's evolution.

*Summary of the talk at Savitri Bhavan,  
as published in AV Today # 145 February 2001.*

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6 The Mother: *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, p. 313 ff.

7 The Mother: *Notes On the Way*, p. 153.

# 5

## *True Philosophy*

*Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?*

John Keats

‘Philosophy’ does not mean ‘love of knowledge’ but ‘love of wisdom’: *sophia*.

‘Wisdom’ is assimilated knowledge used to make life meaningful.

### **True philosophy and the Valley of the False Glimmer**

In *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* Peter Heehs writes:

His philosophy, Sri Aurobindo explained, ‘was formed first’ by the study of these works [*i.e.* the *Gita*,

*Upanishads* and the *Rig Veda*], which were also “the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to realize 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 I later founded my philosophy.” But his experience was not confined to confirming the insights of ancient sages. He once wrote in a personal note that as he sat in meditation, ideas from the intuitive levels linking mind and supermind “came down in a mighty flood which swelled into a sea of direct Knowledge always translating itself into experience ... All sorts of ideas came in which might have belonged to conflicting philosophies but they were here reconciled in a large synthetic whole.” ...

But if a philosophical system is to merit acceptance as philosophy, it has to be defended by logical arguments; otherwise it joins other infallible revelations that depend on faith for acceptance and persuasion or coercion for propagation. In other words, it becomes a religion. Aurobindo did not want his teaching to be regarded as a religion and therefore used logic to present and defend it – but not, he stressed, to arrive at it. In reaching his conclusions, he owed nothing, he said, “to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others.”

How does Aurobindo rank as a philosopher? Most members of the philosophical profession – those who have read him at all – would be loath to admit him in their club. His methods simply do not fit in with the discipline as it is currently practiced. Even Stephen H. Philips, the author of a sympathetic monograph on Aurobindo’s thought, had to admit that Aurobindo wrote *The Life Divine* not as a philosopher, but as a

‘spiritual preceptor’, in a long tradition of intellectual, but hardly academic ‘gurus’. “Yet this preceptorial philosopher created a synthesis of spiritual thought that bears comparison with the best of similar systems: those of Plotinus, Abhinavagupta, and Alfred North Whitehead. Even if his critics deny him the label of philosopher – a label he never claimed for himself – his philosophical writings will continue to be studied by lay and academic readers.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage, which reduces Sri Aurobindo to a ‘preceptorial philosopher’, occupies an important place in Heehs’ book, for it is part of his comment on *The Life Divine* and Sri Aurobindo’s other writings in the *Arya*. In this text two meanings of the word ‘philosophy’ are intertwined.

- The first is the original meaning given to the word ‘philosophy’ by the ancient Greeks: ‘love of wisdom’, a love that was a search for the wisdom that would result in ‘*eudaemonia*’, well-being or happiness. This happiness may be interpreted as the self-fulfilment which would replace the burden of being born as a human being and put an end to it. Sri Aurobindo’s all-embracing ‘love of wisdom’ was the highest and most intense possible, discovering that the only real and permanent ‘*eudaemonia*’ consisted in the transformation of the human into a supramental species, in the transition from what he called ‘the lower hemisphere’ of the manifestation into its ‘higher hemisphere’. When Sri Aurobindo writes about his ‘philosophy’ or his ‘philosophical’ writings, the words are meant in this sense.

- The second meaning used by Heehs is the one that says “if a philosophical system is to merit acceptance as philosophy, it has to be defended by logical arguments.” To put it plainly, a philosophy consisting only of logical arguments

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1 Peter Heehs: *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 276-277.



does not exist and never has existed. In every philosophy the logical arguments are not more than bridges between islands of irrational *a priori* affirmations. A system trying to base itself exclusively on logic was Logical Positivism, the philosophy of the Vienna Circle in the first decades of the 20th century. Its premises were metaphysical materialism – the tenet that all is Matter and there is nothing but Matter – and reality of the perception. These are in fact the premises of mathematics and scientific materialism. In modern science they have been immensely successful because it limits itself to matter. Mathematics works in imaginary spaces of the mind which, to the wonderment of the mathematicians themselves, are (sometimes) applicable to the material universe. As a philosophical system, however, Logical Positivism has been a failure. The reason is that Reality is not only Matter but consists of the complete Chain of Being (as shown by Sri Aurobindo in the first part of *The Life Divine*).

The flaws of any philosophy are inherent in its premises, in the facts it accepts as given and therefore true, because those facts are always more complex than they are asserted to be. As soon as he tries to work with entities that are not pure material facts, the philosopher loses contact with reality and starts juggling, logically or dialectically, with arguments to support the rickety construction of his theory. Philosophy has proved to be unable to solve or even partially illuminate any fundamental problem – although it is very interesting as a mirror of the way individuals and societies approached those problems. For all modern philosophical systems are basically the mentalised expression of the mood of a certain historical period. So was the philosophy of Descartes, as were the writings of Nietzsche and Sartre.

It is puzzling to find the basic requirement of logical argumentation, and consequently of a materialistic and mental attitude, in a biography of the greatest spiritual

discoverer, explainer of things and system builder there has ever been. One may suppose that Sri Aurobindo would not have minded being excluded from 'the club' of the members of the philosophical profession; he was surely aware of the little use to humanity 'the discipline as it is currently practiced' has had throughout. True, Heehs mentions that Sri Aurobindo never wanted his vision to be turned into a religion. Yet the way he has formulated his words actually says that Sri Aurobindo's 'precepts' are just one more metaphysical system, built on rationally not provable, in other words rationally futile, arguments, and he puts Sri Aurobindo on a par with the religions. This he confirms by quoting his friend Stephen Philips, an American professor of philosophy and Asian studies, who 'sympathetically' sees Sri Aurobindo as a 'spiritual preceptor', a 'guru', the likes of whom there have been many in the course of the Hindu tradition.

### How to speak or write about Sri Aurobindo?

It is a poor appreciation and a caricature of Sri Aurobindo to see him as a 'preceptorial philosopher' – he who turned the whole spiritual effort of humanity around from an attempt to escape from the world to an attempt at transforming the world, and thus securing its divine Destiny. "This knowledge first he had from time-born men", writes Sri Aurobindo about his world-changing spiritual explorations in *Savitri*.<sup>2</sup> It was a knowledge that was certainly not to be found in the mental gymnastics of the 'academic' philosophers, performed in the shaky cages of their systems. "It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge – the Knowledge by which we become what we know."<sup>3</sup>

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2 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 74.

3 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 355.

As Sri Aurobindo also wrote: “There have been hundreds of these [academic] systems and formulas and there can be hundreds more, but none can be definitive. Each may have its value for the mind, and different systems with their contrary conclusions can have an equal appeal to intelligences of equal power and competence. All this labour of speculation has its utility in training the human mind and helping to keep before it the idea of Something beyond and Ultimate towards which it must turn. But the intellectual Reason can only point vaguely or feel gropingly towards it or try to indicate partial and even conflicting aspects of its manifestation here; it cannot enter into and know it. ... It is only if there is a greater consciousness beyond Mind and that consciousness is accessible to us that we can know and enter into the ultimate Reality.”<sup>4</sup> And he compares the academic mental constructions to “shimmering mists and fogs which modern intellectualism takes for Light and Truth”; for “the modern mind has so long and persistently wandered – and we with it – in the Valley of the False Glimmer.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The mental glass houses of the mind**

Sri Aurobindo is obviously not alone with his critical evaluation of academic philosophy. Actually a substantial part of this presumed ‘true’ philosophy consists of self-examination and self-criticism. This has finally led to its own negation of the reliability of any mental knowledge, and the declaration of the end of all certainties, in what became known as ‘postmodernism’. Long before this (provisional) finale Arthur Lovejoy, the great ‘historian of ideas’, had already written: “The total body of doctrine of any philosopher or school is almost always a complex and heterogeneous aggregate – and often in ways which the philosopher

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4 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 351.

5 *Id.*, p. 330.

himself does not suspect." And: "The history of philosophy and of all phases of man's reflection is, in great part, a history of confusion of ideas." <sup>6</sup> From Ernest Gellner, himself a philosopher and anthropologist, is this conclusion: "If all American philosophers were gathered into one place and that place disappeared suddenly from the surface of the Earth, American society would remain totally unaffected. No one would notice any difference, and there would be no gap, no vacuum in the intellectual exchange and interchange that would require plugging." <sup>7</sup> Some great philosophical ideas have had, like Platonic 'forms', a profound influence on the way people perceived the world and evaluated their own lives, but in the present circumstances Gellner's dictum may be generalized without qualifications.

### **Sri Aurobindo no philosopher?**

In the following excerpts Sri Aurobindo speaks about his philosophy:

My philosophy was formed first by the study of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*; the *Veda* came later. They were the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to realize 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. I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others. The other source of my philosophy was the knowledge that flowed from above when I sat in meditation, especially from the plane of the Higher Mind when I reach that level; they [the

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6 Arthur Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 3, 22.

7 In Derek Gjertsen: *Science and Philosophy*, p. 18.

ideas from the Higher Mind] came down in a mighty flood which swelled into a sea of direct knowledge always translating itself into experience, or they were institutions starting from experience and leading to other institutions and a corresponding experience. This source was exceedingly catholic and many-sided and all sorts of ideas came in which might have belonged to conflicting philosophies but they were here reconciled in a large synthetic whole.<sup>8</sup>

We have been obliged in our first year [of the *Arya*] ... to devote the Review almost entirely to high philosophy and severe and difficult thinking.<sup>9</sup>

Our idea was the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy which might be a contribution to the thought of the new age that is coming upon us. We start from the idea that humanity is moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race, – in all countries where men think, there is now in various forms that idea and that hope, – and our aim has been to search for the spiritual, religious and other truth which can enlighten and guide the race in this movement and endeavour. The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt could be based, were already present to us, otherwise we should have had no right to make the endeavour at all ...<sup>10</sup>

This meant a continuous thinking, a high and subtle and difficult thinking on several lines, and this strain, which we had to impose on ourselves, we were obliged to impose also on our readers.<sup>11</sup> To grow into the fullness of the divine

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8 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 113.

9 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 101.

10 *Id.*, p. 105.

11 *Id.*, p. 106.

is the true law of human life and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the *Arya*.”<sup>12</sup>

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher – although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. ... I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!<sup>13</sup>

There is very little argument in my philosophy – the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonizing of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

### The Socratic bifurcation

“When, somewhere between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualize knowledge”, wrote Sri Aurobindo, “this Truth [of ‘an Other beyond Thought’] survived in the East; in the West where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade.”<sup>15</sup> In the period Sri Aurobindo indicates there were so many important permutations in the mental make-up of the cultured peoples in East and West that it came to be called ‘the

12 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 107.

13 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 70.

14 Sri Aurobindo: *Id.*, p. 66.

15 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 353.

Axis-Time' by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers. It was the time of the Hebrew prophets, Zoroaster, Mahavir and the Buddha, Lao Tse, Confucius, Heraclitus and the other pre-Socratics, the Greek Sophists. Everywhere the age-old myths and mysteries, as well as all things 'irrational', were questioned by the intellect. This was a profound revolution with lasting consequences; it caused at first a tremendous insecurity and friction of the minds, and resulted in bringing humanity a step forward on its pilgrimage.<sup>16</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, the classic Cambridge scholar and enquirer into the *Vedas*, was like none other aware of the cultural and religious connections between the peoples of the Axis-Time. Others had possessed the erudition to discover ancient links between East and West, for the 'comparative' religious and secular sciences were founded in the decades before Sri Aurobindo wrote on the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, but only Sri Aurobindo was also knowledgeable about the *spiritual* elements at the roots of the eastern and western cultures. He was in fact the only scholar to connect the great classical Indic Scriptures with non-Indic sacred knowledge and 'mysteries' elsewhere – a fact that has hardly ever been noticed.

"The Vedic Rishis were mystics of the ancient type", he wrote, "who everywhere, in India, Greece, Egypt and elsewhere, held the secret truths and methods of which they were in possession as very sacred and secret things, not to be disclosed to the unfit who would misunderstand, misapply, misuse and degrade the knowledge."<sup>17</sup> ... The ideas of the *Upanishads* can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profounder part of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable

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16 See e.g. Karen Armstrong: *The Great Transformation*.

17 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*, p. 103.

consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West. ... To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from Pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the Mystics – Vedic and Vedantic seers, Orphic secret teachers, Egyptian priests. ... The ignoring of the Mystics, our pristine fathers, *purve pitarah*, is the great defect of the modern account of our thought evolution.”<sup>18</sup>

We find the same re-evaluation of the period preceding the recognized cultures and religions in Sri Aurobindo’s seminal introduction to *The Secret of the Veda*:

In ancient Europe the schools of intellectual philosophy were preceded by the secret doctrines of the mystics; Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries prepared the rich soil of mentality out of which sprang Pythagoras and Plato. A similar starting-point is at least probable for the later march of thought in India. Much indeed of the forms and symbols of thought which we find in the *Upanishads*, much of the substance of the *Brahmanas* supposes a period in India in which thought took the form or the veil of secret teachings such as those of the Greek mysteries.<sup>19</sup>

But then, inevitably, came the Axis Time, when the human intellect everywhere began to put the given and sometimes ossified knowledge to the test. In Greece, the cradle of Western culture, this happened with the still mystic Heraclitus, so highly appreciated by Sri Aurobindo that he wrote a revealing series of articles about him; and Heraclitus was followed by a varied group of scholars, the Sophists, whose

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18 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 219-220.

19 Sri Aurobindo: *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 6.



creation was 'that fluid clarity of the reasoning mind'. Greek philosophy lost its ancient affiliation to the mystics, wrote Sri Aurobindo, and "followed the turn given by Heraclitus, developed the cult of the reason and left the remnants of the old occult religion to become a solemn superstition and a conventional pomp. ... Greece with its rational bent and its insufficient religious sense was unable to save its religion; it tended towards that sharp division between philosophy and science on one side and religion on the other which has been so peculiar a characteristic of the European mind."

This revolution in the thought of the West, this Enlightenment in ancient Greece, culminated in the figure of Socrates, *vibhuti* of the Mind. In this appellation there is not the slightest exaggeration. Socrates was an extraordinary human being, aware of his inner daemon and of his mission among the Athenians, master of himself and detached of all else, a living example of the Delphian motto 'know thyself' put into praxis, and even physically stronger than most.

What to his fellow-citizens was tradition and therefore common sense, Socrates submitted to his '*maieutikè technè*', his art to deliver the truth hidden in it. His keen questioning showed that all minds consisted mainly of accepted notions and prejudices – 'mental constructions' – which were considered true and unchangeable. To really know was to be aware, like Socrates, that one knew nothing, the reason why the Delphic oracle declared him the wisest man in Greece. This impulse for rational examination and understanding did not stop at things held to be sacred, at the Gods and their assumed life-stories, the myths. Like everywhere and in all periods of human history, in politics as in history, a person who publicly dared to doubt the generally accepted view, especially the religious one – for the Gods might withdraw their protection – was dangerous. Socrates was not the only one attacked and persecuted in Athens,

for even Pericles had not remained immune, but he was the only one to pay, willingly, with his life.

It is another sign of the important role of this *vibhuti* that the philosophic systems in the following centuries all referred back to him. The cynics based their often shocking negative public and intellectual attitude on Socrates' detached way of life, remembered as a kind of sainthood. The Epicureans did the same, though in a much more philosophical and humane way. Many aspects of their way of life resembled those of the *sadhus* and the practice of certain yogas, with becoming a true Sage, a kind of morally and mentally realized being, as the ultimate aim. And it was also the Socratic strength of mind and character which the Stoics tried to turn in a superhuman accomplishment, deemed by most of them their ideal, even though unattainable. It is however painful (for us) to see how denuded the Western world had become, stripped of its supernatural dimensions, with a watered-down mental '*eudaemonia*' as its ideal, an abstract God as the one presence, and a cyclic eternal return as the understanding of the universe and the aim of life.

From that time onwards – the moment of the Socratic bifurcation between the intellect and the religious and spiritual attitude – the mind would become dominant in the West, and what was not rationally explicable would, as Sri Aurobindo put it, fade away. In his unfinished epic *Ilion* Sri Aurobindo has Zeus strikingly predict this. The father of the Gods, he who possesses 'the sight that sees all things from the Real', predicts the fall of Troy for 'the good of the ages':

*Troy shall fall at last and the ancient ages shall perish ...  
Twilight thickens over man and he moves to his winter of darkness.  
Let not one nation resist by its glory the good of the ages ...  
Troy that displaced by her force and her arms the luminous ancients,  
Sinks in her turn by the ruder strength of the half-savage Achaians.  
They to the Hellene shall yield and the Hellene fall by the Roman.*

*Rome too shall not endure, but by strengths ill-shaped shall be broken,  
Nations formed in the ice and mist, confused and crude-hearted.  
So shall the darker and ruder always prevail o'er the brilliant  
Till in its turn to a ruder and darker it falls and is shattered ...  
So shall it last till the fallen ages return to their greatness.*<sup>20</sup>

Then Zeus addresses his daughter Athena, born from his brain and Goddess of the Mind:

*Girl, thou shalt rule with the Greek and the Saxon, the Frank and the Roman.  
Worker and fighter and builder and thinker, light of the reason,  
Men shall leave all temples to crowd in thy courts, O Athene.  
Go then and do my will, prepare man's tribes for their fullness.*<sup>21</sup>

"Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end", wrote Sri Aurobindo; "in philosophy, thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid ... Western thought has ceased to be dynamic; it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic among the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends ... It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe." And he concludes: "It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge – the Knowledge by which we become what we know."<sup>22</sup>

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20 Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*, p. 447-448.

21 *Id.*, p. 457.

22 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 355.

## Meanwhile in India

In India too the rational thought, the mind, had its requirements in accordance with the times and must be satisfied. The activation of the reflective mind was at that time the necessary step for humanity to progress, to raise its instrumental consciousness in order to enable its future developments. But what in the West became a bifurcation, a split between religion and the intellect, did not so happen in India. The search for Truth, as Sri Aurobindo put it, was not seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his intimate privacy but otherwise void of practical applications on life. It was not a mystic sublimation which could be ignored in the dealings of man with the world of Nature. It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to the degree of their capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life.

This Truth was to be lived and even to be made the governing idea of thought and life and action. This recognition and pursuit of something or someone Supreme behind all forms is the one universal credo of Indian religion, and if it has taken a hundred shapes, it was precisely because it was so much alive. ... Indian religion never considered intellectual or theological conceptions about the supreme Truth to be the one thing of central importance. To pursue that Truth under whatever conception or whatever form, to attain to it by inner experience, to live in it in consciousness, this it held to be the sole thing needful.<sup>23</sup>

The mind was promoted, in India as well as in Greece, to its full potential, but in India its authority was not

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23 Sri Aurobindo: *The Renaissance of India*, p. 183.

extended beyond the limits of its rightful domain, and still less to the function of an all-powerful, supreme judge. Here it may be apropos to recall how the true function of the human mind, between the vital and the spiritual levels of existence, was defined by Sri Aurobindo: "Mind is not a faculty of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain of it in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities of action. Even when it finds, it does not possess; it only keeps a certain fund of current coin of Truth – not Truth itself – in the bank of Memory to draw upon according to its needs. For Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly. ... The mystery of things is the true truth of things, the intellectual presentation is only truth in presentation, in abstract symbols, as if in a cubist art of thought-speech, in geometric figure."<sup>24</sup>

"To the Indian mind", Sri Aurobindo wrote, "the least important part of religion is its dogma; the religious spirit matters, not the theological credo. On the contrary to the Western mind a fixed intellectual belief is the most important part of a cult; it is its core of meaning, it is the thing that distinguishes it from others. For it is its formulated beliefs that make it either a true or false religion, according as it agrees or does not agree with the credo of its critic. This notion, however foolish or shallow, is a necessary consequence of the Western idea which falsely supposes that intellectual truth is the highest verity and, even, that there is no other.

"The Indian religious thinker knows that all the highest eternal verities are truths of the spirit. The supreme truths are neither the rigid conclusion of logical reasoning nor the affirmation of creedal statement, but fruits of the soul's

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24 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 126, 372.

inner experience. Intellectual truth is only one of the doors to the outer precincts of the temple. And since intellectual truth turned towards the Infinite must be in its very nature many-sided and not narrowly one, the most varying intellectual beliefs can be equally true because they mirror different facets of the Infinite. ... There are no true and false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree. Each is one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal.”<sup>25</sup>

The true pursuit of philosophy is, according to Sri Aurobindo’s formula, “the Knowledge by which we become what we know.” He explained: “In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; and intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid. Secondly, *each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness*, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth-discoverers. And the philosophies that lacked a sufficiently powerful means of spiritual experience died out and became things of the past because they were not dynamic for spiritual discovery and realisation.”<sup>26</sup>

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25 Sri Aurobindo: *The Renaissance in India*, p.181.

26 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 353 (italics added).

## True philosophy

“In the West”, wrote Sri Aurobindo, “it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid – just the reverse of the Indian position. Even those who see that the mental Thought must be overpassed and admit a supramental ‘Other’, do not seem to escape from the feeling that it must be through mental Thought, sublimating and transmuting itself, that this other Truth must be reached and made to take the place of the mental limitation and ignorance. And again Western thought has ceased to be dynamic; it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic among the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends. Later on [the lawyers], it became yet more purely intellectual and academic; it became intellectual speculation only without any practical ways and means for the attainment of the Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation. ... It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe.”<sup>27</sup>

Sri Aurobindo sketches here briefly what, in the West, has been an evolution of many centuries. Platonism and Neo-Platonism remained open to the supernatural, and the great system of Plotinus was mystical at its core. Epicureanism was a discipline of which the serious practitioners equalled the ascetic efforts of saints, but it was materialistic

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27 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 353-354.

and had lost any reach beyond. For the Stoics the cosmos was God, and its admirable discipline consisted in a heroic submission to Destiny which was the will of that impersonal God. Later, all 'heathen' philosophy and its practice would be banned, even on punishment of death, by a despotic Catholicism. Free thought was forbidden, the mind had to be conditioned with the writings in the *Bible*, the teachings of the Church Fathers and the accepted creed of the Church councils. This was 'the closing of the Western mind.' It remains a source of amazement how whole peoples and civilizations can live and think between the glass walls of totally irrational, very complex and minutely detailed fictions.

Academic Western philosophy may be seen as the offspring of the mental subtleties of scholasticism together with the reaction against it by Descartes, who submitted all knowledge to its acceptance and justification by the individual mind. Developed by British scepticism and pragmatism, which became the attitude of the French *philosophes* in the Age of Reason, Western thought would in the end inevitably be reduced to the agnostic tenets of science and the scientific method. Nowadays science, whose theories cannot be overlooked, continually influences academic philosophy, while science hardly deigns to take note of the latest craze in philosophy. Academic, exclusively mental philosophy is in the doldrums; it has become aware of the limitations of the mind and has already more than once announced its own demise.

The history of humanity is part of the grand movement of the terrestrial evolution, and Nature in the complexities of its evolution is the work of the Divine. In the Divine there are no errors: therefore Nature makes no errors, nowhere, never, although to the human mind it is very difficult, if not impossible, to discern and explain its



ways and aims. India, 'the heart of Asia', has the privilege of treasuring the spiritual knowledge and the ways to realize it, but the complications the West has gone through must also have had their significance and be a part of the growth of humanity. It is worthy of our appreciation that the intricacies of Western history were carried by so many great human beings who, driven by the urge in their souls, dedicated their lives to the search for Truth and the creation of Beauty. Some of them were *vibhutis*, even *vibhutis* of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Here the following two remarks from Sri Aurobindo come to mind. "There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics; the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live ... There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers."<sup>28</sup>

The second quotation is Sri Aurobindo's evaluation of materialism which is the platform of atheism, the apparent absence of God. "It is well that we should recognise the enormous, the indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing. For that vast field of evidence and experience which now begins to reopen its gates to us, can only be safely entered when the intellect has been severely trained to a clear austerity ... It became necessary for a time to make a clean sweep at once of the truth and its disguise in order that the road might be clear for a new departure and a surer

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28 Sri Aurobindo: 'Message to America' in *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 551.

advance. The rationalistic tendency of Materialism has done mankind this great service.”<sup>29</sup>

Human beings have a soul. The soul is the essence of their being without which they would not exist.

*Even in the theatre of these small lives  
Behind the act a secret sweetness breathes,  
An urge of miniature divinity.  
A mystic passion from the wells of God  
Flows through the guarded spaces of the soul;  
A force that helps supports the suffering earth,  
An unseen nearness and a hidden joy.*<sup>30</sup>

This is true of any evolutionary being that has reached the level of *homo sapiens*. To be aware of it brings us instantly nearer to all those beings in the past who were our brothers and sisters (and some of them ourselves) in their effort, however different from ours today, on the road forward. Sri Aurobindo has not only opened the pathways towards tomorrow, he has also made the immense human efforts of yesterday real and significant again.

Many people, while thinking that they decide and act freely, remain stuck in the hardened glue of their mental constructions like flies in amber; this is the way their souls have chosen and it must in its own manner be meaningful. Others want to think and breathe freely again and live in the space where one can listen to one's soul. In his essay *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique ?* (what is the classical philosophy about?) where he considers the legacy of the ancient Greek thinkers, Pierre Hadot comes to the conclusion: 'Philosophy is essentially an exercise to prepare for wisdom,' practical and practicable ... "Knowledge is to be

29 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 12-13.

30 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 169.

found in the soul itself and it is there that the individual has to discover it.”

He quotes the following words from the classical Greek author Plutarch: “Most of the people think that philosophy means perorating from the height of a chair and teach courses on complicated texts. What those people completely miss is the philosophy which one sees practiced spontaneously every day in the street ... Socrates did not need college benches for his audiences, he did not speak from a professorial chair, and he did not have a fixed timetable to discuss or walk with his disciples.”<sup>31</sup> For philosophy, writes Hadot, is ‘in the first place a way of life’, of real living up to the full human potential. Unfortunately, Hadot’s reappraisal is still darkened by Western skies, and he agrees with the opinions of the Epicureans and Stoics that “everything leads to the conclusion that real wisdom is never obtained.” We are lucky to know better. For we know that it is possible, by a change of consciousness, to “pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge – the Knowledge by which we become what we know.”

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31 Pierre Hadot: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 69.

# 6

## *A Matter of Matter*

Isn't matter the stuff best known to man? Because of its omnipresence in our lives, the fact that its presence is undeniable, and the solidity of its response to our actions, it has been even for some of the greatest philosophers in history the basic, certain fact. And is not matter in the technological world today, as the medium of scientific materialism, declared to be triumphant?

Why then the following statement by a physicist of the status of Freeman Dyson: "I do not know what the word 'materialism' means. Speaking as a physicist, I judge matter to be an imprecise and rather old-fashioned concept. ... Matter is weird stuff"<sup>1</sup>?

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1 Freeman Dyson: *Infinite in All Directions*, p. 8.

### Sri Aurobindo's appreciation of Matter

"Most of the religions have put their curse upon Matter"<sup>2</sup>, wrote Sri Aurobindo. It might even be said that *all* religious and spiritual movements have a negative attitude towards Matter. Matter and the incarnation of the soul in it are seen as the cause of all suffering, as a damnation. In the East the main aim in life, and in a sense the only one, has been to find a way, and if possible a shortcut, for the Great Escape into the eternal liberation of *moksha* or *nirvana*, free for ever of the curse of suffering. In the West there was Plato's famous formula '*soma sèma*', the body is a coffin, and Christianity's denunciation of the earthly existence as 'a vale of tears', a den of sin and of all things low, transitory, dirty and ugly.

Sri Aurobindo, quite on the contrary, wrote about 'the paradox and miracle of Matter'.<sup>3</sup> In the first pages of *The Life Divine* one finds this striking paragraph: "The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness – to its heights we can always reach – when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. 'Earth is his footing', says the *Upanishad* whenever it images the Self that manifests the universe. And it is certainly a fact that the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes the foundation for the higher knowledge, even for the highest, even for the *Brahmavidya* [the knowledge of Brahma]." <sup>4</sup>

"It is a mistake to make the word 'Matter' into a synonym of obscurity and ignorance", said the Mother. "Moreover, the material world is not the only one in which we live;

2 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 246.

3 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 169.

4 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 13-14.

it is rather one of the many worlds where we are existing simultaneously and, in a certain way, the most important. It is the field in which all the worlds become concrete; it is the place where all will have to manifest.”<sup>5</sup>

### Sri Aurobindo's re-appreciation of Matter

The first premise of Sri Aurobindo's reasoning is the same as the fundamental premise of the *Upanishads*: “Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.”<sup>6</sup> To this knowledge, to this sight the eye of man, the mental being, is veiled. In the wisdom of the Vedanta everything derives from the fact that all is That; the experience of the One is the all-revealing experience of life. But although still professed in theory, in practice the One became divided, and Maya became its negative part, the great illusion, from which one had to escape as soon as possible into the Truth and Reality, supposed to be found in *moksha* or *nirvana*.

Sri Aurobindo, in the greatest yogic enterprise in human history, dared to draw again the logical conclusion of the Vedantic premise: if all is the Divine, then Matter too is the Divine. Matter means also the Earth and everything on it, its evolution and the lives, the incarnations of the human beings. The sublunar, terrestrial realm is indeed a place of change, disintegration, struggle, suffering and ignorance for which the short-lived and vulnerable human has no explanation, except perhaps that it may be a preparatory stage for the gain of a paradisiacal afterlife. Sri Aurobindo's vision and avataric realization changes this fundamental evaluation and focuses, in a Great Turnabout, on the Earth, on Matter. The consequences of this turnabout will be endless,

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5 The Mother: *Entretiens* 1929, p. 123.

6 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 38.

for they will involve the coming about of a new Earth and a new species on it, a species beyond the human being.

Sri Aurobindo's logic is imperative in its simplicity. Firstly, as said before, if all is the Brahman, then Matter too must be the Brahman and cannot be anything else; secondly, if there is truth in the phenomenon of evolution, then there is no reason why evolution should stop at *homo sapiens*, a much too unaccomplished species to be the end-result of the workings of Nature – who is an aspect of the Great Mother, who is the manifesting Power of the Divine. If at the start of the evolutionary effort there was the black Inconscient, the works of evolution cannot remain unfinished and hanging in mid-air, its accomplishment can only be a return to the glories of its divine Origin. If there are the levels of matter, life and mind, above the mind there must be higher, spiritual levels, many of which have already been discovered by the great souls whose lives were dedicated to the spiritual exploration.

“Matter is a fit and noble material”, wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*. There we find also among similar statements: “Matter is *Sachchidananda* ... Substance or Matter is only a form of the Spirit ... Matter is a form of Spirit, a habitation of Spirit, and here in Matter itself there can be a realization of Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> “Matter is only energy in action, and as we know in India, energy is force of consciousness in action.”<sup>8</sup> (The equation matter = energy = consciousness formulates the basic truth of all occultism and spirituality.)

The importance of Sri Aurobindo's vision, and his and the Mother's practical application of it in their Yoga, cannot be overestimated. Their Work puts an end to the escapism,

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 8, 249, 253, 691.

8 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 405.

the urge to escape from the Divine's own creation, and it means the beginning of the effort at realization of the evolutionary levels beyond the mind in order to incarnate what is supra-mental, the 'Supermind', in Matter. It divides the evolutionary progress in two stages: its unconscious and subconscious animal creations, to which we humans belong, and the supra-mental stages of which our dreams and most intense aspirations are made. If Spirit is not real, the Divine is not real. Matter too is the Divine, 'a form of the Spirit' in which the supra-mental evolutionary creations will be incarnated on Earth. Seen as such, the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is the greatest revolution ever, aimed at the creation of a superhumanity where now lives the humanity to which we belong.

### **The boundaries of humanhood**

That sense perceptions are unreliable is nothing new. Practically all ancient philosophers have already pointed this out and used it as an argument to question the possibility of the knowledge of a real Reality. Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The evidence of the senses is always by itself imperfect, not altogether reliable and certainly not final, because it is incomplete and constantly subject to error. Indeed, we have no means of knowing the objective universe except by our subjective consciousness of which the physical senses themselves are instruments; as the world appears not only to that but in that, so it is to us."<sup>9</sup> The consequences of the deformation of reality by our senses are far-reaching; according to some philosophers they give the stamp of unreality to the whole of human life. We thank, for instance, to modern science the proofs that the human perception of the immense scale of electro-magnetic waves is limited to the small range between infra-red and ultra-violet.

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9 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 675.



This constitutional, evolutionary physical limitation of our human nature puts also the trustworthiness of our mind in doubt. For if the sense data on which it depends are unreliable, how true may its conclusions be? A second factor is that the mind is only one level or range of consciousness in the Great Chain of Being, above the rudimentary mentality of the beings below the human, but well below the mental capacities of higher beings, where the consciousness functions not in the darkness of ignorance, but in light of undeformed knowledge. And a third element related to the problem of the mind is the fact that the human – ‘the mental being’ on Earth – is the restricted physical incarnation of authentic mental ranges of existence where mind functions unhindered.

The knowledge of these arguments may render the following lines by Sri Aurobindo less disquieting in our mind-centered world. “Mind is not an instrument of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain of it in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities of action [e.g. technology]. Even when it finds, it does not possess; it only keeps a certain fund of current coin of Truth – not Truth itself – in the bank of Memory to draw upon according to its needs. For Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly. It is the power which interprets truth of universal existence for the practical uses of a certain order of things; it is not the power which knows and guides that existence and therefore it cannot be the power which created or manifested it.”<sup>10</sup> (We find here an explanation of the problem of wholism and reductionism.) “Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the

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10 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 126.

indivisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer.”<sup>11</sup>

“Mind cannot arrive at Truth; it can only make some constructed figure that tries to represent it or a combination of figures. At the end of European thought, therefore, there must always be Agnosticism, declared or implicit. ... Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude; whatever it believes, it can doubt; whatever it can affirm, it can deny; whatever it gets hold of, it can and does let go ...”<sup>12</sup> This leads Sri Aurobindo to the general conclusion: “There is an element of error in all human knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

Is then the ‘triumph’ of the materialistic modern science in our contemporary world flawed by ‘an element of error’? For surely science is an exercise of the mind if ever there was one. This is not the place to discuss the wonderland of mathematics. Suffice it to say that its use in science has been possible because science limits itself in principle to the fixity of matter, which is measurable and therefore expressible in numbers. Sri Aurobindo refers to the magic of ‘number and shape’, underlying the creation, on several pages of *Savitri* – e.g. ‘*The Illimitable they measured with number’s rods*’<sup>14</sup> – and justifies the quasi mystical attitude of the great mathematicians. Yet number and measurement become much less, if at all, applicable to vital phenomena, and still less to matters of the mind, two domains of being which cannot be excluded from the complete Reality, to be incorporated in what Sri Aurobindo called the ‘future science’.

Besides, what has become the omnipresent character of the modern world is not physical science as such, but a wondrously developed technology. Though in recent

11 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 173.

12 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 351, 340.

13 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 183.

14 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 273.

times the two sometimes overlap, there is an essential difference between them: science is based on theoretical reasoning, technology on practical effectiveness. Physics has advanced carried by a succession of theories, most of which fell by the wayside, and it is in its present state once more put into serious question: quantum theory remains problematic because of the reality problem, and string theory has now been waiting for decades for the confirmation of experiment.<sup>15</sup> Therefore it may be said that the theoretical physicist does not really know, and that our world is made by the experimental physicist and the engineer.

An interesting illustration of the fundamental uncertainty in theoretical physics is 'the reality crisis in physics', the fact that there are at least eight different theories of reality.<sup>16</sup> In quantum physics, the problem of sense perception became a hot scientific problem which baffled the minds of some of the greatest scientists. If our way of perceiving the world is phenomenal and incorrect, then what or how is the 'real' world, also called 'deep reality'? (At first sight the following enumeration may seem rather theoretical, but it is a telling illustration of fields in which science and spirituality interconnect, more especially in the Integral Yoga and the Mother's transformation.)

1. As they had no way of knowing 'deep reality', being humans enclosed within their perception of phenomenal reality, the leading quantum physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg simply denied that there is such a thing. This viewpoint, called 'the Copenhagen interpretation' and formulated in the 1920s, states: there is no quantum world (i.e. deep reality), there is only a quantum description.

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15 See e.g. Lee Smolin: *The Trouble with Physics* (2006), and Peter Woit: *Not even Wrong* (2006).

16 The author is indebted throughout to *Quantum Reality – Beyond the New Physics*, by Nick Herbert.

2. From this a second viewpoint was deduced: reality is created by observation, which again says that there is no deep reality, only phenomenal or perceived reality.

3. From a totality different viewpoint reality is an undivided wholeness, the world is a seamless and inseparable whole. This is a scientific confirmation or acknowledgement of the age-old mystical experience, accepted among others by David Bohm.

4. The many-worlds interpretation, launched by Hugh Everett in 1974, proposes: reality consists of a steadily increasing number of parallel universes; myriads of universes are created upon the occasion of each measurement act. This is a mathematician's proposition which affects an ordinary mind as bordering on insanity, for it should be remembered that each act of perception by any living being is also a measurement act.

5. The world obeys a non-human kind of reasoning. To cope with the quantum facts, our human capacity of reasoning should be replaced by a kind of supra-human quantum logic. What this requires is not an inflated intellect produced by an extra big brain, but a consciousness resembling what Sri Aurobindo called 'supermind'. This is a unity-consciousness capable of producing and managing the uncountable events happening at every moment in the universe, and in each of its atoms and cells. Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking thought that a Grand Unified Theory would provide insight into the mind of God; given that a GUT would still be the product of the human mind, however, theirs is an inadequate consideration. The mind of God, Sri Aurobindo's supermind, differs essentially from the human mind, as it is the origin and constant support of everything else – also of the human mind.

6. Neo-realism. This view simply refuses to consider the other, problematic views and continues to think and

work pragmatically as ordinary perceiving humans have always done. As to neo-realism, the world is made of ordinary objects, and an ordinary object is an entity which possesses attributes of its own, whether observed or not. The tree in front of my house was there yesterday and it will be there tomorrow.

7. Consciousness creates reality. Only a system endowed with consciousness (e.g. a human being) is privileged to create reality. This was the paradoxical thesis of Bishop Berkeley in the 18th century, and it is one of the most discussed views in recent science. The variants of the anthropic theory are among its results. The consciousness option is stubbornly fought by materialistic scientism, as it finds that the reviving term of 'consciousness' reeks suspiciously of metaphysics.

8. The world is two-fold, consisting of potentials and actualities (this is an interpretation proposed by Werner Heisenberg). What the potentials actually are and how they work, no one has any idea, but they become actualities, i.e. the world as we experience it, in the measurement act, which is also the perceiving act. How the measurement act works, no one has any idea neither; it is therefore called 'the magic measurement act'.

When considering these views, all of them by prominent physicists, it will not come as a surprise that 'matter' and 'materialism' are no longer what they used to be. Actually, science seems often to resemble occultism. "Quantum materialism has little in common with the materialism of the centuries which preceded our own", writes Sven Ortolí. "The fact that those bits of matter [i.e. the elementary particles] have proved to be in reality nothing but mathematical abstractions, non-local, which means that they are able to spread over all of space, and that on top of this they do not obey determinism, has given a fatal blow to classic

materialism. Certainly, materialism is still a possibility, but then a quantum materialism, which should be called 'fantastic materialism' or 'science fiction materialism'." <sup>17</sup>

In sum, then, what is reality and what is Matter? One may now feel with Freeman Dyson, once a founder and later on a critic of string theory, why his answer was 'weird stuff'. Sri Aurobindo, as usual, places the problem against a wider and more comprehensive background. "Knowledge, by whatever path it is followed, tends to become one. Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulae of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta – the original Vedanta, not the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the *Upanishads*. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern science ... Significant, especially, is the drive of science towards a monism which is consistent with multiplicity, towards the Vedic idea of the one essence with its many becomings." <sup>18</sup>

In *The Life Divine* we find statements like the following: "Matter is one existence. ... Every particle of what we call Matter contains all [the other particles] implicit in itself. ... Where one principle is manifest in Cosmos, there all the rest must be not merely present and passively latent, but secretly at work. ... In fact, life, mind, Supermind are present in the atom." <sup>19</sup> And the Mother said: "The physical world as a whole is the symbol of the universal movements ... In each point there is the same as in the material universe as a

17 Sven Ortoli and Jean-Pierre Pharabod: *Le cantique des quantiques*, p. 125.

18 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 16.

19 *Id.*, pp. 25, 272, 283, 739-740.

whole.”<sup>20</sup> These words agree not only with quantum theory in its beginnings, almost a century ago, but with its more recent confirmations by John Bell, Alain Aspect, and others.

“What is illusory is the perception of the world”, said the Mother in 1964, when fully involved in her experiment of physical transformation. “The perception of the world, the perception we have of it, is illusory. The world has a concrete existence, a real existence, in what one might call the Consciousness of Eternity. But the human consciousness has an illusory perception of this world ... There is a true reality of the world ...”<sup>21</sup> In these simple words we find again what Bohr and Heisenberg called ‘deep reality’, ‘phenomenal reality’, and the problem for beings living in phenomenal reality to contact or even think deep reality. Yoga moves beyond the mind, beyond the human mentality. In her yoga of physical transformation the Mother would go into deep reality, which she called the Consciousness of Eternity, and which Sri Aurobindo called Supermind. For the transformed body would consist of the amazing Matter of deep reality fused with the Matter of our phenomenal reality.

### **The Chain of Being**

There is no doubt that the fundamental premise of scientific materialism – the circle that all is matter because there is nothing but matter – is more and more proving to be the wall in which it has itself imprisoned. The indications are clear. There is the imperceptible glass wall between deep and phenomenal reality in quantum physics. Then, in biology, there is the problem of the origin of life, as unexplained now as it was in previous centuries. And thirdly there is the mind-body problem, the question how a physical organ,

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20 The Mother: *Entretiens* 1953, p. 309.

21 The Mother: *Agenda* 1964, p. 294.

the brain, manages to produce phenomena of consciousness. These three problems are crucial ones, and can only be approached when accepting again the Chain of Being as the real structure of Reality.

The Chain of Being is, by way of speaking, a ladder of consciousness rising, in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation, from the Inconscient and Subconscient through Matter, the Life Forces, Mind, the Overmental levels and Supermind, to the highest attributes of the Divine and the Divine itself. This scale has been the result of the occult and spiritual experience of the past centuries; it has been referred to in all interpretations of the world and the Spirit.

"The phrase 'the Great Chain of Being' was long one of the most famous in the vocabulary of Occidental philosophy, science, and reflective poetry; and the conception which in modern times came to be expressed by this or similar phrases has been one of the half-dozen most potent and persistent presuppositions in Western thought. It was in fact, until not much more than a century ago, probably the most widely familiar conception of the general scheme of things, of the constitutive pattern of the universe; and as such it necessarily predetermined current ideas on many other patterns." Thus writes Arthur Lovejoy in his classic essay *The Great Chain of Being*.<sup>22</sup>

Lovejoy's study remained limited to the Western philosophy, religion and culture, but the same hierarchy is found throughout in the ancient scriptures of India. One of the Vedic hymns about says for instance: "I will proclaim the mighty deeds of Vishnu, who measured out the earthly regions and propped the heavens above, accomplishing in his course three mighty strides. ... In these three mighty paces are set all the worlds."<sup>23</sup> And Ken Wilber writes: "All of the

22 Arthur Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, p. vii.

23 Peter Heehs: *Indian Religions* (an anthology), p. 45.



world's great wisdom traditions are basically variations of the perennial philosophy, of the Great Hierarchy of Being [his term for Chain of Being]. ... In Vedanta there are the *koshas*, the sheaths or layers covering Brahman; in Buddhism there are the eight *vijñanas*, the eight levels of awareness, each of which is a stepped down or more restricted version of its senior dimension; in Kabbalah there are the *sefirot*, and so on."<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, each of these gradations, or levels, or steps, or worlds, are subdivided to a degree which only direct experience can appreciate. "In the physical plane itself or close to it there are believed to be layers of greater and greater subtlety which may be regarded as sub-planes of the physical with a vital and mental character; these are at once surrounding and penetrating strata through which the interchange between the higher worlds and the physical world takes place. ... But the Matter that we see and sense is only an outermost sheath and coating; behind it are other subtler degrees of physical substance ..." <sup>25</sup> The Spirit seems to be as concrete and complex as the most arcane phenomena the physicists are studying. This reminds us of the passage about Vedanta and science in the previous section, and raises the question of the reality of the Spirit.

## Reality of the Spirit

For the Spirit in all its aspects is generally supposed to be ethereal, vapourous, unsubstantial. It has as such been represented in the religions and in the folklore of the peoples, and the notion of its lack of solid concreteness is deeply imprinted in the general mind. Sri Aurobindo, testifying from his experience, strongly asserted the opposite: "The

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24 Ken Wilber: *The Essential Ken Wilber*, p. 53.

25 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 830.

more subtle is also the more powerful – one might say the more truly concrete,’ and he writes about ‘subtler grades of substance with a finer law and a greater power.’<sup>26</sup> (In this context it may be relevant to reflect on the fact that the Big Bang theory is now generally accepted; that this immense universe with all its astounding contents originated from a ‘singularity’ smaller than an atom; and consequently, if the universe was created by ‘God’, the power of the Spirit must be far beyond human conception.)

“There is not only this material plane of being that we see”, described Sri Aurobindo, “there is a physical life plane proper to the vital physical operation of Nature. There is a physical mind proper to a mental physical operation of Nature. There is a physical supermind plane proper to the supramental physical operation of Nature. There is too a plane of physical spirit power or infinite physical Being-Consciousness-Force-Bliss proper to the spiritual physical operations of Nature. It is only when we have discovered and separated these planes of Nature and of our physical being and analyzed the synthesis of their contributions to the whole play that we shall discover how the evolution of vital, mental and spiritual consciousness became possible in inconscient Matter.”<sup>27</sup> It seems that, for all these reasons, we may safely conclude that ‘the whole play’ of the Spirit is more than something ethereal or vaporous.

In a letter to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo wrote directly from and about the yogic experience. “If we [*i.e.* he and the Mother] had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements ..., etc., ... we would not speak

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26 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 272, 274.

27 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 248.

of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other, perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of yoga.”<sup>28</sup>

To encourage a disciple in trouble, Sri Aurobindo lifted a tip of the veil behind which he was working and of which few had an idea: “When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the Ananda rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when love flowers out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a light which illumines and transforms in a moment all what was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when the Reality is all around you, you feel at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined and seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine. Then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven – for of these physical things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experiences of the Divine, doubt is impossible.”<sup>29</sup>

### **The unification of Matter and Supermind**

Matter is another word for physical substance, most often in its grossest form, for there is substance on all levels of the Chain of Being which the terrestrial evolution is slowly

28 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 479.

29 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 339.

climbing up toward its Origin, and on which the human seems to be somewhere halfway. In the way the life forces and the mind descended into Matter and took shape, so, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Supermind will descend into Matter and take a concrete shape in living supramental beings on the Earth.

“The transformation is not a change into something purely subtle and spiritual to which Matter is in its nature repugnant and by which it is felt as an oracle or as a shackle binding the Spirit; it takes up Matter as a form of the Spirit though now a form which conceals and turns it into a revealing instrument, it does not cast away the energies of Matter, its capacities, its methods; it brings out their hidden possibilities, uplifts, sublimates, discloses their innate divine energy.” (Sri Aurobindo)<sup>30</sup>

So long as the evolution remains limited to the mind and the infra-mental in the human, the animal, the vegetal and the mineral, so long will this world be a place of growth by opposition and confrontation, by suffering. There are even the oppositions in the overmental worlds of the Gods, as told in all mythologies. Only the Supermind, in other words the Truth-Consciousness which is a Unity-Consciousness, can arrange a world of divine harmony, the realization of the human dreams and aspirations projected in utopias and on the worlds of the afterlife.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were adamant in the task for which they had come. Their Yoga of transformation into the supramental being can be followed over decades in its unprecedented difficulties, unshakable perseverance and hard fought progress. They were the Two-in-One, the living incarnation of Brahman-Maya, Purusha-Prakriti, Ishvara-Shakti. When Sri Aurobindo had to descent voluntarily into

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30 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 522.

death, he transferred to the Mother the yogic supramental gains his body had made and told her to continue the unprecedented effort of physical transformation. The Mother did this during another twenty-three years, and sometimes spoke about the difficulties and gains of her Work to Satprem, a French disciple. These conversations have been collected in thirteen volumes called *The Mother's Agenda*, a unique document in the spiritual literature.

In the *Agenda* we learn about a constant exchange between Matter and Spirit, and the gradual transformation of the former into the latter, in what ultimately would result in a divinized material body. This is of interest in our present talk because it is a practically still unknown illustration of how 'weird' and wonderful Matter actually is – the Matter of our bodies, organs and cells. One of the Mother's main problems proved to be precisely the dual but simultaneous existence of the phenomenal reality and 'deep' reality. All religions and spiritual paths have tried to flee from the world of phenomenal reality. In the supramental yoga the Mother had to stay in it, for it was the world of her physical body, while having to be able to step over into 'deep' reality, which is the supramental reality behind and inside everything. It was the stuff, the substance of deep reality that had to become one with our gross Matter, 'permeate' it, fuse with it. "It is Matter itself that has to change in order that the Supermind may manifest", the Mother said.<sup>31</sup>

From her daily experience, the Mother would sometimes relate perceptions of her bizarre way of living on two quite different levels. "I am an infinitely delicate apparatus for the perception of vibrations. ... To my consciousness the whole life upon earth, including the human life and all its mentality, is a mass of vibrations. ... The body receives the

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31 Satprem: *Mother's Agenda* 1973, p. 367.

vibrations of everything by which it is surrounded.”<sup>32</sup> Again we meet with striking similarities between spirituality and science in the simple words describing an experience, e.g. “A vibration at one point awakes automatically a vibration at another point”, or “Each element of a whole contains potentially everything that is in the whole.”<sup>33</sup>

Such statements will ring a bell with whomever knows about Bell’s interconnection theorem, and with other theories of locality or non-locality, and speculations about an undivided universal wholeness.

‘Deep’ reality, or the real Reality, the Mother perceived as “that multicoloured light, of all colours, not in layers but as if connected by dots, of all colours.”<sup>34</sup> Above the human mind all substance consists of light, and the Mother’s experiences are always expressed by light, indeed like waves of vibrations. “It’s like a cloud of powder, like a powder of atoms, but with an extreme vibratory intensity – but without movement.”<sup>35</sup>

“That moves and that moves not”, said the Mother, trying to express the inexpressible in words. “It was a movement in constant motion, without interruption, and yet nothing changed its place ... [It was] a golden light that was absolutely immobile, with an internal intensity of vibration so fast that it could not be felt, that it escaped all perception ...”<sup>36</sup>

The mind boggles at such contradictory phenomena. But quantum theory too rests on paradoxes, and the *rishis*

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32 Satprem: *Mother’s Agenda 1965*, p. 60. – *Words of the Mother 13*, p. 96. – *Mother’s Agenda 1966*, p. 24.

33 The Mother: *Entretiens 1956*, pp. 89, 187.

34 Satprem: *Mother’s Agenda 1967*, p. 32.

35 Satprem: *Mother’s Agenda 1960*, p. 478.

36 Satprem: *Mother’s Agenda 1963*, p. 236.

must have known similar ones, for in the *Isha Upanishad* one reads: "One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, that the Gods reach not, for it progresses ever in front. That, standing passes beyond others as they run. ... That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near. That is within all this and That also is outside all this."

The human being is an incarnated soul. However oppressed or ignored the Presence in him may be, still in all times and climes it will suddenly reveal itself in humans in which it is most alive. So for instance in the young French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) whose eye of vision broke through the senses and the mind, and saw: "*Millions d'oiseaux d'or, ô future vigueur !*" – millions of birds of gold, hail vigour of the future! The supramental vibrations described by the Mother could hardly be better expressed in human language than by the engulfing pulsations of millions of winging golden birds (gold is the colour of the Supermind). Here too the poet perceived the reality of the Spirit not as ethereal, but as the superhuman strength that will belong to the future species.

As Sri Aurobindo said: "In Matter undoubtedly lies the crux" of our existence.<sup>37</sup>

Humanity's destiny proves ultimately to be a matter of Matter.

*This is the text of a talk held on 11 February 2012  
within the framework of a seminar on Matter,  
organized at the Auroville Townhall  
by Ms Aster Patel.*

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37 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 256.

# 7

## *The Closing of the Western Mind*

### **Interpreting history**

Does the knowledge of the past have any value? Does history teach us anything? Does the past tell us something about the future? “Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding ... than its own communal and collective life”, wrote Sri Aurobindo. “History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 279.



One finds a similar opinion in a recent text by the French historian Roger Chartier: "I think pretending that the past can explain the present is a rhetorical trick of the historians to justify their position. To me this idea has no ground because I think that history consists of discontinuities. Events are not repeated, and going back is not possible: nothing in history can be used as an example for later on. In Antiquity historical examples served as guidance for the present. Such is, of course, not the case today."<sup>2</sup>

All the same, Sri Aurobindo's statement that 'history teaches us nothing' seems aimed at the academic, mental view which tries to interpret history as a bundle of linear, related and rationally understandable developments leading to a goal, this goal usually being the historian's thesis. According to Sri Aurobindo humanity is essentially one; its evolution is not linear but progressively cyclic; and its aim is a growth of consciousness, leading to its own perfection and following the processes of its evolutionary constitution. "All mankind is one in its nature, physical, vital, emotional, mental, and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and negroid to the rich cultures of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the countless millenniums of its history."<sup>3</sup>

There have been many worlds in the world, each one actualizing an aspect of humanity's potential. Only since the Enlightenment has the inherent unity of humanity been realized and probingly brought into practice. The cultures and religions in the kaleidoscope of the past represent many images of the human being, yet there is one fundamental

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2 Robert Chartier, in *L'Histoire aujourd'hui*, p. 18.

3 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, pp. 66-67.

human constitution, discovered in the spiritual experience of the sages. Therefore history may be seen as the exploration of all aspects of human nature and their gradual conscious integration into one body for humanity. This body has to be built in its conscious totality before humanity can consider its evolutionary task accomplished – before it is ready to access the next higher step in the evolution which is its secret destiny.

History seen in this way obtains an evaluation in which everything becomes meaningful. After all, we were there in former lives, in places mentioned in the history books, but also in events narrated in what have become myths, or legends, or speculation, or in places swallowed by time as their soil was covered by crusts of earth or by the waters. When asked what he had been doing in his former lives, Sri Aurobindo answered laconically but so significantly: “Carrying on the evolution.” The Mother wrote about herself: “Since the beginning of the earth, whenever and wherever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of consciousness, I was there.”<sup>4</sup> Seen in this way, history is no longer a chaos of events unrelated among them; it is part of the present because it generated the present and is alive in us.

When did history begin? If one accepts that it began when some peoples started to record things in writing to support their memory, then its beginning must have been something like five thousand years ago in the Middle East. However, more and more civilizations are dug up which date from times well before Sumer, even from -10,000, like Göbekli Tepe in present-day Turkey. And then there are the fiercely discussed civilizations of which no known trace is left, but which have remained alive in humanity’s memory. Where did the cave artists, painting their masterpieces 35,000 or more years ago, come from? One reads time and

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4 *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life*, p. 1.

again about primitive hunter-gatherers who settled down around -8,000 years, before which there was only wilderness sparsely populated with primitives. To this Sri Aurobindo objects that ten thousand years would have been insufficient for the human mind and its practical capacities to develop.

The Western way, originating in Greece, and the Eastern of which India was the spiritual cradle, are generally considered the two main ways leading up to the present. To keep things simple we will follow this interpretation, leaving for instance ancient Egypt out of our consideration because much is known about it, but not yet that which is essential to its occult and spiritual understanding.

### Opening the Western mind

“No Indian can be adjudged so totally Greek as Sri Aurobindo”, wrote K.D. Sethna.<sup>5</sup> This is a rather surprising statement in the Aurobindonian literature, where Sri Aurobindo is mostly presented as a prominent former freedom fighter and an incarnation of the Indian soul. But Sethna was one of his closest disciples, a frequent correspondent over many years, and the editor of *Mother India*, considered by Sri Aurobindo to be his own mouthpiece, and therefore must have known what he was writing. Besides, in Sri Aurobindo’s oeuvre there is abundant support for Sethna’s statement. There is e.g. the unfinished epic *Ilion* about the fall of Troy, the illuminating series of articles on *Heraclitus*, and the first two articles of *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* proposing the Greek ideal of the perfection of body and mind, “in countries like Greece, Greece where all sides of human activity were equally developed”, set as an example to the students of the Ashram School.<sup>6</sup> There are also the countless references, explicit or implicit, throughout his

5 K.D. Sethna: *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, p. 2.

6 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 517.

work. All testify to a presence of ancient Greece which had remained vividly alive in Sri Aurobindo – who as a classical scholar in Cambridge had been awarded several prizes for his mastery of the Greek language.

A point that has been generally overlooked in this context is the importance Sri Aurobindo ascribed to the presence of the mystics in Egypt and Greece, whom he held to be on an equal footing with those in India. It should be recalled that ancient Greece was much more than the Athens of Pericles. Its 'mysteries' point back to a knowledge and a life many centuries old and often related to ancient Egypt or even imported from there. Also, the Greek culture on the islands of the Aegean and on the coast of Anatolia (now Turkey) preceded in most cultural aspects the golden age of Athens.

"The Vedic Rishis were mystics of the ancient type", wrote Sri Aurobindo, "who everywhere, in India, Greece, Egypt and elsewhere, held the secret truths and methods of which they were in possession as very sacred and secret things, not to be disclosed to the unfit who would misunderstand, misapply, misuse and degrade the knowledge ..." <sup>7</sup> "In Greece the mystics and the mysteries were there at the prehistoric beginning and in the middle (Pythagoras was one of the greatest of the mystics) ..." "The ideas of the *Upanishads* can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato, and form the profounder part of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West." Initiation in the mysteries always forbade disclosure of their spiritual contents, even on punishment of death; as a consequence much about them remains unknown or the result of fanciful guesses. But there can be no doubt that behind the cult of Osiris and Orpheus, or of Dionysus and Apollo there lived the essence

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library vol. 22, p. 103.

of true spirituality, including the awareness of an immortal soul and of reincarnation.

The entity called Greece was not political, at least not in the beginning, for Greece was divided in numerous and most often inimical city-states. Its essence was its culture, of which the importance rose to the surface in its 'mysteries' and during the four great Games (one of which was the Games at Olympia), when a sacred truce was respected by all. When Greece emerged from its dark ages around -700, the centre of its culture was not Athens, but the coast of Anatolia and some of the islands in the Aegean. All were connected by an intense trade, always the carrier of ideas and religion. Miletus, for instance, now little more than a name, was a big, very lively and rich harbour.

It was from Miletus and places near it that the first pre-Socratic philosophers originated, among them the very first one to be recognized as such and to be counted among the Seven Sages: Thales of Miletus (probably 624-546). Together with his name is usually mentioned that he was the first known person to predict a solar eclipse, the one that took place on 28 May -585. It may be safely assumed that Thales did not find the astronomical data and do the complicated calculations all by himself. Miletus was visited by sea and by land from all over the known world at that time, and Thales himself, like so many others eagerly seeking for knowledge, was an extensively travelled man. It is known that he visited Egypt, and he must also have been in places in Mesopotamia or have met savants from Ur or Babylon. Both the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians possessed an astonishing astronomical knowledge. In this cultural exchange, Thales stands as an example of the other philosophers who created 'the Greek Miracle'. The travels of Pythagoras, to Phoenicia, Egypt, Mesopotamia and up to the borders of India, are related in some detail by classical authors. Plato too will sail to

Egypt, as had done the first historians, the law-giver Solon, and countless other Greek intellectuals before him.

At the time of Plato, the aristocratic, powerful Athens at the head of an empire of city-states on the mainland and in the sea had already for some time become the magnet of Greek culture. Athens was now where the traders came, where the drachmae filled the coffers, and where philosophers from the four corners of the world sought a platform to make their voices heard. At the zenith of ancient Greek culture, with the magnificent monuments on its acropolis and its democratic values forever after shaping the societies of humanity, Athens shone like a torch in the night for a few decades – before being swallowed up by history in the shape of the Macedonians. But in those few decades it would lay an important part of the foundations of Europe and the West.

### **The Socratic bifurcation**

They came to Athens from near and far in Greater Greece, the philosophers known as ‘sophists’, who would create what was nothing less than the first Western Enlightenment. They were the first in Western history to represent the mind, the intellect, reason pure and simple, questioning the myths, superstitions and morals of their contemporaries. As always when rational thought clashes with established creed, they did this at the risk of banishment and even of their lives.

“The word ‘sophists’ means professionals of the intellect”, writes Jacqueline de Romilly. “They were not ‘sages’ or *sophoi*, a word not applicable to a profession but to a state of being. Neither were they ‘philosophers’, a word evoking a patient aspiration for truth rather than an optimistic confidence in one’s own mental capacities. They knew the mental processes and were able to transmit them. They were masters in the use of thought, in the use of the spoken

word. Knowledge was their instrument as the piano is the instrument of a pianist. [Some possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge.] The idea behind the word 'sophist' was eminently formulated by one of them, Thrasymachus, who had the following words written on his tomb: 'My place of origin was Chalcedonia and my profession was knowledge.'"<sup>8</sup>

In a society in which the spoken word used in the art of argumentation was the most important tool of the citizen, the sophists trained the youth who could pay for it in obtaining the upper hand in the social conventions which it was their civil duty to attend. But "they were not only masters of rhetoric, they were also philosophers in the true sense of the word – philosophers whose doctrines liberated the minds, stimulated them and opened paths formerly not trod. This new kind of philosophers – not to be compared with our academic philosophers – thus started a real intellectual and moral revolution. ... They inaugurated a total relativism, which left nothing behind that was transcendent or assured."<sup>9</sup> Theirs, with their 'fluid clarity of the reasoning mind' (Sri Aurobindo) was the revolution of *logos* versus *mythos*, of the questioning mind against the established, dogmatic certainties of myth, the basis of religion.

Their importance and activity will become clear if one realizes that the first and foremost sophist was none other than Socrates himself. He, the man who questioned anybody and anything, to find that in fact nobody knew anything for sure, was *the* essential sophist, showing the rational relativity of everything, and finally condemned to drinking hemlock for his alleged undermining of religion. The greatness of Socrates, the sincerity of his vocation, and his inner daemon leave no doubt that he was a *vibhuti* of

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8 Jacqueline de Romilly: *Les grands sophistes dans l'Athènes de Périclès*, p. 17.

9 *Id.*, pp. 26, 107.

the Mind. It was he whom the others took as an example, even when ridiculing him. The schools of Pyrrhonism, with its basic principle of rational relativity, stoicism, cynicism and epicurism, all principal schools of classical philosophy, had their direct origin in Socrates – not to mention Platonism, for in Plato's writings he is the principal protagonist throughout. If Plato presented Socrates as an opponent of the sophists, it was because Socrates, guided by his *daemon* and initiated by the priestess Diotima of Mantinea, took a moral stance against the amorality of the dialectic reason, convinced as he was that the knowledge of the truth must inevitably lead to the practice of the Good.

The years when satyr-faced and barefoot Socrates moved among the Athenians, while his fellow knights-of-the-mind taught the Athenian youth how to excel in the city by their intellectual agility and their mastery of the spoken word, are a decisive moment in the history of the West. Rational interrogation questioned dogmatic imposition and ossified tradition. This increasing separation may without exaggeration be called 'the Socratic bifurcation', giving to the other sophists their due share in the event. Sri Aurobindo has highlighted the importance of this bifurcation on several occasions, for instance in the following evaluation. "Greece at large followed the turn given by Heraclitus, developed the cult of the reason and left the remnants of the old occult religion to become a solemn superstition and a conventional pomp. ... Greece with its rational bent and its insufficient religious sense was unable to save its religion; it tended towards that sharp division between philosophy and science on one side and religion on the other which has been so peculiar a characteristic of the European mind."<sup>10</sup>

The Greek mind dominated the Hellenistic world for centuries. When first the Macedonians and then the Romans

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10 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 246.



conquered Greece, Greek culture in its turn conquered them. The philosophical schools mentioned above were the main patterns according to which the intellectuals interpreted the world and found strength to cope with it. Centres of those schools will be founded throughout the eastern Mediterranean, but Athens will remain the jewel in the crown. It is there that many prominent Romans went to study, as did several Catholic Church Fathers.

Plato did not have any use for science, but his disciple Aristotle had. Dry Aristotle may be seen as the initiator of the study of Nature by the sciences, fields in which the mind must work with the utmost bareness and accuracy. A brief enumeration of the names of classical Greek scientists and their best known accomplishments will suffice to illustrate their brilliance. Euclid and geometry. ("The astonishing fact is that, after two thousand years, nobody has ever found an actual mistake in Euclid's *Elements*, that is to say a statement that did not follow logically from the given assumptions."<sup>11</sup>) Aristarchus: the Earth moves around the Sun; he also calculated the distances of the Sun and the Moon from the Earth. Heraclitus of Pontus: the Earth spins on its axis. Hipparchus: the precession of the equinoxes. Eratosthenes: calculated the circumference of the Earth within two hundred miles. Archimedes: laid the foundations of integral calculus, applied mathematics and hydrostatics.

But then the Western mind was closed. Examining, questioning, calculating, exploring were allegedly inspired by the Devil, for all answers were to be found in the *Bible*, the Word of God. The Academy in Athens was forcefully closed in 529, and only a thousand years later, in the Renaissance, would the freedom to ask and to answer, rediscovered in the texts of the classical Greeks, revive.

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11 Robert Osserman: *Poetry of the Universe*, p. 100.

### Initiation for the masses

Roman emperors, consuls and senators sought initiation in the Greek mysteries, which continued to exist in the margin of society. But all human beings have a soul, and those with a living soul will seek for spiritual enlightenment in whatever form available. Not only in Greece, but also in the other conquered territories of the Roman Empire there were mysteries, and some of them spread and became quite popular. There was for instance the cult of Isis, the Universal Mother, of Mithras, favourite of the military, of Cybele and Serapis.

The spreading of the mystery cults, however, remained restricted because their access required initiation and absolute secrecy. The initiated became as it were a superior category of humans in conscious possession of their souls and gradually climbing up to higher grades of initiation (resembling in this present-day freemasonry). On the one hand the religious universality of Greece, mirrored in the Roman pantheon, had lost much of its credibility because of the rationalism of the sophists; on the other hand the restrictions and the occult character of the cults left the majority of the people without an interpretation of their lives, without a Source of Strength to turn to in the midst of their very harsh lives.

"They were none of them religions of the masses, because all taught that salvation comes through knowledge [gnosis]. Knowledge may be imparted suddenly, by revelation, to whomever the teacher deems worthy, as was the wont of certain Gnostics; or it might be learned by long study as among the Platonists, not a few Gnostics and, it seems, the Hermetists. But however acquired, it was always the possession of an elite. Hence the tendency within these milieux towards the emergence of a two-tier structure, with a small group of teachers, the 'elect', taking responsibility

for the instruction of a much larger group of what the Platonists and Manicheans appropriately called 'listeners'." (Garth Fowden in *The Egyptian Hermes*)

There was a need and abundant space for a new mass religion.

Christianity started as one mystery cult among others, in fact as a variety of small gnostic sects, each with its own preceptor and sacred text. The basic belief of Gnosticism is that the world is divided in two: a vast higher hierarchy of heavens of light and holiness, a limited lower world of darkness and perdition. Some souls, inhabitants of the higher worlds, happen to fall into the world of darkness; their fall causes them to forget their origin and real nature; they remain bound to the darkness through many incarnations – till a Redeemer descends from on high among them, gives them the effective knowledge (gnosis) of their real nature, and shows them the way out of the darkness into the Light. The similarity with the basic tenets of Christianity is obvious, and more so if one recalls that the belief in reincarnation also existed among the early Christians.

Who Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, actually was, remains a mystery in spite of the innumerable volumes written about him. Making the riddle still more mysterious is the fact that even the basic texts of the *New Testament* differ on all important points, and that each of them is untrustworthy in the wording it has come to us. Sri Aurobindo names Christ several times, together with Krishna and Buddha, as an *Avatar*, and finds his main inspiration to have been Buddhism, which he calls the parent of Christianity. "His was the Eastern ideal carried by Buddhism and other ancient disciplines to the coasts of Asia and Egypt and from there poured by Christianity into Europe."<sup>12</sup>

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12 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 1088.

It is one of the great gaps in our knowledge of history that all records and references to the first *thirty years* of Christ's life, except for the nativity, were torn out from the sources. There is, firstly, no doubt that Christ was an extraordinary personality, whose words and actions presuppose a profound spiritual training. Secondly, what may be seen as the core of his teaching can only be understood through oriental spiritual knowledge. But this is what in Christianity never happened. The mind of the Church Fathers was shaped by Greek philosophy, especially Platonism (although Aquinas returned to Aristotle); the Hebrew religion remained a permanent obligatory reference; and when the Christian doctrine and its superstitions were put to the test by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, their secular knowledge lacked any spirituality.

There are many faces of Christ, but which was the true one? There was the apocalyptic Christ, who is supposed to have said: "Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away before all these things [he had been predicting] take place." (Mark 13:30)<sup>13</sup> There was the incarnated Son of a loving Father, so contrary to the jealous and vengeful Yahweh of the Old Testament. There was the teacher of a movement (which may have been the Essenes). There is no doubt that Christ, during his short public life, was supported by an organization without which his mission would have been impossible to execute in such a short time. And there was, often usefully forgotten, the bringer of the sword. "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household'." (Matthew 10:14-16) Such words can only be spoken by a leader who demands a

13 See Bart Ehrman: *Jesus – Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*.

total and exclusive commitment from his followers, whose salvation depends on his word and his spiritual power.

As to his oft discussed miracles, this is the opinion of a 'mahayogi' who knew what he was talking about, namely Sri Aurobindo: "Jesus Christ made the use of the *siddhis* a prominent feature of his pure, noble and spiritual life, nor did he hesitate to communicate them to his disciples – the laying of hands, the healing of the sick, the *ashirvada* [blessing], the *abhishap* [cursing], the speaking with many tongues were all given to them."<sup>14</sup>

Gnosticism was eclectic, owing some of its elements to Alexandria, the Egyptian metropolis, to Mesopotamia and India in the East, to Hebrew mysticism, and to Platonism. The common factor in all this was the search for Truth, wherever it may be hidden, beyond the materialism and phenomenalism of the dominating philosophies. Gnosticism was mystic – and much of it wildly sectarian, for founded on the experience or imagination of some charismatic figure, like all the sects in the past and today. Theologians, e.g. Irenaeus in *Adversus Heraeses*, did their best to separate Christianity from the other gnostic sects, and to give it an own identity whose God was the one true God and whose scripture contained the one true truth.

The Nag Hammadi bombshell in 1945 proved definitively how intimately Christianity had been part of the gnostic movement. Nag Hammadi is a small place in Egypt where Christian monks had buried their gnostic texts at the time that they were forbidden, somewhere in the 4th century, by the Emperor and the Church authorities. Among this treasure trove was found, e.g. *The Gospel of Thomas*, with supposedly authentic sayings by Jesus which sound at least as original as the material of the four canonic gospels. (One wonders

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14 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 15.

what else may suddenly be thrown up on the beaches of time to reinterpret history – documents about the first thirty years of Jesus' life?) "The term 'Christianity', for example, is not the name for any single unit of the type for which the historian of specific ideas looks", writes Arthur Lovejoy. In Christianity there were "all manner of distinct and conflicting beliefs under the one name ... a very mixed collection of ideas, the result of historic processes of a highly complicated and curious sort ... a series of facts which, taken as a whole, have almost nothing in common except the name."<sup>15</sup>

Driven by History, it was the mission of Christianity to create a mass religion which would fill the empty soul-space left behind by the Socratic bifurcation. To this end it needed the mystic core which it provided by presenting Jesus of Nazareth as the gnostic Redeemer who would show the souls their way back to heaven, and by gradually building up the myth of his exclusive divinity. Secondly, it needed an organized body, a Church, with strict authority over the members. Thirdly, it needed uniform definitions of its faith, the same for all the Church and to be accepted on heavy punishment (in this case eternal damnation in hell). The many truths of Gnosticism were reduced to one single truth, but not without feisty discussions and disagreements.

It is amazing how fast the Catholic Church built itself a structure, the pillars of which were the bishops. Initially each bishop was the highest authority in his community or bishopric, owing respect to none other. As Ignatius, himself a bishop, wrote: "You should regard the bishop as the Lord himself ... The bishop presides as the counterpart of God ... Do nothing without the bishop and his presbyters ..." (Henry Bettenson)<sup>16</sup> But the problem rose ere long that

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15 Arthur Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 6.

16 Henry Bettenson: *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 42.

each bishop seemed to have his personal interpretation of Christianity.

One reason was that most of the communities had their faith from different sources and interpreters. Some had heard an apostle tell his own story, others had been handed a text differently inspired, and still others made a mixture of this, that and the other rumour about Jesus Christ, soon turned into miraculous truth. In circulation were the Old Testament scriptures, quite influential as Christianity originally spread along the paths of the diaspora and its synagogues; there were the gospels, not only four but more than twenty; there were the books of revelation, written by prophets and seers; there were the letters of Paul who, according to many exegetes, had created his own (gnostic) version of Christianity; there were the Church Fathers, commenting on disputed points of the teaching and adding their own interpretations, which became authoritative in their turn; there was Platonism, very influential especially through some of the Church Fathers; there were the decisions and the creeds of the Church Councils, trying to bring order in the general and often violent confusion, but only adding to it ...

### **‘What I wish, must be the cannon’**

In spite of the persecutions, Christianity spread rapidly and soon had a dominant place among the new sects in the Empire. The main reason for which the Christians were persecuted was that they refused to recognize the Emperor as a god and sacrifice to him. Not only was this sacrilege according to the Roman law, it was also feared that it would attract the wrath of the heavens on the Empire and its citizens. A simple act of veneration sufficed to free anyone of condemnation, most often to a public execution or to serve as prey for wild animals in circus.

It is one of the surprises of history that the severe persecution by Diocletian, in 310, was almost immediately followed by the breakthrough of Christianity. Constantine the Great proclaimed in 313, by the Edict of Milan, universal freedom of religious confession, with special privileges for the Christian faith. Soon the persecuted for Christ became administrators and judges in the Empire; 'the poor', as they called themselves, became rich, sometimes ostentatiously, thanks to the generosity of the Emperor; the hidden now erected luxurious buildings for their congregations: the first churches.

Constantine himself became venerated as the thirteenth apostle. Was he really a Christian? Formerly, most historians had well-founded doubts about this, considering him rather an adherent of Sol Invictus, like so many of the military from whose ranks he had risen; because of the gruesome murders he committed on persons close to him in order to stay in power; and because he let himself be baptised only on his deathbed. But, as so often, in Constantine's case too the opinion of the historians proved to be inconstant, and one reads in a recent book by the French historian Paul Veyne: "Nowadays, the historians agree in seeing Constantine as a sincere Christian believer."<sup>17</sup>

One of the main reasons Constantine tried to build a basis on Christianity was that it was so widely spread and therefore might serve as the support of the unity of his huge and very diverse Empire. (Soon the Empire would be split and ruled by two Emperors, each one assisted by a Caesar.) In this he rather miscalculated. For, as we have seen, the authoritative sources of Christianity varied without end, a situation which resulted in continuous quarrels, serious public disturbances, street battles and killings. Countless were the efforts to reach an agreement on the many points

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17 Paul Veyne: *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, p. 95.



of contention by calling the bishops to discuss them in a council. Councils there were many, generally or partially attended and each one with a set of agreements which was proclaimed as the official, canonical truth the Church as a whole had to accept on punishment of eternal damnation. One creed replaced another, soon to be put into question by a new fanatic personality or a dissident council of disagreeing bishops.

One of the principal points of discussion was the status of Jesus Christ. Some said he was entirely God, others that he was entirely human, and many that he was something in between. This is of course the problem of the 'avatarhood' of Christ, the Son of God who was also the Son of Man. What in practically every council was discussed without end was a problem that is common in Hinduism, but that the West had to work out for itself, Christ being accepted as the only avatar without a second. For the right view many were ready to die, or to make others die. From the status of God to that of a human being, there was a whole scale of beliefs, e.g. Sabellians, adoptionists, subordinationists, Arians, and the ones for whom Christ was human like any other human being, albeit in an exceptional way. In the 4th and the 5th century so many councils were held – and so many internal battles fought for the Christian faith – that reading about it makes the head spin. Ultimately the Creed defined in Nicea, in 325, has endured more than any other, and it is still the official creed of the Catholic Church.

Such endless turmoil was the opposite of the unity which Constantine had hoped for, and he intervened with all his power and money to eliminate the dissenters and support the orthodox. It seemed however impossible to decide who was orthodox or not, and all of them declared themselves inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e. by God himself. Constantine could play the same game: he declared

himself inspired by the Holy Spirit and exerted the utmost pressure for the bishops to come to a definitive, clearly formulated conclusion. He proclaimed solemnly: "We have received from Divine Providence the supreme favour of being relieved from all error ... myself, to whom the Highest Divinity by his celestial will committed the government of all earthly beings." Which means that the councils held in his presence formulated their conclusions according to his opinion and decision – a man who had to wait till the 20th century to be thought of as a Christian. Nonetheless, this emperor's iron fist did not put an end to the chaos, which soon made Constantius II state: "What I wish, must be the cannon", and by the cannon is meant the formulation of the holy Christian faith, which was for a great deal the result of the viewpoint of emperors.

Already in the first decennia of this unholy turmoil, the bishop Irenaeus of Lyon had written: "If anyone asks how the Son was 'produced' from the Father, we reply that no one understands that 'production' or 'generation' or 'calling' or 'revelation' or whatever term anyone applies to his begetting, which in truth is indescribable."<sup>18</sup> Yet the head of the theologians was programmed for defined understanding, and as this had to be the result of the workings of the mind, its always partial definitions continued to sow dissension, leaving no place for Irenaeus' mystic confession of mental inability to define the Undefinable.

### **The closing of the Western mind**

As it grew in numbers and power, the Christian Church became ever more authoritarian, also in its creed and teachings. A sort of composite construction had grown out of the combative diversity over the years. The big framework of

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18 Irenaeus: *Adversus Haereses*, quoted in Henry Bettenson in *The Early Christian Fathers I*, p. 74.

this often bizarre 'theological' construct became more or less generally accepted, especially as it was supported and therefore imposed by the authorities and by the emperors, now real Christians, above all. In 395 Emperor Theodosius declared Catholicism the official obligatory religion; paganism was forbidden, as were the non-Catholic versions of Christianity, Arianism prominent among them. (This tightening of the mental straitjacket would continue till Justinian decreed in 534 the death penalty for those who still practised pagan cults.)

It did not take long before the escalating power trip of the Catholic Church took even on the emperors themselves. After all, the Church represented the Supreme Power on earth, namely that of God himself. It had the might to forgive the worst sins or to refuse to do so, as it could excommunicate anybody it wanted, even whole peoples or kingdoms, thereby sending their souls assuredly to hell for all eternity. A priest could transmute bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and administer or refuse the sacrament for the dying, again determining the eternal destiny of a person's soul. Compared to this, all bearers of the worldly authority were merely humans depending on the interventions and decisions or the representatives of God. It did not take long before Ambrosius, a potentate of the Church, refused to administer the sacraments to Emperor Theodosius, thus forcing him to submit to papal supremacy.

When Augustine became bishop of Hippo (ca. 400), northern tribes had already crossed Europe and invaded North Africa. This former Manichaean would in the coming centuries be considered 'the cornerstone of the western Christian tradition'. It was he who taught that all human beings are born in original sin, because of Adam's decision to eat the forbidden fruit in Paradise; who sent all non-Catholics to eternal hell, even new-born unbaptized children;

who condemned all humans to eternal fire and brimstone, except for the predestined who were to be saved and whose number was known to God alone; and who declared that the Catholic Church had the divine right and duty 'to force all outsiders to come in', thereby developing a rationale for persecution. This sombre religious thought will dominate the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages.

How contradictory all this was to the life and teachings of Christ. The kingdom within which he sought had been 'humanized' into an external kingdom of mental confusion, ruthless power and eternal damnation instead of Love. "The result of the usurpations of philosophy was that mankind flung itself with an infinite sincerity, with a passionate sense of relief into the religion of an obscure Jewish sect, and consented for a length of time which amazes us to every theological absurdity, even the most monstrous, so that it might once more be permitted to believe in something greater than earth and to have relations with God." (Sri Aurobindo)<sup>19</sup> The obscure Jewish sect was composed of numerous smaller gnostic sects; to form a mass religion, philosophy had to bend all existing kinds of elements into one authoritative, monstrous structure, the framework of a gigantic institution that would present itself as the bridge, the interface between lowly humanity and the heavens of God.

"The old philosophical spirit was torn to pieces with Hypatia in the bloodstained streets of Alexandria. Theology took her place ..." <sup>20</sup> As symbol of those times Sri Aurobindo chose Hypatia, a philosopher and mathematician in fascinating Alexandria, that metropolis of learning and knowledge in Egypt. This exemplary learned woman, still representing the open mind of 'heathen' Greece, was murdered in 415 by

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19 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, pp. 80-81.

20 *Ibid.*

a band of black-robed monks in the name of Christ, the new God. (Such bands of Catholic fanatics acted everywhere as the hammer of the new, just and true religion to eradicate paganism by destroying its temples and monuments, and killing its representatives. They could do this unpunished, as they were allegedly implementing the edicts of the emperors and of most of the bishops.)

This was the time of the closing of the Western mind, when what the Church taught was the Truth and all the rest was falsehood or superfluous knowledge. All Truth was contained in the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers and the conclusions of the Church councils; the rest was unnecessary or dangerous. The glorious Roman Empire ended in 476 with the fall of Rome to barbarians. "The last recorded astronomical observation in the ancient Hellenistic world was one by the Athenian philosopher Proclus in 475, nearly eleven hundred years after the prediction of and eclipse by Thales in -585, which traditionally marks the beginning of Greek science. It would be over a thousand years – until the publication of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* in 1543 – before the studies began to move forward again."<sup>21</sup>

### The Teutonic lapse

The northern border of the Roman Empire in what is now Europe was of enormous length, a constant headache for the emperors to defend and demanding huge military resources. Battles with Germanic tribes had to be fought on frequent occasions, and this was where army commanders earned their laurels and sometimes gained enough power to contest for the Empire as a whole. Still, gradual infiltrations of the *lines* by barbaric tribes had taken place for centuries, often turned into permanent settlements and collaboration

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21 Charles Freeman: *The Closing of the Western Mind*, p. 328. The present author has borrowed the title of his talk from Freeman's great essay.

with the Romans. Barbarians filled the ranks of the legions and some of them rose to the highest commands.

The great unrest, however, started in 370 with the invasions of the Huns, the wild horse-riders out for the joy of battle and booty, who smashed the Ostrogoths and drove what remained of them into Roman territory south of the Danube. Great Rome itself, mother of the empire, was sacked for the first time by Gothic tribes who were in fact Christians, not Catholics but Arians. Glorious Rome, filled with treasures of all kinds, kept attracting the restless tribes also of the Huns under Attila, in 452, and of the Vandals under Gaiseric, in 455. That the axis of the Empire was repeatedly shaken was a bad omen for the survival of the Empire as such.

What is here mentioned in a couple of paragraphs was in fact a process of years, in which many 'barbarian' chieftains were attracted by the Roman lifestyle, adopted it to any possible degree, and with it submitted to conversion by the Catholic Church. Their descendants live on to this day in France, Spain, Italy and North Africa, rarely conscious of their origin. The era of the great invasions, which would lead to the downfall of the Roman Empire in 476, is extensively mentioned in the history books, where one will find demographic and economic reasons for it, but nothing deeper. It is nevertheless the deeper reason, perceived by Sri Aurobindo's insight, which will bear in later centuries not only on Europe, but on the development of the world.

The European character is still clearly divided into two: northern or Germanic, southern or Romanic. If there is a mixture of the two, and if it is this mixture that has played such an important role in world history once Europe awoke from the Dark Ages, it is because of the infusion of the vitality of the Germanic tribes. They were the reason that the Roman Empire came to an end and Western

Europe, because of its closing of the rational mind, sank into darkness. Sri Aurobindo called this historic process 'the Teutonic lapse', Teutonic standing here for Germanic or barbarian. "For the European, even since the Teutonic mind and temperament took possession of western Europe, has been fundamentally the practical, dynamic and kinetic man, vitalistic in the very marrow of his thought and being."<sup>22</sup>

It is "this triumphant emergency and lead of the vital man"<sup>23</sup> which will provide the impulse for the re-opening of thinking mind and push it towards its realizations in science, commerce and conquest. "The emphasis of the Western mind is on life, the outer life above all, the things that are grasped, visible, tangible. The inner life is taken only as an intelligent reflection of the outer world, with the reason for a firm putter of things into shape, an intelligent critic, builder, refiner of the external materials offered by Nature ... Even from religion the West is apt to demand that it shall subordinate its aim or its effect to this utility of the immediate visible world ... The genuine temperament of the West triumphed and in an increasing degree rationalized, secularized and almost annihilated the religious spirit." For this emptiness of the religious spirit, Catholicism itself, with its almost exclusively dogmatic system, was responsible. It "sought to capture the soul and the ethical being, but cared little or not at all for the thinking mind [as all was prescribed and nothing free to be thought about] ... When the barbarians captured the Western world, it was in the same way contend to Christianize them, but made it no part of its function to intellectualize"<sup>24</sup> – till reason will reaffirm its rights in the Renaissance.

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22 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 157.

23 *Id.*, p. 158.

24 *Id.*, p. 76.

### What became of Christ's message ...

So what became of the message of Love for which a smiling young sage in Judea had sacrificed his life? "The Messenger suffered on the cross, and what happened to the truth that was his message?" asks Sri Aurobindo. And he answers himself: "As Christ himself foresaw, it has never been understood even by its professors. For five hundred years [after the death of Christ] it was a glorious mirage for which thousands of men and women willingly underwent imprisonment, torture and death in order that Christ's kingdom might come on earth and felicity possess the nations. But the kingdom that came was not Christ's, it was Constantine's [who made Christianity the handmaid not of Love but of controversy and war]; it was Hildebrand's [Pope Gregorius VII, who in 1077 excommunicated the Holy Emperor Henry IV, divested him of his imperial power and dissolved his subjects of all oaths sworn to him]; it was Alexander Borgia's [one of the scandalous Renaissance popes]. For another thirteen centuries the message was – what? Has it not been the chief support of fanaticism, falsehood, cruelty and hypocrisy, the purveyor of selfish power, the keystone of a society that was everything Christ had denounced?"<sup>25</sup>

As an illustration of his assessment, Sri Aurobindo writes: "Witness the whole external religious history of Europe, that strange sacrilegious tragic-comedy of discords, sanguinary disputations, 'religious' wars, persecutions, State churches and all else that is the very negation of the spiritual life."<sup>26</sup> And he points to "the bloodstained and fiery track which formal external Christianity has left furrowed across the mediaeval history of Europe almost from

25 Sri Aurobindo: *Essays Divine and Human*, pp. 75-76.

26 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 38.



the days of Constantine, its first hour of secular triumph, down to very recent times." He points to the record of the Inquisition. And he says: "But we must observe the root of this evil, which is not in true religion itself, but in its infra-rational parts, not in spiritual faith and aspiration, but in our ignorant human confusion of religion with a particular creed, sect, cult, religious society or Church."<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the fundamental reason of the human tragic-comedy is the limitations of his mind, with ignorance turned into fanaticism as its illegitimate offspring. Dark powers rise up in the infrarational parts of humanity and inspire it with apparently meaningful formulas, which they use as the rods to beat it into submission to the gods as whom they pose. Such is the foundation of small sects and of successful sects called religions, but also of political movements, warped idealistic utopias, and practically everything humans try to do together. The closing of the Western mind was a monstrosity which is still alive, as it has been recognized as such without its opponents finding a replacement which would keep the mind open and still worthwhile to be the guidance of life.

The balance of Christianity drawn in the previous paragraphs is quite negative. Yet in Christianity there remained a mystical core which it kept from its gnostic times. There was the dictatorial institutional Church, but there was also a mystic underground, mostly hidden because the Church which owned and operated all access ways to God would not stand that individuals found their own way to God in their heart and soul. Even in the first canonical writings there were the letters of Paul of Tarsus and the *Gospel of John* with their very own mystic flavour, borrowed from the gnostic origins of the Christian movement. There has also been, at

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27 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 176.

all times, a strong reaction against the dogmatic and tyrannical Church and its creeds and prescriptions, because after all the human reason can be bludgeoned into unconsciousness but not eradicated.

Any soul will be touched by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, in search of the Grail, a symbol of the highest spiritual aspiration and perhaps transformation. There were the Knights Templar, whose secret seems to have been gnostic, probably revealed to them by mystics of the Muslim faith. It gave them the strength to create an empire of their own, and to remain faithful to themselves when persecuted, tortured and put to the stake. There were the Cathars, an anti-Church as old as the successful one, which organized a bloody crusade to smash them out of existence.

Within the Catholic Church itself, there were the Franciscan mendicant orders, with Francis of Assisi as their example and patron saint. Their ideal was to return to the supposed life in poverty of original Christianity, i.e. of Christ and his companions. Considering the ostentatious luxury of the official Catholic Church, the barefoot mendicants were not a pleasing sight to the eye of the men in power. And there were the medieval mystics of Flanders and the Rhine Valley: Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruysbroeck, and beguines like Hadewych and Marguerite Porete, who like so many mystics in this and other religions was burned for the sin of having found God in her heart and having realized Him.

*All* these individuals and movements stood up against the institutional Church. *All* of them returned to the origin of the faith – love, poverty, God within – and wanted the external Church to follow them back to the original and inner Christ. This urge of spiritual authenticity is now as alive as ever, and is being suppressed as vigorously as ever. What revolutionary theologians like Hans Küng wanted was a

return to the Church of the Apostles in the Christian spirit of simplicity. This brings to mind the following anecdote about Thomas Aquinas, the *doctor angelicus*, who “on 6 December 1273, while attending mass fell into a prolonged and rapturous mystical state. Thereafter, he ceased to write. [He had written enormously, including the *Summa theologica*.] When urged by officials of the Catholic Church to continue his work on the *Summa*, which he had left unfinished, he replied: ‘I can do not more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value.’”<sup>28</sup> In this he joined Meister Eckhart and his realization of the One; both exceptionally learned Dominican monks were called to justify themselves before the Holy Inquisition for their deviations from the orthodox truth.

One finds the closing of the Western mind summarized in the following words of Sri Aurobindo: “Because men in the passion and darkness of their vital nature had chosen to think that religion is bound up with certain fixed intellectual conceptions about God and the world which could not stand scrutiny, therefore scrutiny had to be put down by fire and sword; scientific and philosophical truth had to be denied in order that religious error might survive.”<sup>29</sup>

### The re-opening of the Western mind

The division of the Roman Empire at the time of Constantine had been practically inevitable not only because of its hugeness, but still more because of the different cultures it contained: in the East the brilliant Byzantine culture, still deeply rooted in ancient Greece and developing its own kind of Christianity, in the West a world with the exception of some highlights like Rome still living in a primeval

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28 Quoted by David Berlinski in his book: *The Devil's Delusion*.

29 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 176.

nature and mentality. When the western wing of the empire ceased to exist in 476, the eastern part, still mentally and physically strong, continued to exist, although gradually shrinking in the course of the centuries. In the 16th century, however, under attack by the Turcomans, Constantinople (founded as the New Rome) fell and the Roman Empire as a whole ceased to exist.

This fact is of importance in our story because Constantinople, and many other places of learning in the Byzantine Empire, still possessed a rich stock of original Greek manuscripts. If these fell into the hands of the Turks, they would most probably be destroyed. Therefore most of the manuscripts were taken to Italy, where, as it happened, something later called 'Renaissance' was in full swing, and many rich and cultivated merchants were willing to pay big sums for their acquisition. This cultural exchange created one of the main sources of 'the new learning', that would regain the ancient inquisitive spirit and put everything, including the dogmas and superstitions of the Catholic Church, to the test of reason. It became possible again to be an individual and to think as one. (In this period of mental and artistic fermentation Giovanni Pico della Mirandola wrote his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.) Art, science and discovery flourished, although their practitioners still had to watch their step, for the Church in power would not let go of its prerogatives easily.

Pages without end could be written about this important moment in Western history, which would prove equally important for the world. Here we will suffice with the following evaluation of the Renaissance by Sri Aurobindo. "The Renaissance gave back to Europe on one hand the free curiosity of the Greek mind, its eager search for first principle and rational laws, its delighted intellectual scrutiny of the facts of life by the force of direct observation and individual

reasoning, on the other the Roman's large practicality and his sense for the ordering of life in harmony with a robust utility and the just principles of things. But both these tendencies were pursued with a passion, a seriousness, a moral and almost religious ardour which, lacking in the ancient Graeco-Roman mentality, Europe owed to her long centuries of Judaeo-Christian discipline."<sup>30</sup>

It was inevitable that a serious scrutiny of the Catholic faith and of its canonical writings would soon lead to frictions and conflicts, for much of it simply does not stand to reason, and the time had come that some passionate thinkers would no longer hesitate to say or write so in public. Thus came the Reformation; thus followed the Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason. Although the world has widened considerably since then, many of the points at issue then are still under discussion now. Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment may well have been the prologue to an age of global change which will lead to the transformation of humanity.

### **The way of the East**

In this talk the attention has been chiefly focused on ancient Greece and the Socratic bifurcation, the coming about of the mass religion of Christianity, the Teutonic lapse, and the revival of the mind in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, all of them Western historical phenomena. They have created elements which will play an essential role in the further development of humanity as a whole, even up to the present day. The East, and in the first place India, has created its own values. Usually these are seen as to be of a spiritual or mystical kind, but such a view, though basically true, omits the rich development of India's philosophical systems and its manifold experimentation with moral

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30 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 19.

systems. The East 'fell asleep' when Europe reached a level of activity that would impose its values on the globe, but the treasure the East was guarding is now becoming available to humanity as a whole and will at long last provide humanity with its highest and true reason of existence.

Sketching the roads discovered by the East would require at least an exposition at least as long as the present one of the West. We will therefore conclude with the following admirable summary by Sri Aurobindo. "When somewhere between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualize knowledge, this truth [of 'an Other beyond Thought'] survived in the East; in the West where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade [after the Socratic bifurcation]. In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience. Secondly, each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a yogi ... In the West it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect ..." <sup>31</sup>

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31 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 353.

Metaphysics, mysticism and spirituality in general have been banned from the scientific mind. For this there was good reason, as the religion in whose midst modern science grew up was irrational and superstitious in the highest degree. But, as seems inevitable to the human mind, science itself formulated its dogmas and thus turned itself into a religion, which is still exclusively practised in all of its temples. This has continuously withheld science and most of its practitioners of examining the root and truth of things. It has even driven some of them to openly wage a war against religion and 'God', not realizing that they were fighting the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible, as they had not idea of a Divine which is present at the core of all beings as it is all beings. Words like the following by the ethologist and media-superstar Richard Dawkins have become famous: "I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented."<sup>32</sup>

After having considered what this talk has to say about the converging history of West and East, it may be a right conclusion to end with the words of Sam Harris, another publicist who battled in the ranks against religion and God, but who in a recent book seems to have seen the light. "When the great philosopher mystics of the East are weighed against the patriarchs of the Western philosophical and theological traditions, the difference is unmistakable: Buddha, Shankara, Padmasambhava, Nagarjuna, Longchenpa, and countless others down to the present have no equivalents in the West. In spiritual terms, we appear to have been standing on the shoulders of dwarfs. It is little wonder, therefore, that many Western scholars have found the view within rather unremarkable."<sup>33</sup>

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32 Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion*, p. 36.

33 Sam Harris: *The End of Faith*, p. 215

# 8

## *The Fall*

*Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidd'n Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe ...  
Sing Heav'nly Muse ...*

John Milton

In the talk 'Theodicy: Nature Makes no Mistakes'<sup>1</sup> I have mainly considered *how* suffering and evil came to be in the divine manifestation which is the world. Another aspect of the theodicy problem is *why* it had come to be. "It is true", writes Sri Aurobindo, "that the problem still remains

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1 Georges van Vrekhem: *Preparing for the Miraculous*, pp. 213-233.



why all this that yet is should have been necessary – these crude beginnings, this long and stormy [evolutionary] passage – why should the heavy and tedious price be demanded, why should evil and suffering ever have been there. For to the how of the fall into the Ignorance as opposed to the why, the effective cause, there is a substantial agreement in all spiritual experience. It is the division, the separation, the principle of isolation from the Permanent and One that brought it about ... Once consciousnesses separated from the one consciousness, they fell inevitably into Ignorance and the last result of Ignorance was Inconscience; from a dark immense Inconscient this material world arises and out of it a soul that by evolution is struggling into consciousness, attracted towards the hidden Light, ascending but still blindly towards the lost Divinity from which it came.”<sup>2</sup>

‘The fall into the Ignorance’, with all its deplorable consequences, features in most great mythologies, traditions and religions. In Indian mythology there are the four *yugas* which gradually descend from the perfection of the *Krita Yuga* to the dreadful conditions of the *Kali Yuga* in which we live, but which, begun in the year -3102, should now be near its end. The classical cultures of Greece and Rome too knew about a succession of the four ages: Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron. It is no exaggeration to say that suffering humanity has always lived with the remembrance or the fancy of a past age of perfect happiness, and in the hope or with the dream of its return.

The best known story of humanity’s fall, however, is what Sri Aurobindo called ‘the poetic parable’ of the Hebrew *Book of Genesis*.

The Lord God took the man [Adam] and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

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2 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 256.

And the Lord God commanded the man: 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.' ... Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman [Eve]: 'Did God really say: *You must not eat from any tree in the garden?*' The woman said to the serpent: 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say: *You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.*' 'You will not surely die', the serpent said to the woman, 'for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (*Genesis, 2:16-17 and 3:1-7*)

This parable of 'the Fall', of the 'original sin' of Eve and Adam inspired by Satan in the disguise of a Serpent, is in the West, together with the story of the Christ's nativity, probably the most famous of all Old Testament stories. It has been evoked in countless paintings and poems, theologians have racked their brains and written libraries about it, and it is still a frequent point of reference even in the common discourse of the present.

The most radical and influential of all interpreters of this story, for whom, as the word of God, it was believed to be historical truth, was bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430), last of the Church Fathers. He taught that eating the

apple was both an act of foolishness, pride and disobedience to God committed by Adam and Eve. Therefore it was not God who was responsible for the suffering and evil in the world, but Adam and Eve, and in them humanity as a whole. Theodicean problem solved. In Augustine's view all of humanity was really present in Adam when he sinned (Eve was only the instrument), and therefore all humans have sinned. Because of this 'original sin' human nature was henceforth degraded into a fallen state. Adam and Eve, through sexual reproduction, recreated human nature; their descendants now all live in sin, transmitted from parents to children by the libido of the sex act. Only through baptism, and therefore thanks to the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, could humans be redeemed from the state of sin. This means that all the human beings outside the Catholic Church, even the millions in the past who could not even know that somewhere such a Church existed and even the children who died unbaptized, were condemned to suffer in hell for all eternity.

Sri Aurobindo commented on the Genesis story in quite a different way, which is a striking illustration of the distinction between Eastern spirituality and Western religion. "That fall is man's deviation from the full and pure acceptance of God and himself, or rather of God in himself, into a dividing consciousness which brings with it all the train of the dualities, life and death, good and evil, joy and pain, completeness and want, the fruit of a divided being. This is the fruit which Adam and Eve, Purusha and Prakriti, the soul tempted by Nature, have eaten. The redemption comes by the recovery of the universal in the individual and of the spiritual in the physical consciousness. Then alone the soul in Nature can be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and be as the Divine and live for ever. For then only can the purpose of its descent into material consciousness be accomplished, when the knowledge of good and evil,

joy and suffering, life and death has been accomplished through the recovery by the human soul of a higher knowledge which reconciles and identifies these opposites in the universal and transforms their divisions into the image of the divine Unity.”<sup>3</sup>

### Cyclic – linear – evolutionary

The most important distinction between the Judeo-Christian and the Vedantic view is that in the former there is a gap between God and his creation, while in the latter God *is* his creation and the creation is God. It is a mental reflex reaction of the Christian theologians – and at the same time an illustration of their ignorance of Vedanta – to brand the statement ‘the creation is God’ as pantheism. If there were only the active, manifesting Brahman, this would be true; but the Brahman of the *Upanishads* is always presented as being (in) his manifestation while also existing by himself, apart from it: the active and passive Brahman. (Besides, one might ask why ‘pantheism’ would be such a bad thing. Seeing God in the wonders of the universe, and submitting one’s destiny to the supernal Intelligence that is capable of working those wonders, as the Stoics and so many others did, is one of the most elevated feelings humans can experience. Pantheism is ‘lower’ than monotheism? But how monotheistic is the threefold God, the Trinity, of Christianity? And why did Yahweh have to insist so much on his uniqueness in order to distance himself from the ‘other gods’?)

It bears recalling some sentences from Sri Aurobindo inspired by a real monotheism: “If it be true that the Self alone exists, it must also be true that all is the Self. ... For we cannot suppose that the sole Entity is compelled by something outside or other than itself, since no such thing exists. Nor can

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3 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 56.

we suppose that it submits unwillingly to something partial within itself which is hostile to its whole Being, denied by It and yet too strong for It; for this would be only to erect in other language the same contradiction of an All and something other than the All. Brahman is indivisible in all things and whatever is willed in the world has been ultimately willed by the Brahman. ... 'There is one Lord and Self and the many are only His representations and becomings.'"<sup>4</sup>

An evolutionary development is already present in Vedanta and most outspoken in the *Puranas*, the 'old scriptures' which narrate the succession of the Avatars. Now that we have, thanks to the biological sciences, an idea of how the evolution of life on Earth has proceeded, there can be little that at the time the *Puranas* originated there was also a knowledge of its progressive stages: fish, amphibian, mammal, pithecanthropus, primitive man, tool-making man, mental and moral man, devotional and yogic man, ascetic and spiritual man, future man ... Yet the idea of the cycles of time remained dominant: the *Krita*, *Treta* and *Dwapara Yugas* preceding the *Kali Yuga* in which we live. The ancient Greeks had a similar view of cyclic time – otherwise how to imagine that something as huge as the cosmos could have suddenly appeared at a certain point in infinity or eternity? The cosmos must always have existed and would exist for ever, repeating its cycles endlessly, and, some said, in an identical way. (This was the view the classical Greek scholar Friedrich Nietzsche would experience as an illumination among the mountains of Silvaplane.)

'The vectoral conception of time', with a beginning and an end, originated in the belief of 'the three religions of the Book' which have their roots in the *Bible*: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. "There is certainly an important difference between the Judeo-Christian tradition and a

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4 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 35-36.

certain number of others”, according to the historian Jean Delumeau. “Hinduism, in particular, and Buddhism in its wake, harbour a belief in a sort of cyclical course of affairs. At the end of a certain number of centuries or eras there will be a return to the point of departure. This is also how the Greeks conceived of things. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, on the other hand, history has been looked upon as a vector. There is a beginning and an end. God has created the world, life and mankind, and thereafter mankind has been subject to time. One day God will decide to bring the cosmic story, the story of terrestrial life, to a close, and that will be the end of the world, the end of history, the end of time – all of which come to the same thing.”<sup>5</sup>

The scientific theories of biological evolution have had, since the 19th century, a profound influence on the previous cosmological and religious views of whatever kind. Its arguments of a *history* (beginning and end) of life on Earth, supported by a geological history of the Earth itself, are convincing. Unfortunately, the converging arguments of science can only provide, even at present, a kind of proof that is convincing but not absolute, this because of the simple fact that official science recognizes nothing but matter as the substance of reality, in spite of being constantly confronted with the ‘intrusions’ of life and mind. The new scientific paradigm in biology is therefore violently attacked by the religions who assert, at least the most important among them, that their knowledge and their view are dictated directly by God. Yet the biological theories of evolution are also attacked by schools *within* the scientific paradigm, who argue that the theories fall short of explaining the real processes in nature.

To Sri Aurobindo our separatist egoism and the effective division in consciousness, the necessary condition for

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5 Interview in *Conversations about the End of Time*, pp. 46-47.

the great plunge into the Ignorance which is the soul's adventure in the world, are the cause of our fall from the Divine and our original sin. In his own words: "Suffice it at present to observe that the absence or abolition of separatist egoism and of effective division in consciousness is the one essential condition of the divine Life, and therefore their presence in us is that which constitutes our mortality and our fall from the Divine. This is our 'original sin', or rather let us say in a more philosophical language, the deviation from the Truth and Right of the Spirit, from its oneness, integrality and harmony that was the necessary condition for the great plunge into the Ignorance which is the soul's adventure in the world and from which was born our suffering and aspiring humanity."<sup>6</sup>

A clear distinction should be made between what Sri Aurobindo calls the 'involution' and the plunge into the Inconscient. Involution is the eternal manifestation of the descending hierarchical scale of worlds and their beings. These worlds are non-evolutionary or 'typal', to use Sri Aurobindo's term. All consist of their own kind of substance (in our world called 'matter'); all have their specific degrees of life and mind, some up to the highest gradations of consciousness, and in the worlds of Sat-Chit/Tapas-Ananda even of the pure divine Consciousness. All are peopled with uncountable numbers and varieties of beings, for every degree of consciousness corresponds to a certain kind of being, while no being can exist without representing a certain degree of consciousness.

The lowest degrees of the typal scale of involutory worlds are the worlds of the lower vital. In this scale there is no Inconscient. It is the great 'plunge' of the Divine into its Opposite which has created the Inconscient, as it were *below* the degrees of the lower vital. Out of the Inconscient,

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6 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 169.

through the action of divine Love, the Subconscious and Matter developed, and our material universe was formed. On Earth, a material planet, the evolutionary movement of this universe was continued and accelerated in the emergence of material beings integrating successively the vital and mental degrees of the involutory, typical scale. Simultaneously they developed the psychic element, the Self within, which is there in the star and the atom, and in all things. There are no material living beings in any of the typical worlds, nor, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, elsewhere in our material universe.

Sri Aurobindo asks the question whether the Fall, the introduction into the world of falsehood, evil and suffering, is a general cosmic phenomenon on all gradations of the manifestation, or only a localized phenomenon. He reflects: "There is no authentic inevitable cosmicity of falsehood and evil even as there is no absoluteness; they are circumstances or results that arise only at a certain stage when separateness culminates in opposition and ignorance in a primitive unconsciousness of knowledge and a resultant wrong consciousness and wrong knowledge with its content of wrong will, wrong feeling, wrong action and wrong reaction. *The question is at what juncture of cosmic manifestation the opposites enter in; for it may be either at some stage of the increasing involution of consciousness in separative mind and life or only after the plunge into inconscience.* This resolves itself into the question whether falsehood, error, wrong and evil exist originally in the mental and vital [involuntary] planes and are native to mind and life or are proper only to the material manifestation because inflicted on mind and life there by the obscurity arising from the Inconscient."<sup>7</sup>

The ladders of descent and ascent, involution and evolution, which structure the world of the manifestation are

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 623-624 (emphasis added).



easy to picture and understand. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that all is the One, that all is one in the One, and that there is a constant interconnection and exchange between all levels, elements and individual formations constituting the manifested universe. (Even the physicists have come to the conclusion that the state of an individual particle is dependent on the universe as a whole.) To keep this in mind is crucially important to comprehend the workings of the evolution (which are the workings of the Yoga of Nature and of our own Yoga).

The evolutionary process is twofold. On the one hand it is a slow ascension, a painful climb out of the Inconscient towards the recovery of the pure divine Consciousness of the Origin. This evolving urge has been awakened by the Love which the Shakti poured into the Inconscient at the command of the Ishwara. All levels of evolution are fixed within the limits and in the forms of their specificity, for the simple reason that otherwise they could not be a formal, concrete manifestation but only a fluid, indefinite sort of phantasmagoric mass. 'Fixed' means that a given level of evolution with its particular species cannot break through its own ceiling; yet, if species could not evolve into something higher, evolution would not be able to progress, however strong the inherent urge to surpass itself. What is therefore needed, on the other hand, is a response from the corresponding, already existing and immediately *higher* level in the involution, agreeing to react to the urge or 'aspiration' of Nature in the evolution. (To the aspiration of the mental being in the Yoga the consciousness of the immediately higher level in the evolution, supramental, must respond and, descending, consent to integrate with the aspiring being on the material Earth.)

This may clarify what Sri Aurobindo meant – see the italicized sentences in the previous section – with 'junctures

of cosmic manifestation' and 'stages of the increasing involution'. He asks the question whether 'the opposites' to the supreme divine attributes, i.e. falsehood, evil, suffering and death, are to be found in the whole of the manifestation, or whether they enter in only at a certain juncture where an ascending degree of the evolution is met with the correspondent descending degree of the involution.

"It is to be noted", writes Sri Aurobindo, "that the appearance [of the 'opposites'] does not extend higher than the lower supraphysical life-planes [the degrees of the lower vital]; they are 'powers of the Prince of Air' – air being the ancient symbolism [of] the principle of life and therefore of the mid-worlds where the vital principle is predominant and essential. The adverse opposites are not, then, primal powers of the cosmos, but creations of Life or of Mind in life. Their supraphysical aspects and influences on earth-nature *can be explained by the co-existence of worlds of a descending involution with parallel worlds of an ascending evolution*, not precisely created by earth-existence, but created as an annexe to the descending world-order and a prepared support for the evolutionary terrestrial formations; here evil may appear, not as inherent in all life, but as a possibility and a pre-formation that makes inevitable its formation in the evolutionary emergence of consciousness out of the Inconscient. However this may be, it is as an outcome of the Inconscience that we can best watch and understand the origin of falsehood, error, wrong and evil, for it is in the return of Inconscience towards Consciousness that they can be seen taking their formation and it is there that they seem to be normal and even inevitable."<sup>8</sup>

These worlds of (lower) life and mind, or life-mind were "already created as part of a parallel gradation to the involutionary descent"; they are now forming "a stair for

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8 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 628.

evolutionary ascension towards the Spirit just as the involutory was a stair of the descent of the Spirit." The evolution has started from the black abyss of the Inconscient, where the 'opposites' were absolutes. Thanks to the power of divine Love, these absolutes have been slowly modified first into the monsters of the subconscious, then into the monstrous elementary life-forms, and gradually further into the life-forms preceding the human being and into the human being itself. But one should never forget that we are carrying the evolution in our very cells and in the dark impulses of our subconscious and lower vital. It is somewhere in this dark emergence that, according to the evolutionary formula, the existing worlds and beings of the involutory lower life and mind forms have descended into the upward striving gradations of terrestrial material evolution.

As all is the Divine and Nature makes no mistakes, this insertion of the gradations of the lower life and mind forms must also have its purpose. "For it would contain pre-formations of the good and evil that must evolve in the earth as part of the struggle *necessary* for the evolutionary growth of the Soul in Nature; these would be formations existing for themselves, for their own independent satisfaction, formations that would present the full type of these things, each in a separate nature, and at the same time they would exercise on evolutionary beings their characteristic influence."<sup>9</sup>

The lower life and mind worlds of the involution are real; they are part of our lives and influence them constantly, as we find in their descriptions Sri Aurobindo, traveller of the worlds, has given us in *Savitri*. Especially the cantos 'The Kingdoms of the Little Life', 'The Godheads of the Little Life', 'The Descent Into Night' and 'The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness' make the presence

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9 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 813 (emphasis added).

of 'the opposites' almost palpable in our own being. There Sri Aurobindo explores 'the little deities of Time's nether act' and meets ominous beings 'whose very gaze was a calamity' in 'a borderland between the world and hell'.

*A race possessed inhabited those parts. ...<sup>10</sup>  
 An evil environment worsened evil souls:  
 All things were conscious there and all perverse. ...<sup>11</sup>  
 The Fiend was visible, but cloaked in light;  
 He seemed a helping angel from the skies:  
 He armed untruth with Scripture and the Law;  
 He deceived with wisdom, with virtue slew the soul  
 And led to perdition by the heavenward path. ...<sup>12</sup>  
 There Ego was lord upon his peacock seat  
 And Falsehood sat by him, his mate and queen ...<sup>13</sup>*

*There suffering was Nature's daily food  
 Alluring to the anguished heart and flesh,  
 And torture was the formula of delight,  
 Pain mimicked the celestial ecstasy. ...<sup>14</sup>*

*There Life displayed to the spectator soul  
 The shadow depths of her strange miracle.  
 A strong and fallen goddess without hope,  
 Obscured, deformed by some dire Gorgon spell,  
 As might a harlot empress in a bouge,  
 Nude, unashamed, exulting she upraised  
 Her evil face of perilous beauty and charm  
 And, drawing panic to a shuddering kiss  
 Twist the magnificence of her fatal breasts,  
 Allured to their abyss the spirit's fall.<sup>15</sup>*

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10 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 214.

11 *Id.*, p. 229.

12 *Id.*, p. 207.

13 *Id.*, p. 209.

14 *Id.*, p. 221.

15 *Id.*, p. 212.

Sri Aurobindo, however, was much more than a traveller: he was a warrior who undertook his explorations in search of the roots of the opposites Falsehood, Suffering, Evil and Death with the intention to eradicate them. He was the Avatar with the mission and the Power to put an end to the consequences of 'the Fall', thus creating at last a possibility for all the utopias and millenniums to be finally realized by a superhuman species beyond man.

*He turned to find that wide world-failure's cause. ...<sup>16</sup>  
 In this slow ascension he must follow her [i.e. life's] pace  
 Even from her faint and dim subconscious start:  
 So only can earth's last salvation come.  
 For so only could he know the obscure cause  
 Of all that holds us back and baffles God  
 In the jail-delivery of the imprisoned soul.<sup>17</sup>*

Those who want to follow in his footsteps better be warned:

*All who would raise the fallen world must come  
 Under the dangerous arches of their [i.e. the Hostiles] power;  
 For even the radiant children of the gods  
 To darken their privilege is and dreadful right.  
 None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell.<sup>18</sup>*

This brings us back to where we started. "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil with its sweet and bitter fruits is secretly rooted in the very nature of the Inconscience from which our being has emerged and on which it still stands as a nether soil and basis of our physical existence; it has grown visibly on the surface in the manifold branchings of the Ignorance which is still the main bulk and condition of our consciousness in its difficult evolution towards a

16 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 202.

17 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 135.

18 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 227.

supreme consciousness and an integral awareness. As long as there is this soil with the unfound roots in it and this nourishing air and climate of Ignorance, the tree will grow and flourish and put forth its dual blossoms and its fruit of mixed nature." These roots were so deep and tenacious that, even after a life of avataric Yoga, they still threatened to poison Sri Aurobindo's mission and turn it into a fiasco. Here light is thrown from another angle on the reason of Sri Aurobindo's voluntary descent into death, and on the problem at the bottom of Existence that made the descent an absolute necessity.<sup>19</sup>

"It would follow", continues Sri Aurobindo, "that there can be no final solution until we have turned our inconscience into the greater consciousness, made the truth of self and spirit our life-basis and transformed our ignorance into a higher knowledge. All other expedients will only be makeshifts or blind issues; a complete and radical transformation of our nature is the only true solution. ... A total change of consciousness, a radical change of nature is the one remedy and the sole issue."<sup>20</sup> Sri Aurobindo has come; he has worked out his world-redeeming mission even in death; together with the Mother, his avataric counterpart, he has laid and completed the foundations of the Life Divine upon Earth. Hardly a handful of the billions of people alive know about this; and among those who know, only a few realize the significance of what happened and continues happening.

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19 See Georges van Vrekhem 'Sri Aurobindo's Descent into Death' in *Preparing for the Miraculous*, pp. 171-189.

20 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 650-651.



# 9

## *The Integration of the four Varnas and the New Dharma*

### **The Purusha Sukta**

'Caste', the petrification of the spiritual phenomenon of the four *varnas*, is still strongly associated with India and its society by non-Indians. Yet Westerners may be surprised to learn that a four-fold stratification also structured their societies in the course of their history, and that a four-fold order can even be shown to underlay their present society.

Sri Aurobindo pointed this out a century ago: "It is noticeable that both in Europe and Asia there was a common



tendency ... towards the evolution of a social hierarchy based on a division according to four different social activities – spiritual function, political domination and the double economic function of mercantile production and interchange, and dependent labour or service. The spirit, form and equipoise worked out were very different in different parts of the world according to the bent of the community and its circumstances, but the initial principle was almost identical.”<sup>1</sup> That social hierarchy, wrote Sri Aurobindo, was “the Vedic institution of the four-fold order, *caturvearna*”, i.e. the four *varnas*, often “miscalled the system of the four castes”.<sup>2</sup>

The origin, or founding scripture, of the four *varnas* is known. Sri Aurobindo quotes the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda* “where the four orders are described as having sprung from the body of the creative Deity, from his head, arms, thighs and feet.” The *Purusha Sukta* is one of the latest hymns of the *Rig Veda*. It is there that the concept of the four-fold order appears for the first time in Indian civilization: “His mouth became the Brahmin, his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs into the People, and from his feet the servants were born.”

*Purusha* (= Man) is a huge archetypal, divine Being, neither man nor woman. “The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervades the earth on all sides ... It is the Man who is all this, whatever has been and whatever is to be. He is the ruler of immortality ...” In fact, the *Purusha* is a personification of the Supermind, which is the source of all manifestation and in whom Nature’s evolution takes place. It is extremely interesting to find that the head, the trunk and the limbs of the human body are, in the course of the evolution, gradually shaped after the ‘body

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 375.

2 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 8.

plan' of the Purusha. Present behind the terrestrial evolution, he directs its development.<sup>3</sup>

"To us this is merely a poetical image", remarks Sri Aurobindo, "and its sense is that the *Brahmins* were the men of knowledge, the *Kshatriyas* the men of power, the *Vaishyas* the producers and support of society, the *Shudras* its servants. As if that were all, as if the men of those days would have so profound a reverence for mere poetical figures like this of the body of Brahma ... [and] would have build upon them elaborate systems of ritual and sacred memory, enduring institutions, great demarcations of social type and ethical discipline. We read always our mentality into that of these ancient forefathers and it is therefore that we can find in them nothing but imaginative barbarians ... Even the metaphor or simile in the Vedic style is used with a serious purpose and expected to convey a reality, not to suggest a pleasing artifice of thought.

"The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed ... To them this symbol of the Creator's body was more than an image, it expressed a divine reality. Human society was for them an attempt to express in life the cosmic Purusha who has expressed himself otherwise in the material and the supraphysical universe. Man and the cosmos are both of them symbols and expressions of the same hidden Reality."<sup>4</sup>

In 1907, during one of her visits to Max and Madame Th  on in Tlemcen, The Mother too had an experience of the

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3 See Georges Van Vrekhem 'Adam Kadmon and the Evolution' in *Preparing for the Miraculous*, pp. 1-23. The new gender awareness may create difficulties in the discussion of texts written in earlier times. The literal translation of 'Purusha' is 'Man' (and *purusha* still means the male human being in several Indian languages), but the Supramental Being, for which the cosmic *Purusha* stands, is genderless.

4 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, pp. 9-10.

cosmic Purusha. She told this experience in 1961, in one of her conversations, as follows. 'With great [occult] dexterity' she had left behind one after another of the twelve body sheaths of her human incarnation and arrived at the edge of the Formless. "In this domain one experiences total unity – unity in something that was the essence of Love. ... In a quite unexpected and astonishing way I found myself in the presence of what one might call 'the principle', the principle of the human form. It did not resemble the human being, in the sense that it had nothing of what we are used to see [physically], but it was a form that stood upright, just on the border between the world of forms and the Formless", and she says that it was like a kind of blueprint, model or archetype. "When I met Sri Aurobindo and talked to him about it, he told me: 'It is surely the prototype of the supramental form.' I saw it several times afterwards, later on, and it proved to be true."<sup>5</sup>

### ***Varna is not the same as 'caste'***

In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo sketches the cycle of development of human society. From a symbolic phase, which is still the direct experience and expression of the underlying spiritual Truth, it degrades into a typical phase which is predominantly psychological and ethical. Subsequently it descends into a conventional stage "born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the ideal become more important than the ideal, the body or even the clothes more important than the person. Thus in the evolution of caste, the outward supports of the ethical four-fold order ... each began to exaggerate enormously its proportions and its importance in the scheme. At first, birth does not seem to have been of the first importance in the social order, for faculty and capacity prevailed;

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5 *Mother's Agenda*, 7.11.61.

but afterwards, as the type fixed itself, its maintenance by education and tradition became necessary and education and tradition naturally fixed themselves in a hereditary groove.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus “the rigid hierarchy of castes with the pretension and arrogance of the caste spirit was a later development; in the simpler life of old, difference or even superiority of function did not carry with it a sense of personal or class superiority; at the beginning, the most sacred religious and social function, that of the *rishi* and sacrificer, seems to have been open to men of all classes and occupations.”<sup>7</sup>

“Each man contains in himself the whole divine potentiality”, writes Sri Aurobindo, “and therefore the *Shudra* cannot be rigidly contained within his Shudrahood, nor the *Brahmin* in his Brahminhood, but each contains within himself the potentialities and the need of perfection of his other elements of a divine manhood.”<sup>8</sup> And he draws the logical conclusion: “A spiritual or cultured man of *pariah* birth is superior in the divine values to an unspiritual and wordly-minded or a crude and uncultured *Brahmin*. Birth counts, but the basic value is the man himself, in the soul behind, and the degree to which it manifests itself in his nature.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo, the conventional age reaches inevitably a point where its restrictions become unbearable and are shattered by revolting individuals, as happened in Europe at the time of the Renaissance. “The revolting individual flings off the yoke, declares the truth as he sees it and in doing so strikes inevitably at the root of the religious, the social, the political, momentarily perhaps even

6 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 12.

7 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 360.

8 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 127.

9 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 487.

the moral order of the community as it stands, because it stands upon the authority he discredits and the convention he destroys and not upon the living truth which can be successfully opposed to his own.”<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the inspired and heroic individual revolt the age of his protest, demanding a truthful authenticity in the life of the humans, will gradually become “the subjective period of humanity through which man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilization.”<sup>11</sup>

“This is what true subjectivism teaches us – first that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly that we are in our life and our being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape. It is the old Indian discovery that our real ‘I’ is a Supreme Being which is our true self and which it is our business to discover and consciously become and, secondly, that the Divine is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity, and only by realizing our unity with others can we entirely fulfill our true self-being.”<sup>12</sup>

### The *varnas* in Europe

In European history, the presence and evolution of the *varnas* was quite pronounced. “The feudal period of Europe with its four orders of the clergy, the king and nobled, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has a sufficiently close resemblance to the Indian four-fold order of the sacerdotal, military and mercantile classes and the *Shudras*.”<sup>13</sup> During

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10 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 17.

11 *Id.*, p. 14.

12 *Id.*, pp. 47-48.

13 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 375.

the high feudal period, towards the end of the Dark Ages, the Catholic Church and the hierarchy of the nobility were entirely dominant, living from the sweat of the serfs, who belonged to the soil they were labouring on. The presence of the third estate of the bourgeoisie and the merchants was the result of the increasing importance of the towns and the liberties they gained from the dominant, possessing classes. The towns and their populations created the High Middle Ages with their fortifications, cathedrals and universities.

It would take several centuries before the bourgeois became sufficiently rich and influential to become the bankers of kings and nobles, and to function as a *noblesse de robe* along the traditional 'blue-blooded' *noblesse d'épée*. The aspirations and the impulse behind the third estate, prepared during the Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, would unexpectedly become fully blown in the French Revolution (1789). Sri Aurobindo called the mantra that was its motto – liberty, equality, fraternity – 'godheads of the soul', whose acquisition was the result of humanity's conscious or unconscious striving for ages, and whose possession was the precious crown of effort. "The principal gifts of the French Revolution must remain and be universalized as permanent acquisitions, indispensable elements in the future order of the world."<sup>14</sup>

He and the Mother would constantly work to have the triple revolutionary mantra become or remain the foundation of the humanity destined to be the field of transformation into a supramental world. The biggest known fight for its conservation was their continuous intervention in the Second World War, the second part of the great Twentieth Century War. While the Second World War was going on, Sri Aurobindo wrote to a correspondent: "I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war ... It is the

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14 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 344.

struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope and light and truth, and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible ...”<sup>15</sup>

In an astounding acceleration of history, the fourth estate would come into itself on the heels of the third one. The phenomenon that gave shape to the fourth estate was the Industrial Revolution, more or less simultaneous with the French Revolution. The reasons of the sudden coming about of this technological revolution of iron, coal and steel remain frequently commented upon but actually unexplained. It's labouring force were 'the proletariat', the former serfs, tearing themselves loose from the land to which they had been tied and streaming to the mills and factories in the industrial centres. Although their life could hardly be more miserable than it had been before, soon its destitution was such that something had to happen to change it – and that something was at first socialism (ca. 1830), followed by communism (the *Communist Manifesto*: 1848).

Humankind in Europe was now in a sense complete, aware and active in each of its segments. This was a necessary step towards its unification, which Sri Aurobindo foresaw as inevitable. In the comparisons between East and West, the East is generally seen positively as the treasurer of true spirituality, the West negatively as having lost God and its justification of human existence and the world. It might nonetheless be remembered how strenuously and courageously the West has worked to bring its *varnas* to their full expression, an acquisition which it would soon

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15 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 463.

share with the rest of humanity, and which would directly lead to the possibility of the next, supramental step in the evolution of the species on Earth.

For “all mankind is one in its nature, physical, vital, emotional, mental and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and negroid to the rich cultures of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the countless millenniums of its history.”<sup>16</sup> And Sri Aurobindo wrote also: “The unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature’s eventual scheme and must come about. ... Unity is the very basis of our existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature is moved to realize consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Integration upward and downward**

Yet, the path to consciousness and conscious unity is steep and arduous for ‘the still half-animal race’. Positivist biologists even say that “we are indeed only 1% human and 99% ape.”<sup>18</sup> We know that we are incarnated souls, and as Aurobindonians we have faith in the destiny of humanity.

*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.*<sup>19</sup>

16 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 66.

17 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 284, 513.

18 Mary and John Gribbin: *Being Human*, p. 3.

19 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 46.



Still:

*Only a little of us foresees its steps,  
Only a little has will and purposed pace.  
A vast subliminal is man's measureless part,  
The dim subconscious is his cavern base.*<sup>20</sup>

Like every higher degree of the evolution, *homo sapiens* too had to take up into him the elements of which the previous species consisted, in order to assimilate them and to bring them ultimately to completion. He had "to take up into him the animal and even the mineral and vegetable: they constitute his physical nature, they dominate his vitality, they have their hold upon his mentality."<sup>21</sup> Because of this 'downward propensity' or 'downward gravitation' (an often used term by Sri Aurobindo) each integration of a lower state into a higher results in the *elevation* of the lower state, but also in a *degradation* of the values of the higher state and of the whole to which it belongs.

The third estate, originally the *varna* of reason and communication, became the commercial, 'philistine' bourgeoisie of the 19th century. The integration into society of the fourth estate, originally the *varna* of the dedicated worker, has created the global mass culture in which we live at present, the environment of the sensational man with its own trinity of excitement, fun and sex. It is the world of the masses in the cities, the sports stadiums and the political rallies; of noise, artificially created if not naturally provided; of the search for immediate satisfaction of the desires; of the short-lived information by easily accessible media, with no reliable background in the consuming minds. It is a kind of frenzied dance, choreographed by adroit post-modern organizers, on the verge of a gaping Nihil towards which all backs are turned.

20 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 483.

21 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 74.

Still: humans have a soul, and in all of them the qualities of the four *varnas* are present. The vortex of the unification of humanity and its total disorientation are elements of the global transition predicted and initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. And when all old values and supports have disappeared, something new may have infiltrated without anybody noticing it.

*For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
And belief shall be not till the work is done.*<sup>22</sup>

### **Announcing a new dharma**

In a letter dated 3 September 1943, when the conflagration of Second World War was still raging everywhere on the globe, Sri Aurobindo wrote about “a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice – an infant dharma which would have been throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his ‘Avataric’ mission and established his new ‘religion’ over all the earth.” This new dharma had to do with modern ideas, “the right of all to liberty, both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire”,<sup>23</sup> with the new values of democratic freedom which were the principles of an evolutionary movement. The values Sri Aurobindo was writing about were those of the Enlightenment, which he opposed to the worldview Adolf Hitler and Nazism represented. “Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical.”<sup>24</sup>

“The assertion of his human dignity and freedom is a virtue man has only acquired by long evolution and painful

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22 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 55.

23 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 467.

24 *Id.*, p. 196.

endeavour",<sup>25</sup> and which Sri Aurobindo did not want humanity to lose. This was the reason why he and the Mother had entered the war against the dark, asuric forces. "It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth, and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country [i.e. India] do not dream of and cannot yet at all realize."<sup>26</sup> Shortly before he had written: "It does not seem to me that Nolini is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra."<sup>27</sup>

As we have seen before, 'liberty, equality, fraternity', the motto which became the mantra of the French Revolution (started in 1789) may be seen as the summary of the ideals of the Enlightenment, as the quintessence of the thought of the Age of Reason in the West. It was also the culmination of centuries of human aspiration. These three words signified a first deliberate realization of the rational principle in individual and social human life, the access to a level not attained before in history. Their formulation and the effort to put them into practice did not result in their immediate fulfilment; the inherent inertia in humanity required its gradual effectuation in several subsequent revolutions (in 1830, 1848 and 1870), and even at present democracy is not exactly what the British and French philosophers, the intellectuals of the Age of Reason, intuited.

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25 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 408.

26 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 463.

27 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 219.

None has more clearly seen and strongly affirmed the importance of this revolutionary mantra than Sri Aurobindo, who time after time insisted on the necessity of it being adhered to and worked out in humanity's evolution. We find this concern on many pages of his writings, especially in *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. The Mother disclosed later on that the cause of Sri Aurobindo's and her direct intervention in the Second World War had been the conservation of these revolutionary acquisitions for humanity, and that their part in that war, demanding their constant attention, had brought their Yoga to a standstill for the duration. So dangerous was the threat of the Asura to annihilate the new values, the first formulation of the new dharma, that Sri Aurobindo gave Hitler a fifty-fifty chance of success. Few are aware of the occult significance of the Second World War, this second act of the Great 20th Century War, which was the direct effect of the presence of the Avatar on the Earth and their initiation of a new period in human history.<sup>28</sup>

In wanting to keep the status quo and humanity in bondage, the Asura, identified by the Mother as the Lord of Falsehood, had a relatively easy task, for there is what Sri Aurobindo called the 'downward gravitation' in the still half-animal human being, the weight in him of his evolutionary past and constitution. "Relapse in this [downward] direction is always easy, because the assertion of his human dignity and freedom is a virtue man has only acquired by long evolution and painful endeavour; to respect the freedom of others he is still less naturally prone, though without it his own liberty can never be really secure; but to oppress and dominate where he can – often, be it noted, with excellent motives – and otherwise to be half dupe and half

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28 See Georges Van Vrekhem: *Hitler and His God – The Background to the Hitler Phenomenon* (Rupa & Co, New Delhi).

serf of those who can dominate, are his inborn natural propensities.”<sup>29</sup>

The letter of 3 September 1943 was not the first occasion on which Sri Aurobindo mentioned the action of the new dharma. It was an essential development in humanity he and the Mother had come to defend, foster and develop, and about which he had already written extensively in the *Arya* in different global circumstances. The First World War was then tearing mainly Europe apart, ignited by the Pan-German attitude of superiority and their unconditional demands on other nations, including the British Empire, which were themselves in turmoil. The democratic values, infants when one measured their age on the scale of history, came under attack for the first time in the 20th century.

Part of Sri Aurobindo’s analysis of the then situation reads as follows: “This change in the movement and orientation of the world’s tendencies points to a law of interchange and adaptation and to the emergence of a *new birth* out of the meeting of many elements. Only those imperial aggregates are likely to succeed and eventually endure which recognize the new law and shape their organization to accord with it. Immediate victories of an opposite kind may indeed be gained and violence done to the law; but such present successes are won, as history has repeatedly shown, at the cost of a nation’s whole future. The recognition of *the new truth* had already commenced as a result of increased communication and the widening of knowledge. The value of variations had begun to be acknowledged and the old arrogant claims of this or that culture to impose itself and crush out all others were losing their force and self-confidence when the old outworn creed suddenly leaped up armed with the German sword to vindicate itself, if it might,

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29 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 408.

before it perished ... The seeds of *a new order of things* are being rapidly sown in the conscious mentality of the race.”<sup>30</sup>

A new law, a new truth, a new order of things – a new dharma. Sri Aurobindo has defined ‘dharma’ as ‘action controlled by our essential manner of self-being’<sup>31</sup> “... Our dharma means the law of our nature and it means also its formulated expression.”<sup>32</sup> Our dharma is what we essentially are, not on the surface or according to our own idea of ourselves, but according to our specific and unique place and role in the divine manifestation as expressions of the manifesting Divine. The new law, truth, order of things is a new development of humanity in its gradual ascension towards the divinization of the evolutionary manifestation. In the dualities of our world, where every existent has the innate right to work itself out to the fullest, the old dharma had the right to attack the new dharma and try to suppress it. The divine incarnation in matter is ‘inevitable’ – one of Sri Aurobindo’s keywords – but contrary circumstances can postpone it for centuries or even millennia. This was precisely what Sri Aurobindo warned against during the Second World War. In other words, the forces representing the old dharma threatened his and the Mother’s initiation of a new evolutionary phase, beyond humanity as we know and live it, for which the new dharma was indispensable.

## The old dharma

Then what was the old dharma, the law of the preceding evolutionary stages? The dominant characteristic and right of any form directly animated by the life-forces is its urge to assert its self-existence, to affirm its ego. This

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30 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 320 (italics added).

31 Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 191.

32 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 456.

is the law of all living things, from the unicellular animals to the mammals; it is the law of the human being and its groupings, its societies. " ... Men and nations have to act and think egoistically, because in their self-ignorance that is the only life known to them, and to live is their God-given impulse; therefore they must live egoistically rather than not at all, with whatever curb of law, ethics and practical common sense of self-restraint nature and experience have taught them. ... Science investigating life discovered [in Darwinism] that the root nature of all living is a struggle to take the best advantage of the environment for self-preservation, self-fulfilment, self-aggrandizement."<sup>33</sup>

Struggle and strife have been the main occupations of all life-forms, including the human, and this in all aspects and on all levels of existence. Culture has mostly been a thin coat of varnish on the underlying need of self-affirmation, from the times that the first humans had to survive in nature until now. To the Hellenes sung by Homer, their strength and daring was their pride and justification of life. Of Genghis Khan (1167-1227), driven by the conviction that he was empowered by God, are the words: "The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies, to chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth, to see their near and dear bathed in tears, to ride their horses and sleep with their women." The fame and virtue of kings lay in the expansion of their lands at any cost. Greatness, held to be synonymous with true humanity, was an adornment of the ego.

"National egoism, the pride of domination and the desire of expansion still govern the mind of humanity", wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "however modified they may now be in their methods by the first weak beginnings of higher motives and a better national morality ...

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33 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, pp. 46, 56.

It is idle to hope for a federation of free nations until either the present inequalities between nation and nation are removed or else the whole world rises to a common culture based upon a higher moral and spiritual status than is now actual or possible.”<sup>34</sup> There he wrote also that the egoistic side of human nature was “once all and [is] still nine-tenths of our being.”<sup>35</sup>

‘Others’ have always instinctively been held to be inferior, to be barbarians. Usually people, especially in peaceful times, see themselves as less egoistic, more humane and more civilized, until a sudden crisis puts their self-evaluation in doubt. Instances of genocide of ‘others’ are many even in our recent history. The image humans have of themselves seldom admits that they are a ‘vital and emotional half-reasoning human animal’<sup>36</sup>, albeit an ensouled one. The fact that humans are evolutionary beings has only become a common part of their self-view since the time that Charles Darwin published his essay *On Origin of Species* (in 1859). By then, Carolus Linnaeus had already classified *homo sapiens* among the primates. The physiological resemblance with the apes is, of course, undeniable, however shocking when Darwin’s theory first entered the general awareness.

Religion and spirituality have been directly responsible for the unreality of the idea humans had about themselves, for most of the great Announcers and Realizers, aware of the difficulty the lower sheaths of the being posed to mastery and transcendence, disregarded and discarded them. The body was a burden which had to be disposed of as soon as possible, and the general attempt in the incarnated life had to be one of escape. *Soma sèma*, the body

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34 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 349.

35 *Id.*, p. 577.

36 *Id.*, p. 397



is a tomb, is a famous dictum of Plato's; the medieval poet complained about his body that it was as difficult to tame as a donkey – and these were only the less crude metaphors or descriptions. The ancient Indian seers knew about evolution, but humanity had to wait several millennia before this knowledge became re-integrated in its awareness, one of the signs that a new age was in the making.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the adventure of the soul as evolutionary, and of the human as an evolutionary being, took shape when Darwinism was still controversial, his theory apparently moribund, and the biological sciences in disarray. Here was a seer who changed the perspective of the spiritual eye from the allurements of a totally enjoyable life in the hereafter to earthly self-analysis, understanding and acceptance. The incarnation in material, vital and mental body-sheaths was given a rational justification. From a source of denial, spirituality became an effort at mastery and transformation of one's own nature, and through one's own nature of the world, which is also That, the manifestation of the Divine. It was recognized that 'man was moulded from the original brute', that "Inflicting still its habits on the cells / The phantom of a dark and evil start / Ghostlike pursues all that we dream and do."<sup>37</sup> The complexity of the human being was accepted for what it truly was, and, as the self-confirmation of life equals ego, the mastery of the egoistic human nature became one of the main necessities and objectives of the spiritual endeavour.

Science (especially the biological sciences) has wiped out the image of a God which its reason could no longer accept, namely the Judeo-Christian autocratic God, apart from and above his creation. Given the suffering and injustice in the world, and the continuous strife and slaughter in human

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37 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, pp. 158, 40.

history, it had no difficulty in putting the omnipotence and benevolence of such a God in doubt. And reducing dogmatically reality to matter, it could not but deny all non-material phenomena, thus constructing a human environment with world-changing technological gains, but also with problems of the mind which it remains unable to solve.

For a while science accepted the idealistic humanitarianism of the Enlightenment and the idea of progress, essential to the 19th century. At present its gross materialism can provide no light to a world in confusion, and it has encapsulated itself in a dogmatism ('scientism') as stringent as that of the religions it continues to oppose and ridicule. The human being is nothing but matter; its consciousness is, in some mysterious way, an epiphenomenon of matter; the coming about of the human is due to a long string of inexplicable coincidences in an inexplicable universe. Nothing has meaning, nothing makes sense.

In Sri Aurobindo everything has meaning and everything makes sense, also the still half-animal, but also half-divine, human with his unflagging ego. "While Nature imposes the ego as a veil behind which she labours out the individual manifestation of the spirit, she also puts a compulsion on it to grow in being until it can at last expand or merge into a larger self in which it meets, harmonizes with itself, comprehends its own consciousness, becomes one with the rest of existence."<sup>38</sup> "When this ego pivot is abandoned and this ego-hunt ceases, then man gets his first real chance of achieving spirituality in his inner and outer life. It will not be enough, but it will be a commencement, a true gate and not a blind entrance"<sup>39</sup> – to a new, higher and finally fully enjoyable stage of terrestrial existence.

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38 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 167.

39 *Id.*, p. 255.

## The new dharma

The new dharma is that of an earthly existence without ego. "The absence or abolition of separated egoism and of effective division in consciousness is the one essential condition of the divine life ..." wrote Sri Aurobindo.<sup>40</sup> The divine life is the next step of life on Earth, which Sri Aurobindo showed to be the logical and inevitable sequel of the incarnated gradations of consciousness realized by the terrestrial evolution, including *homo sapiens*. We saw above that Sri Aurobindo defined the ego as the 'pivot' of our present way of being, that which makes us into an individual and orients or structures the world around us. Elsewhere he wrote of the ego as "the lynch-pin invented to hold together the motion of the wheel of nature", and as "the most formidable of the knots which keeps us tied to the Ignorance."<sup>41</sup> But it is also a precondition for the possibility of existence of the lower life-forms, to which the human being for a considerable part still belongs. "He has to put on the temporal, the psychological, the egoistic ignorance in order to protect himself against the light of the infinite and the largeness of the universal, so as to develop behind this defence his temporal individuality in the cosmos."<sup>42</sup>

To overcome the ego is a formidable, not to say quasi-impossible task. "To renounce one's ego is the same as dying for somebody who is not ready to do so", said the Mother.<sup>43</sup> For it is the axis of the ego which gives direction and meaning to our world, which influences all our actions and the way we perceive and assess things. Not to be 'I' seems equivalent to not being anything. And is not much

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40 Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 169.

41 *Id.*, pp. 574, 584.

42 *Id.*, p. 612.

43 The Mother: *Entretiens 1950*, p. 79.

of religion and spirituality an act of egoism, for instance the attempt to escape from the incarnated life into the real or imaginary beatitudes of worlds hereafter, leaving the world and the fellow humans to their fate?

The ego formation has been nature's way of producing separate, individual life-forms. It is, after all, the ego-consciousness which makes us aware of ourselves, of what we physically and psychologically exist of, of what makes us specific. This was the reason why the Mother said: "One cannot melt one's ego in the Divine without being completely individualized. ... One must first exist before one is able to give oneself."<sup>44</sup> "The ego was necessary to form humanity ... Now the ego has finished its work. It has done its work well. It must disappear"<sup>45</sup>, to be replaced by another, higher consciousness.

Turning back to the ideals of the Enlightenment discussed above, it should now be clear that they were a first conscious step towards the surmounting of the ego, individually and socially. As such, they were a basic necessity for opening the gates of humanity's future on an existence and a world beyond the present ego-determined, still half-animal being that is *homo sapiens*. The obstruction by the Asura of this evolutionary step forward would have blocked for centuries or millennia all hope of a better world, as it would have rendered Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's work impossible. "Man needs freedom of thought and life and action in order that he may grow; otherwise he will remain fixed where he was, a stunted and static being."<sup>46</sup> "Europe has obeyed one great law of Nature's progressive march, her trend towards a final equality. Absolute equality is surely

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44 The Mother: *Entretiens* 1954, pp. 293 and 296.

45 *Mother's Agenda* 1973, p. 152.

46 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 211.

neither intended nor possible, just as absolute uniformity is both impossible and utterly undesirable; but a fundamental equality which will render the play of true superiority and difference inoffensive, is essential to any conceivable perfectibility of the human race."<sup>47</sup>

However, "the third and most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula" is also the most important: fraternity, a word which Sri Aurobindo sometimes replaces by (inner) 'unity' or 'oneness'. "Perhaps liberty and equality, liberty and authority, liberty and organized efficiency can never be satisfactorily reconciled so long as man individual and aggregate lives by egoism, so long as he cannot undergo a great spiritual and psychological change and rise beyond mere communal association to that third ideal which some vague inner sense made the revolutionary thinkers of France add to their watchwords of liberty and equality – the greatest of all three, though till now only an empty word on man's lips, the ideal of fraternity or, less sentimentally and more truly expressed, an inner oneness. That no mechanism social, political, religious has ever created or can create; it must take birth in the soul and rise from hidden and divine depths within."<sup>48</sup>

The meaning of these words, written a century ago, becomes poignant at a time when the destiny of humanity on planet Earth, and the continued existence of the planet itself as bearer of life, turns out to have become questionable. Here the practice of spirituality is no longer an individual choice or adventure, but a matter of survival and continuance for the human species. "Until man in his heart is ready, a profound change of the world conditions cannot come; or it can only be brought about by force, physical force or else

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47 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 288.

48 *Id.*, p. 383.

force of circumstances, and that leaves all the real work to be done.”<sup>49</sup> Human unity is the prime condition, the *conditio sine qua non*, for the realization of the age-old dreams of humanity, which will remain dreams “so long as man individual and aggregate lives by egoism, so long as he cannot undergo a great spiritual and psychological change and rise beyond mere communal association.”<sup>50</sup>

The French revolutionary ideals, spread through humanity as the foundations of democracy, are a telling sign that the evolutionary movement in humanity is ready for the momentous change of accessing a new era, a new level of consciousness and being. Equally telling are the unification of humanity and the divulgence of the spiritual means – the all-important treasure discovered and preserved in India – to turn unity into a reality. It is still little realized that the necessary prelude to this human unity was the integration of the four *varnas*, commonly called castes, worked out in Europe and now gradually being imitated everywhere else.

“The coming of a spiritual age must be preceded by the appearance of an increasing number of individuals who are no longer satisfied with the normal intellectual, vital and physical existence of man, but perceive that a greater revolution is the real goal of humanity and attempt to effect it in themselves, to lead others to it and to make it the recognized goal of the race. In proportion as they succeed and to the degree to which they carry this evolution, the yet unrealized potentiality which they represent will become an actual possibility of the future.”<sup>51</sup>

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49 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 553.

50 *Id.*, p. 383.

51 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 263.



# 10

## *Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo*

### **The fateful day**

Sri Aurobindo has subtitled his epic poem *Savitri* 'A Legend and a Symbol'. The legend, chosen from the *Mahabharata*, is the story of Savitri and Satyavan serving as framework for the 'symbol', a glorious poetic creation that gives shape to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's avataric Work and Message.

The first book of the epic, 'The Book of Beginnings', opens with the dawn of the single day which is the actual time span covered – like in a Greek tragedy – by the 724 pages long epic. The dawn of this day evokes symbolically



the dawn of the beginning of the cosmic evolution, ultimately resulting in the appearance of the human species among whose tribes Savitri has been born and is now living. This day, tragically, is also the day that her husband Satyavan must die, according to the infallible prediction by the heavenly sage Narad.

In the following canto, the second, Sri Aurobindo defines what is at stake that day, not only for Savitri but for humanity as a whole:

*To wrestle with the Shadow [Death] she had come  
And must confront the riddle of man's birth  
And life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night.  
Whether to bear with Ignorance and death  
Or hew the ways of Immortality,  
To win or lose the godlike game for man,  
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice.<sup>1</sup>*

These passage, and many others in the text, makes it clear that the contents of the 'symbol' surpass by much the story of the 'legend'. It is 'the riddle of man's birth' that is to be confronted, the 'ways of immortality' that are to be hewn, and the 'godlike game for man' that is to be waged and won – all of which is something quite other than a legend of marital fidelity. For Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is no ordinary young woman, for in her 'the great World-Mother' had arisen: she is the Avatar of the Great Goddess.

At this point it matters to recall exactly what the *Mahabharata* legend tells us. The following is a translation from the Sanskrit by R.Y. Deshpande:

Long ago in Madra ruled a noble king. An ardent follower of the *dharma*, he was of a devout nature and was firmly established in truth. He was respectful to the seers and sages and was kind to the citizens of his

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1 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 17.

country. His name was Aswapati. Performer of *yajnas*, presiding over charities, skilful in work, one who had conquered the senses, he was loved by the people of his kingdom and himself loved them; Aswapati's single concern was always the welfare of everybody and towards that end he spared no effort.

But he was issueless. With the passing of time, and with the advancing of age, this caused him great affliction. Therefore, with the intention of getting a child, he undertook very hard and arduous *tapasya*, extending over eighteen years. Every day he offered a hundred thousand oblations to the Goddess Savitri. He observed rules of the strictest continence, and held all the senses fully under control, and took just a little food, and that too only in the sixth part of the day.

At last, pleased with his devotion and worship, Goddess Savitri herself appeared out of the sacrificial flames in front of him and blessed him. She granted him a boon of fulfilling an appropriate wish of his. She even told him that she, understanding the purpose of his great austerities, had already spoken with Brahma about his desire to have a son. She further informed him that he would soon get a daughter, beautiful and effulgent, and he should not have any hesitation or reservation in accepting this boon. It had been bestowed by the great Father-Creator himself and he should be happy about it. In proper time the King, who ever abided by the Law, established his seed in the womb of his eldest queen, the companion of his *dharma*, Malawi; a few months later a daughter was born to her.<sup>2</sup>

To honour the forefathers by producing a son was in ancient times, and remains now, an obligation imposed on all

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2 R.Y. Deshpande: *The Ancient Tale of Savitri*, pp. 2, 3.

Hindus. King Aswapati, 'ardent follower of the *dharmā*', did everything prescribed by tradition to fulfil this duty. That his *tapasya* was answered by the gift of a daughter must have been a disillusion, making him think of refusing the boon, and only made good by the assurances of the Goddess Savitri (whom some texts say was the God Savitri).

### Aswapati unnamed?

We come now to the third canto of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, entitled 'The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul's Release'. This canto is the first of a development in the epic which will cover half of its totality, for the thread of the legend will be picked up again only on page 349. The canto begins with the lines:

*A world's desire compelled her mortal birth.  
One in the front of the immemorial quest,  
Protagonist of the mysterious play  
In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms ...  
A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,  
Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.  
His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres  
Into our province of ephemeral sight,  
A colonist from immortality. ...  
His human self like a translucent cloak  
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world.  
Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time  
And paying here God's debt to earth and man  
A greater sonship was his divine right.*<sup>3</sup>

"Here the poet introduces Aswapati", wrote A.B. Purani in 1960.<sup>4</sup> Practically all other commentators, analysts and exegetes of the epic agree with him, so it must be true. But is it? If it is true, then why does Sri Aurobindo never name

3 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 22.

4 A.B. Purani: *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*, p. 139.

Aswapati – not in the introductory lines quoted above, nor in the following pages, nor in the following cantos all the way up to page 341, where the thread of the legend is picked up again and the name appears for the very first time. There must be a serious reason for this.

Not naming Aswapati can hardly have been a matter of forgetfulness or oversight of somebody as painstaking as Sri Aurobindo, of whose poetic labour Nirodbaran, his amanuensis, wrote that he made “revision after revision, addition of lines, even punctuations changed so many times.” Moreover, the Books reporting and depicting Aswapati’s (?) actions seem to be of special importance, for again we read in Nirodbaran: “Undoubtedly the first three Books were of a much higher level of inspiration and nearer perfection than the rest, for with ample leisure [recovering from the fracture of his thigh in November 1938], and working by himself [Sri Aurobindo] could devote more time and care to that end, which unfortunately could not be said about the rest of the Books.”<sup>5</sup>

The reason that the name of Aswapati is mentioned nowhere in the first half of the epic is simply that Sri Aurobindo did not write about Aswapati: he wrote about himself. “One in front of the immemorial quest ... Protagonist ... A thinker and toiler in the ideal’s air ... His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres ... A colonist from immortality ...” – all of this is apposite not to a *dharma*-dedicated king, but to an Avatar. This is explicitly confirmed in the lines: *His human self like a translucent cloak / Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world. / Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time / And paying here God’s debt to earth and man / A greater sonship was his divine right.* Each one of these statements is in the epic itself explained as definitions and actions of the Avatar, which were Sri Aurobindo’s own experience.

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5 Nirodbaran: *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 265, 189.

Aswapati was an exemplary man according to the religious and moral prescriptions of the Scriptures reflected in the *Mahabharata*, which is a very complex text on both matters. It may be reminded that at that time there was no yoga. (The four *ashramas* in life might be seen as a kind of collective, dharmic yoga.) The dominant practices were the *tapasya* or self-mastery required by the rules of one's *varna*, and the *yajnas*, the sacrifices, performed for prosperity in this life, a pleasant place in the afterlife, and a high caste in the next rebirth.<sup>6</sup>

The Being introduced by Sri Aurobindo in 'The Yoga of the King' can therefore not be the Aswapati of the legend, and this is obviously the reason why Sri Aurobindo does not name him thus. Moreover, it is a Being that even in the first phases of his yogic progress is superhuman: "He made of miracle a normal act ... He plunged his roots into the infinite ... His soul, mind, heart became a single sun ... A genius heightened in his body's cells ..." The least idea of the accomplishments of his Yoga, of who this Yogi was and wherefore he had incarnated, must make it obvious that the Being, whose eminent identity and actions are recorded in the first half of *Savitri*, is none other Sri Aurobindo himself.

In her conversation about *Savitri* as recollected by Mona Sarkar, the Mother said that Sri Aurobindo was "so full of humility and divine modesty, He never asserted himself."<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo himself has written that an Avatar rarely proclaims himself publicly, although he may do so, like Sri Krishna, to a few intimates. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have often declared in private letters and conversations that they were Avatars, even when not literally asserting the fact. When, for instance, Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter: "It is

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6 See e.g. Nicholas Sutton: *Religious Doctrines in the Mahabharata*.

7 Mona Sarkar: *Sweet Mother*, p. 21.

only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting the earth out of its darkness towards the Divine”, he could hardly have been more explicit.<sup>8</sup> And if, as they confirmed time and again, they had come to make the manifestation of the Supermind in Matter possible, they must have been the last Avatar in the terrestrial evolution, Sri Kalki. But their reticence has prevented their disciples from seeing this and drawing the right conclusion until now, sixty years after Sri Aurobindo’s passing.

The very opening line of canto three puts the previous two cantos about Savitri in perspective – and far out of the context of the legendary Aswapati narrative: “A world’s desire compelled her mortal birth.” It was not Aswapati’s dutiful effort to obtain a son one reads about here. What is at stake is the destiny of the ‘world’, which can be interpreted as the Earth, the Universe or humanity. Then Sri Aurobindo, in magnificent, forceful poetry, describes the nature of the protagonist he is introducing. “A power was in him from the unknowable.” The title of the canto, ‘The Yoga of the King’, should therefore not be understood as ‘the yoga of king Aswapati’, but as the ‘Raja Yoga’, the Royal Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Why did Sri Aurobindo suddenly – when he had the leisure, as Nirodbaran writes – erupt in a poetic venture which exceeded all contextual proportions, a report of his own avataric transformation and his unique role in the great Change of the world? This nobody can tell. Certainly, he was seeking to express his ever higher accomplishments in a mantric poetry which would be of a ‘perfect perfection’ because of ‘the inevitable word’. All the same the care he took, and his constant preoccupation with the poem, point

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8 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 46.

to something more also. The Mother called *Savitri* his 'message'. Sri Aurobindo bequeathed to us the treasure of his avataric testament, and at the same time his and the Mother's spiritual autobiography, so that we might know and use it to contribute our own part in the process of Change. Enthusiasts of *Savitri* have often proclaimed the epic to be the most wonderful poetry in the world, which it is in many ways. But thanks to *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo also continues contacting us through words that are concrete vibrations when read or spoken, the privilege of an exceptional spiritual Force at our disposal.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasts have also projected the ancient Aswapati image on the living image of Sri Aurobindo. The reasoning is simple: the epic's framework is no doubt the Savitri-Satyavan legend, so the king of the *tapasya*, the King of the Yoga, must be Savitri's royal father Aswapati. Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo himself has written in his correspondence about Aswapati by name. And Aswapati is named on page 341 and in the following cantos, so he must have been the protagonist in all the previous cantos too.

What is completely missed here is Sri Aurobindo's art of composition.

### **'The fit reader'**

The pedestrian way in which *Savitri* is often commented upon is amazing. After all, this text consists throughout of nothing less than 'overhead poetry', which means poetic writing inspired from levels above the ordinary human mind. Even the most modest lines originate from the Higher Mind, the source of religions and of some of the greatest literature. The Illumined Mind is often synonymous with genius. The Intuitive Mind equals direct knowledge, the true comprehension of reality of which our ordinary mind

is incapable. And then there is the Overmind to the level of which Sri Aurobindo, in inspired correction after correction, pulled up the most admirable passages of his poem.

The Mother had already warned: "You can find there [in *Savitri*] all the answers to all your questions. ... But the mystery is well hidden behind the lines and one must rise to the required level of true consciousness to discover it. ... All the secrets that man possesses, he has revealed them, as well as all that awaits him in the future; all this is found in the depths of *Savitri*, but one must have the knowledge to discover it – the experience of the planes of consciousness, the experience of the Supermind, even the experience of the conquest of Death. ... It is not by the mind that one can understand *Savitri*. One needs spiritual experience in order to understand and assimilate it."<sup>9</sup>

These words were spoken to a young Ashramite not especially interested in matters of the mind. To the intellectual K.D. Sethna, himself a poet of considerable talent, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer. ... The mystic feels real and present, even ever present to his experience, intimate to his being, truths which to the ordinary reader are intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations. He is writing of experiences that are foreign to the ordinary mentality. Either they are unintelligible to it and in meeting them it flounders about as if in an obscure abyss or it takes them as poetic fancies expressed in intellectually devised images. ... When [*Savitri*] is not understood, it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind ..."

Without 'a complete alertness from the reader' the subtleties of a mystical and symbolic poem can not be grasped, Sri Aurobindo wrote. A critic of *Savitri* "must be one who

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9 Mona Sarkar: *Sweet Mother*, pp. 11, 12.



has seen and felt what is in the thing written ... He must be open to this kind of poetry, able to see the spiritual vision it conveys, capable too of feeling the Overhead touch when it comes." He must be 'the fit reader'. "*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences. ... There must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry."<sup>10</sup>

The care which made Sri Aurobindo change a comma several times over must obviously also have been brought to bear on the composition of the whole. The way *Savitri* grew from a small narrative poem into the final prodigious masterpiece is now well known, thanks to the work of a few dedicated scholars. The 'construction' of the epic, its composition, was changed many times over the years and remained the object of the poet's incessant attention. It is mostly taken for granted that *Savitri* is a kind of simple, continuous narrative. This is far from the fact. Its composition is the element which builds Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece up to a grandeur by which it will 'front the years', like the avataric acts of its author. It is rife with architectural inventions that catch the attention of the reader and open vistas which project him or her into dazzling dimensions, as if passing through a cascade of ecstasy.

One example, which concerns our present theme directly, will have to do. It is the first line of canto three: *A world's desire compelled her mortal birth*. This line, referring to Savitri, belongs logically to the previous canto, and would have been a great line to conclude Sri Aurobindo's description of the missioned Savitri and 'the issue' of her incarnation. Yet it is placed as the grand opening line of canto

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10 These quotations from Sri Aurobindo are culled from the last pages of the 1970 *Savitri* edition by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

three – abruptly followed and contrasted by *One in front of the immemorial quest, / Protagonist of the mysterious play ...* which introduces the other main Character, contrasted although probably related with Savitri. It may be noted that the first word defining the newcomer is the neutral ‘One’, in its solitary grandeur put at the beginning of the line ‘in front of the immemorial quest’. Only then follow the nouns and characteristics giving shape to that neutral One and identifying him as an Avatar.

By so doing, Sri Aurobindo puts as it were the whole yogic adventure of ‘the Protagonist’ in the light, or in the perspective, of Savitri, whose incarnation will turn out to be the result of his avataric Yoga and decisive effort for humanity. This is of prime importance in what *Savitri* really is about, as we will see later on.

### **The hybrid Aswapati**

Considerations like the above are known to some students of *Savitri* and will not come as a surprise to others. They are, however, contradicting the general interpretation formerly and at present supported by many writers and lecturers. As said before, practically all of them teach that the ‘One in front’, the ‘Protagonist’, the ‘Thinker’ from the beginning of canto three up to the end of ‘The Book of the Divine Mother’ is none other than Aswapati. One reads, for instance, that in canto three ‘we get the beginning of Aswapati’s story’; that Aswapati is “a king who is a spiritual person”; that “it was Savitri’s father, King Aswapati, who articulated the world’s desire”; that “Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is Aswapati’s yoga.”

Might it be that *Savitri* is reduced to a simple story because of the lack of effort or the incapacity to read and study it adequately? By which is not at all meant that only

learned scholars should read *Savitri*. A book is an occult instrument, as the Mother explained in her *Entretiens*, and reading a book puts the reader into contact with the mind of its author. The more so the literary treasure which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have left us, the richest spiritual literature ever. But there is a difference between reading for the development of one's knowledge or as a personal spiritual exercise, and lecturing and writing from the platform of a knowledge which is not that of a 'fit reader'. The Mother even said: "[*Savitri*] is something which will be appreciated only in the future, it is the poetry of tomorrow of which he has spoken in *The Future Poetry*. ... It is only the new race with the new consciousness that will be able to understand."<sup>11</sup>

Yes, several commentators of the epic knew that the yoga, the exploration of the supernatural worlds and the supreme meeting with the Great Mother were not the accomplishment of an imaginary Aswapati, but the endeavour of Sri Aurobindo. One reads for instance: "It is very clear that here Sri Aurobindo is writing about his own yoga", and that "Sri Aurobindo's yoga is Aswapati's yoga ..." But even this way of putting things creates a kind of hybrid character which is and is not Aswapati, which is and is not Sri Aurobindo, as in: "We may say, Aswapati mirrors the universal aspiration of Sri Aurobindo himself", or in: "Aswapati felt that he was 'a colonist from immortality', and as such he tended to grow towards, or into, the likeness of his spiritual Self." – "Savitri was born because of a 'world's desire': it was her father, King Aswapati, who articulated the 'world's desire'; and Aswapati was humanity's advance scout destined to prepare the way for the coming Savitri." – "It may be noted here that this was also Sri Aurobindo's own quest as a yogi. In a very real sense these 22 cantos devoted to Aswapati's

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11 Mona Sarkar: *op. cit.*, p. 12.

yoga also describe Sri Aurobindo's own *tapasya*. Like Sri Aurobindo, Aswapati too seeks to win for mankind the secret of transforming the very structure of human consciousness so that life on earth can blossom into fulfilment."

These are only a few examples from the literature on *Savitri*, intentionally kept anonymous. The hybridization of Sri Aurobindo with Aswapati is not an innocuous trifle, it is a serious matter because it influences continuously a reader's approach to the poem and thus his or her approach to Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and their Work – which means the significance *Savitri* may have for the person and the yoga of the reader.

A direct consequence of this confusion is the way Sri Aurobindo and his astounding avataric effort are seen. Who has actually read *Savitri* and can still manage to write: "And so Aswapati flies past world after world, and still mounts higher and higher"? Or: "Aswapati's yoga is the yoga of a scientist. Very leisurely, very impersonal, he has all the time at his disposal and he observes unmoved whatever is presented to his view, whether he is in the vital worlds of the gods or in the world of darkness and falsehood. His job is to report, his job is to observe, and that is what he does"? How can Sri Aurobindo's effort for the great Change in humanity, through the knowledge and mastery of all the levels of manifestation and the incarnation of the Great Mother, be interpreted in such a way? Partially, at least, through the projection of the personality of the ancient king Aswapati on Sri Aurobindo.

Only the fusion of the old lore with the not yet understood new Reality can cause a reader to interpret lines like the following in the manner mentioned above:

*A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart,  
And to discern the superhuman's form*

*He raised his eyes to unseen spiritual heights,  
Aspiring to bring down a greater world.*<sup>12</sup>

*In Night he plunged to know her dreadful heart,  
In Hell he sought the root and cause of Hell.  
Its anguished gulfs opened in his breast ...*<sup>13</sup>

*A divinising stream possessed his veins,  
His body's cells awoke to spirit sense,  
Each nerve became a burning thread of joy:  
Tissue and flesh partook beatitude.*<sup>14</sup>

But there is more. Out of the confusion results an evaluation of *Savitri* which will mislead many a reader among those who take up the book for the first time and thereby rely on the assumed authority of some commentators. It is sometimes as if *Savitri* is whitewashed over with the paint of tradition. No follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will lack in veneration for the ancient Indic Scriptures, be they the *Vedas*, the great epics, or the *Upanishads*. But what to think of the following, stated without explanation: "If we think about the power of Love overcoming Death, we see that this is in consonance with the ancient Vedic and Vedantic teachings of India"? How so? Or: "Before he could dare new spiritual adventures, Aswapati should get to know the bases of the 'Secret Knowledge' that his hoary ancestors – the Seers of the *Veda*, the Rishis of the *Upanishads* – have bequeathed to him. The Sacred Books point the way." "The Secret Knowledge' is the title of a vital canto in the epic (about which more further on).

Of that secret knowledge, sufficiently important to take up a whole canto in a tactical location, Sri Aurobindo declares in a not to misunderstand single line: "This

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12 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 76.

13 *Id.*, p. 230.

14 *Id.*, p. 334.

knowledge first he had of time-born men.”<sup>15</sup> One reads nevertheless: “Such is the ‘Secret Knowledge’ Aswapati has received from ‘time-born men’ [*sic!*] He knows now in fuller detail the long way to be traversed, the signposts, the turns, the clue.” This can only mean that the whole of Sri Aurobindo’s Vision and Work is nothing new, that the hoary ancestors already possessed the knowledge he discovered, and that everything to be found in *Savitri*, and consequently in the whole of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is already contained in the Sacred Books, which point their way.

### Three reasons

In sum, the discernment or lack of discernment between Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati in the first three Books of *Savitri* is of importance for the following reasons:

1. The constant repetition of the name Aswapati in connection with the first three Books of *Savitri* has grown into a sort of tradition from the earliest commentaries onwards – a tradition that persists till this day. Such constantly repeated interpretation tends to settle as established fact, with reference to the first commentators who wrote on *Savitri*, now highly esteemed disciples who are no longer alive. (This does not mean the few followers of Sri Aurobindo for whom *Savitri* became the central focus of their life, in the first place K.D. Sethna.) Such a kind of reverential attitude is common to the development of religions. Its consequences would be nefarious, especially among the reading public who are unable to put an allegedly authoritative opinion into question.

2. In the comments on *Savitri*, the systematic repetition of the name ‘Aswapati’ in connection with its first part – where one should read ‘the Traveller’, or ‘the Protagonist’, or ‘the One in front’, or ‘the Thinker’, all of them used by Sri Aurobindo and meaning himself – automatically, one might

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15 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 74.

say subconsciously, pulls the reader back to bygone times. In the first half of *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, takes us ahead with him in his avataric endeavour to establish the foundations of the future, repeating the promise of their fulfilment. Aswapati belongs to the world of the legend and the past, Sri Aurobindo to the world of the symbol and the future. As said before, no Aurobindonian will show a lack of respect towards the world of the Rishis, of the *Mahabharata* and of Veda Vyasa, but, however great, they belong to what Sri Aurobindo called 'the lower hemisphere', *aparardha*, just like the rest of the bygone history of humanity. In the first three Books of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo, 'in the front of the immemorial quest', has laid for the very first time and for all time to come the bases of the 'upper hemisphere', *parardha*, of a divine Consciousness and Life upon earth. The repetition of Aswapati's name and the associations in accordance with it may act as a kind of film dimming our perception of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's world-transforming action.

3. As mentioned previously, it is beyond doubt that the first three Books of *Savitri* are a record of Sri Aurobindo's experiences, in other words that they are autobiographical, as he has confirmed himself repeatedly in his letters. This, by itself, makes them invaluable – which would be diminished and distorted by ascribing them to the legendary and very human Aswapati. The following statement of Sri Aurobindo's in a letter to a disciple is well-known: "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all about my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see." By now, a great many facts about his life have been gathered and the writing of a responsible, well-founded biography has become possible. The immense value of the first three Books of *Savitri*, however, is that they present us with an extensive account and narrative of what "has not been on the surface for men to see". Who Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were and what they did for humanity cannot be

known without this account, and this goes far beyond anything Aswapati was or could stand for.

### 'The Secret Knowledge'

No canto in *Savitri* has been treated more stepmotherly than canto four in the first book, 'The Secret Knowledge', although it would be frivolous to suppose that Sri Aurobindo had no good reason to write it, give it this intriguing title, and put it, with his art of composition, precisely in that place. 'The Secret Knowledge' is strategically positioned between the first 'Yoga of the King', specified as 'The Yoga of the Soul's Release', and the second 'Yoga of the King', specified as 'The Yoga of the Spirit's Freedom and Greatness'. It may have been these specifications which, in their simplicity and modesty, led several commentators to misread this canto as common knowledge of anyone who had even the slightest notion of yoga. For what else would 'Aswapati's' yoga have been about if not his soul's release, necessarily resulting in his spirit's freedom and greatness? This 'common sense' interpretation seems in some cases to have been supported by the fact that the canto is about evolution and Purusha and Prakriti, also things that are known to be well known.

However, at the end of his 'Yoga of the Soul's Release' Sri Aurobindo had already shot far beyond anything previously realized by any incarnated being. We are told so most explicitly in the last section of the canto:

*Thus came his soul's release from Ignorance,  
His mind and body's first spiritual change.  
A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,  
A new world-knowledge broadened from within ...  
One soul's ambition lifted up the race ...  
The universal strengths were linked with his ...  
He drew the energies that transmute and age ...*<sup>16</sup>

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16 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 44.



It is in 'The Secret Knowledge' that Sri Aurobindo reveals the 'wide God-knowledge' and the 'new world-knowledge' discovered by him in the course of his avataric *Sadhana*. This knowledge is none less than the knowledge which will make the great Change for humanity possible, and must therefore be quite different from the traditional spiritual knowledge for which *moksha* or *nirvana* are the ultimate ideals. Sri Aurobindo states that "a death-bound littleness is not all we are", that there is 'a secret grandiose meaning of our lives' because the Divine is 'in us as our secret self' and the divine intention is other than an escape into a hereafter or an eternal cyclic return.

The enormous importance of the involutory-evolutionary view, of which the terrestrial evolution is a part, is as yet rarely realized. 'The Secret Knowledge' is about the Aurobindonian Revolution to change the world at its foundations, but it is still indiscernible to most minds because hidden behind mental constructions of standardized knowledge about spirituality and evolution. The earthly incarnation of our souls has a meaning in the general divine plan. The human species is not the highest or last one on the Earth, there is a higher aim, a divine sense in the evolution of which we are a part:

*An outstretched Hand is felt upon our lives.  
It is near us in unnumbered bodies and births;  
In its unshaken grasp it keeps for us safe  
The one inevitable supreme result  
No will can take away and no doom change,  
The crown of conscious immortality,  
The godhead promised to our struggling souls  
When first man's heart dared death and suffered life.*<sup>17</sup>

What Sri Aurobindo announces here is, of course, 'the one inevitable supreme result' of supramentalization which

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17 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 59.

will create, beyond the human species, the divine species of the Superman – “The galloping hooves of the unforeseen event, / Bearing the superhuman rider near ...”

*Then in a figure of divinity  
The Maker shall recast us and impose  
A plan of godhead on the mortal's mould  
Lifting our finite minds to his infinite,  
Touching the moment with eternity.*<sup>18</sup>

Here the ultimate aim of the incarnation of our souls and their rebirths is not a last escape into an afterlife, but the transformation which is logically to be expected given the processes of evolution. Moreover, the time when the moment will be touched with eternity is not put off indefinitely, it seems to be ongoing, as suggested by the wonderful lines on page 55, one of the great passages in the epic:

*Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.  
When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast  
And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,  
As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread  
Of one who steps unseen into his house.  
A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey ...  
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.  
In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,  
In body and body kindled the sacred birth ...  
A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;  
For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
And belief shall be not till the work is done.*

Then follow the pages on the deepest explanation of the works of the manifest Brahman. “There are Two who are One and play in many worlds ...” But before this came to be the silent Brahman – ‘The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone’ – had to become Two:

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18 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 67.

*The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force  
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush  
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep  
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.*<sup>19</sup>

Sri Aurobindo formulates here in perfect language the mystery of the division of the One by which the manifestation originated. The One became Two: He and She. He is She, She is He. She has many names in the great Scriptures of India, as well as in the wisdom Scriptures in many other places.

*There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;  
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met  
And light and darkness are their eyes interchange.  
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,  
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;  
They are married secretly in our thought and life.*<sup>20</sup>

These words of ‘The Secret Knowledge’ are of essential importance for anyone who wants to understand and follow the path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Here is the explanation why they were, and are, a double Avatar, one Being though in two bodies, because the level of evolution in which they incarnated still demanded it. The pages following on this quotation might be called the Love Song of the Purusha – which, if Sri Aurobindo is seen as the Purusha and the Mother as Prakriti, might also be the Love Song of Sri Aurobindo. In this wonderful poetry may be expressed their most intimate relation, irradiating into the surrender and adoration of the receptive devotee.

Then, at the end of the canto, Sri Aurobindo uses the same compositional device as he did with the line “A world’s

19 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 67.

20 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 61.

desire compelled her mortal birth", discussed earlier. The canto following 'The Secret Knowledge' is called 'The Yoga of the Spirit's Freedom and Greatness'. In this canto Sri Aurobindo will relate his full development into the Avatar of the Supermind. Yet the first line reads: "This knowledge first he had from time-born men", which undoubtedly refers to 'The Secret Knowledge' and could have concluded that canto. If anything, it confirms the originality of the contents of 'The Secret Knowledge', as it also 'modulates' the directness of the statement – Sri Aurobindo's modesty – into the opening of a perspective on the coming spiritual development.

We have already seen previously that this crucial line, asserting that Sri Aurobindo discovered and brought us a knowledge which renders life and the world worthy, has been shockingly misinterpreted by some. Others manage to write 'Aswapati's consciousness is the consciousness of the Higher Mind' (as if Sri Aurobindo remained stuck on that level!), and still others that "Aswapati acquired this secret knowledge that had come down by tradition ..." The whole of Sri Aurobindo's avataric endeavour is then in conclusion appreciated as follows: "Aswapati presently returns to the phenomenal world, but only after a baptism in the waters of transcendence. His return is a rebirth, or a renewal of life armed with stainless knowledge from the remote ineffable home of Truth. He feels spiritually fresh and strong, even as people feel after a good invigorating bath or a plunge in the waters of the Ganga or a splash under a waterfall ... "

After the greatness of which we have had some glimpses, such asinities are hardly worth our attention, but the reader be warned all the same. Let us rather finish this section with these words of the Mother: "*Savitri* is [Sri Aurobindo's] whole Yoga of transformation, and this Yoga, it is for the first time that we see it appear in the earth consciousness. ... It is something that has never happened before, he is the

first to have made the path in the Unknown so that we may be able to walk with certitude towards the Supermind."<sup>21</sup>

### The Kalki Avatar

It is time the Aurobindonian movement becomes aware that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother incarnated as the Kalki Avatar. In the text on 'The Kalki Avatar' in my collection of talks at Auroville, *Preparing for the Miraculous*, I put the question thus: "According to the Hindu tradition, the evolution of life and consciousness on Earth has been supported by a succession of Avatars. If Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were Avatars, or an Avatar, what or which Avatars or Avatar were they?" The late Mangesh Nadkarni, a well-known speaker on *Savitri*, formulated the same problem in this way: "It looks to me that this time we had to have twin Avatars – for Sri Aurobindo came as an Avatar, and the Mother also came as an Avatar. I wonder whether there have been any feminine Avatars in the past, although the consciousness of the Mother has been present on earth in some form whenever a breakthrough in evolution was about to take place. But this time the Supreme Divine Mother herself has come down as an Avatar. This is probably because the change now contemplated, the transformation anticipated now, is going to be so radical, so unheard of in the history of evolution. The work to be undertaken this time is not an ordinary one. The magnitude of the issues involved is such that two Avatars had to come."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, "the change now contemplated is unheard of in the history of evolution." This alone points to the 'Kalki-hood' of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For: "In Hinduism, the Kalki Avatar is thought of as the last of the succession

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21 Mona Sarkar: *op. cit.*, p. 12.

22 *Collaboration*, Summer and Fall 2011, p. 28.

of Avatars, who will come at the end of the present Kali Yuga. The victor of the last, decisive battle with the hostile forces, he will ride on a white (winged) horse and brandish the sword or scimitar of his power. He will vanquish Yama, or Death, and resolve all opposites as well as overcome darkness. He will be the divine man, at one with infinite divinity.”<sup>23</sup>

No Aurobindonian will deny that the Mother as well as Sri Aurobindo was an Avatar. The problem consisted in identifying *both* of them with the one Kalki. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote: “Too much importance need not be attached to the [traditional] details about Kalki – they are rather symbolic than an attempt to prophesy details of future history. What is expressed is something that has to come, but it is symbolically indicated, no more.”<sup>24</sup> The traditional description stems, after all, from the times of the *Puranas*, when a supramentally transformed world was not even imaginable.

Still less expected was that the new being, the supramental successor of the human species, would be a-sexual, sexless, genderless. How strongly Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have insisted on the need to overcome our evolutionary animality is well known, and one of the first reports by the Mother about her ‘new body’, her archetypal supramental body, was that it was sexless. Moreover, we read in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* how Sri Aurobindo foresaw that the transitory specimens of the ‘new humanity’, called by the Mother variations of the ‘Overman’ (*surhomme*), would have to find the occult means for the gestation of new beings without physical copulation. At the present time, our time in the evolution, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could not yet incarnate as one body,

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23 Georges Van Vrekhem: *Preparing for the Miraculous*, p. 14.

24 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 489.

for that would have been an androgynous monstrosity; the laws of evolution still demanded that they incarnate in a male and a female body.

Yet their essential oneness has been declared by themselves on many occasions. Sri Aurobindo wrote for example: "The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play"<sup>25</sup> – precisely the play of the manifestation in the evolution. And the Mother wrote: "Without him, I exist not; without me, he is not manifest", which is a concise formulation of the supreme gnosis in all high spiritual traditions.<sup>26</sup> She also said: "Sri Aurobindo and I are always one and the same consciousness, one and the same person."<sup>27</sup> And these words of hers are directly applicable to the point under consideration: "When in your heart and thought you will make no difference between Sri Aurobindo and me, when to think of Sri Aurobindo will be to think of me and to think of me will mean to think of Sri Aurobindo inevitably, when to see the one will mean inevitably to see the other like one and the same Person – then you will know that you begin to open to the supramental force and consciousness."<sup>28</sup>

As I wrote in the already mentioned text on 'The Kalki Avatar': "Until now, and throughout the course of the evolution of life on Earth, the Avatars have always been of the male gender, and a female Avatar may seem rather unorthodox, especially to people familiar of old with the line of male Avatars. It is nonetheless obvious that one gender does not represent the full human constitution and condition, nor does it take into account the divine sexless Archetype which

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25 Sri Aurobindo: *The Mother and Letters on The Mother*, p. 81.

26 The Mother: *Words of the Mother*, vol. I, p. 32.

27 *Mother's Agenda*, vol. I, p. 121.

28 The Mother: *Words of the Mother*, vol. I, p. 32.

supports the evolution and directs it towards its goal (i.e. the cosmic Purusha of the *Rig Veda*<sup>29</sup>)."'

Hence the importance of the pages on 'the Two who are One' in *Savitri*, included in the canto on 'The Secret Knowledge', which must be an essential knowledge in our understanding of the world and of the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

*There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;  
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met  
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange.  
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,  
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;  
They are married secretly in our thought and life.*<sup>30</sup>

That this Two are Purusha and Prakriti, has been generally understood. The question, however, why Sri Aurobindo would include in his 'secret knowledge' this supposedly well-known concept of the Samkhya School, and a frequent feature in Indic philosophical and spiritual thought, has as generally slipped the mind. Sri Aurobindo's enormously important validation of the manifestation and Matter, his turn towards the Earth who also is the Divine and must find her accomplishment in her divinization, is one aspect of that new knowledge. If 'Purusha and Prakriti' are another aspect, they must mean more than a traditional philosophical tool of explanation, they too must be part of the great Book of Change that is *Savitri*.

The crux of this matter is that, as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are Avatars, they are the living incarnations of the abstractions Purusha and Prakriti. This in itself is reflected in the magnificence of Sri Aurobindo's pages on

29 See Georges van Vrekhem 'Adam Kadmon and the Evolution' in *Preparing for the Miraculous*, pp. 1-23.

30 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 61.



the relationship of Purusha and Prakriti, 'the Two who are One', which is high philosophy and at the same time one of the most beautiful love songs ever written, and which gives the fundamental rationale of the manifestation of the One. Their *lila* is the *lila* of the One; the *lila* of the One is their *lila*.

*In the march of this obvious ordinary world  
Where all is deep and strange to the eyes that see ...  
She through his witness sight and motion of might  
Unrolls the material of her cosmic Act ...  
Her empire in the cosmos she has built,  
He is governed by her subtle and mighty laws.*<sup>31</sup>

It was not, as Nadkarni thought, two Avatars who had to come: it was a single Avatar who came, the Kalki Avatar, albeit for 'the necessity of the play' incarnated in two bodies, double-poled but of a single essence. And that is what the Traveller beholds when he reaches the origin of his own being:

*There he beheld in their mighty union's poise  
The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,  
A single being in two bodies clasped,  
A diarchy of two united souls,  
Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;  
Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.  
Behind them in a morning dusk One stood  
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable.*<sup>32</sup>

As often stated in the poem, it is from that original source that the being of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother originated, as it is the source that upheld their actions as initiators of the great, superhuman and superhumanly difficult Transformation. "The Mother and I are one but in

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31 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 64.

32 *Id.*, p. 295.

two bodies", wrote Sri Aurobindo, and: "The Mother and myself stand for the same Power in two forms."<sup>33</sup>

Then how to collate the story as told in *Savitri* with the biographies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?

A first possible answer is that the multi-dimensional supernatural worlds of 'undivided Time', as Sri Aurobindo translates *trikaldrishti*, are quite different from the four-dimensional world in which we live and which is the field of our perception. Our world enclosed in space and time might be imagined as a theatre within a city, on the stage of which theatre happenings are performed that are envisioned and prepared in many places and at various times outside it. The Mother said, for instance, that she had chosen the parents from whom she wanted to be born. But it is clear, on a wider scale, that the Avatar comes at times in the terrestrial evolution which are, in the divine Plan, necessary events known beforehand in 'undivided Time' where all is one. All is that; all exists because of That; and nothing exists outside of That.

Sri Aurobindo was born in 1872, and Mirra Alfassa, who was 'even in her youth above ordinary humanity', in 1878. Both were according to their own testimony 'atheists' in their youth, and both would take up their yoga in 1908. (This is only one of a series of parallel occurrences in their lives.) But such data are of little significance when comparing them with the Yoga and the unprecedented explorations and accomplishments of the Traveller in Time who is Sri Aurobindo, and the resulting consent to incarnate of the Great Mother.

A second possible answer is that the grand Endeavour, of which the report is *Savitri*, may have been the

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33 Sri Aurobindo: *The Mother and Letters on The Mother*, p. 127.

experiences which Sri Aurobindo had for the most part from 1910 onwards in Pondicherry, and of which we find summary annotations in the *Record of Yoga*. Mirra Richard arrived in Pondicherry in 1914, rather sceptical of the impression Aurobindo Ghose had made on her husband. In Ghose's photo which Paul Richard had shown her, she had recognized only the political activist. It was when she went to see him for the first time, on Sunday 29 March 1914, that she recognized Aurobindo Ghose as 'exactly' the 'Krishna' which she had seen in her visions previously.

Mangesh Nadkarni said in one of his talks: "Recent work by Richard Hartz and others has shown that it was somewhere around the mid 1920s that Sri Aurobindo realized who Mirra Richard really was. His recognition of her as the Mother, as an Avatar of the Supreme Divine Creatrix, became the seed for the revision that Sri Aurobindo undertook on *Savitri* after 1926 or 1928."<sup>34</sup> Mirra became identified with the Great Mother in 1915. In my biography of *The Mother* I wrote: "Now had come the time for the identification of her [already realized] self with her Self. This crucial event in Mirra's spiritual evolution must have happened in the last days or on the last day of August 1914, for we read in her diary entry of 31 August the invocation: 'O Mother, sweet Mother who I am ...'"<sup>35</sup> Sri Aurobindo wrote the *Arya* in the years 1914-1921, the same period in which most of *The Record* was written. And still, when in 1915 the Richards had to leave India on the insistence of the British authorities, Sri Aurobindo did not ask Mirra to stay, a fact that would remain a painful memory of the Mother many years later.

When Madame Richard and her husband came back in 1920, things seem to have taken a decisive turn, especially after Paul Richard left and Mirra went to live in the same

34 *Collaboration*, Summer and Fall 2011, p. 28.

35 Georges Van Vrekhem: *The Mother – The Story of Her Life*, p. 172.

compound as Sri Aurobindo for the 'seven hidden years'. "When I returned from Japan and we began to work together, Sri Aurobindo had already brought the supramental Light into the mental world", but he had difficulty to make progress. It was on the Mother's recommendation that both of them descended into the Vital, which was when Sri Aurobindo stopped writing the *Arya* and their physical countenance changed so remarkably. Mirra seemed to have become eighteen again, Sri Aurobindo's complexion turned golden, and the *sadhak's* around them knew their 'brilliant period'. But then the descent into Matter and the subconscious had to follow, for that was were the real problem, fundamentally that of the Inconscient, had to be dealt with.

It was from this time onward that Sri Aurobindo began working with Mirra as his equal, for it was then that he began to name her 'Mother'. In the beginning "he would refer to her quite distinctly as Mira", reminisces Nolini Kanta Gupta. "For some time afterwards (this may have extended over a period of years) we could notice that he stopped at the sound of M and uttered the full name of Mira as if after a slight hesitation. ... No one knows for certain on which particular date and at what auspicious moment the word 'Mother' was uttered from the lips of Sri Aurobindo."<sup>36</sup>

Nadkarni suggests that Sri Aurobindo's recognition of Mirra Richard as the Mother had a profound influence on his conceptions and work. "His recognition of her as the Mother, as an Avatar of the Supreme Divine Creatrix, became the seed for the revision that Sri Aurobindo undertook on *Savitri* after 1926 or 1928." He once wondered, in a private conversation with the author, about a fundamental difference between *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. Sure, the grand revolutionary blueprint of the manifestation is the same, but the Great Mother is hardly to be found in the

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36 Nolini Kanta Gupta: *Reminiscences*, pp. 82-83.

former, while she is the title-bearing Protagonist in the latter. The same difference is there in the Yoga as explained by Sri Aurobindo to his disciples: the yogic attitude at the time of *The Life Divine* is one of mastery and distance with one's own constituents and with the world, while in *Savitri* the essential and ultimate Act is the surrender to the Divine Mother – since the mid 1920s, and more specifically since the foundation of the Ashram in 1926, advised as the basic requirement for the practice of the Yoga.

Is all this of any importance to understand the composition of *Savitri* and the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? Yes, because the biographical data as well as the creative masterpiece tell directly of the avataric intervention that changed the course of human history forever. Less so, because *Savitri* should be its own explanation.

*Savitri*, in essence, is the epic of Sri Aurobindo's effort to make the Great Mother agree to incarnate as the female part of the Avatar – the last Avatar, Sri Kalki, missioned to accomplish the work began by Sri Krishna to establish the life divine on Earth.

The Mother herself has said that she had been on Earth from the beginning, "wherever the Consciousness could manifest". Some of her numerous incarnations as a *vibhuti* she has named, Hatshepsut, Joan of Arc, Elisabeth I, and Catherine II among them. But what was required now, to effectuate the great Change, was more than a *vibhuti*: it was the incarnation of the Great Mother herself, fully empowered. It is as such that Sri Aurobindo has drawn her in his supernal poetry, and it is as such that she constituted the Avatar together with Sri Aurobindo. It was also their two-fold bodily presence that made Sri Aurobindo's descent into death possible: the Divine Presence in her remained incarnated on Earth and could continue the Work of physical

transformation during the last twenty-three years of her terrestrial existence.

*In her he found a vastness like his own,  
His high warm subtle ether he re-found  
And moved in her as in his natural home.  
In her he met his own eternity.<sup>37</sup>*

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37 Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, p. 16.



# 11

## *On Occultism*

*An interview with Auroville Today*

*Auroville Today: What exactly is occultism?*

Briefly, occultism can be defined as wisdom or systems of wisdom about that which exists behind the surface of things as perceived by us. We are mental beings, restricted to viewing each phenomenon separately without seeing the whole, unified in one picture. Because our perception is so limited we talk about occultism as a separate phenomenon, while in reality anything outside our mental awareness, anything hidden, is occult. Thinking and feeling are essentially occult acts.



In normal parlance, however, occultism has a much more limited meaning. Most people equate occultism with magic of some kind or other, or with the use of some 'supernatural' power. All kinds of systems have been and are still being developed that endeavour to get access to and mastery of hidden planes for a variety of reasons, mostly to gain knowledge and especially power. Some of these systems are hundreds and even thousands of years old. Astrology, for example, existed already in the ancient civilizations of Babylonia, Chaldea and India. Palmistry has been known since the Egyptian civilization. The Tarot has a cabalistic background; it is a great system of wisdom, you may say even a system of inner evolution which is yoga. But of course, all depends on the quality of the person who uses these systems. If you choose to practise a system, you have to be serious about it and consider it as a part of your life. To just read a book won't do. It is my impression that most Aurovilians are interested in occultism, but few have the patience to make a real, time-consuming study of it.

*In her Conversations the Mother has often warned against the use of occultism, for she says that the practitioner may open him or herself to beings of a lower vital plane. If one consults an astrologer, or allows one's hand to be read or uses the Tarot, what guarantees that those beings are not interfering?*

It all depends on the spirit in which one approaches these systems and their practitioners. If you use occult knowledge in the right spirit, you will get the answer in the right spirit and profit from it. If your motivation is aggrandisement of your ego only or self-satisfaction or search for power of some kind, you are opening yourself to beings of the lower worlds. The only right attitude in such things is sincerity. Sincerity implies a purity which in turn implies surrender to the Divine: it is your only safeguard. This applies to those who consult an occultist as well as to

the occultist. There have been a number of occultists who have misused their power, and who have used other people to feed their ego. You see then a budding guru becoming 'great' because he actually feeds on the devotion of his growing number of disciples. I doubt if a sincere seeker really would be fooled by this. But even if this was the case, it would help him to grow. You can learn from everyone, from a man in the tea-shop or a child no less than from an occultist. You can catch in passing the word that changes your life! Even the devil can lead you to your destiny – on the condition that you are sincere in your search.

I would personally, never fully trust any human being. But I might go to any occultist with a good reputation to learn more about myself. I would not surrender myself to the knowledge or conclusions of the occultist but to the power of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the only trustworthy Beings to speak through that occultist in case it might be helpful for me. If you have made the central surrender to the Divine, then you can go to any occultist, as well as confront any event in life. And there is another important point. Things happen in your life when they have to happen. So if you consult an occultist at a given moment, he may tell you something that strikes you consciously or unconsciously, because at that moment it has to be told to you.

*This brings in the discussion of predestination versus free will. Your observation would imply that even the consultation itself is predetermined.*

Predestination is always a difficult philosophical question. Let's begin by saying that the human world is a world full of choices. There is a motivation behind someone's decision to consult an occultist. This motivation, I dare say, is rarely pure. Most people are only interested in hearing more about themselves or solving a particular problem, especially love relationship. There are very few who come to

an occultist with sincere goodwill for help on the spiritual path. This is the position seen from their angle.

But there is another angle as well. At birth, we are programmed to work out something. It is not blind pre-destination which made your soul choose these particular events in life. Your destiny, as the Mother has said, works itself out on different levels of awareness; the more conscious you are of your destiny, the higher you can reach, the more fully you can work out that destiny. At the highest level the destiny is to reach or realize our Self or the Divine. This fact of the different levels is extremely important for yoga, as it is for occultism. And above everything is the Grace. And it is this combination of Grace and levels of awareness which will give you an answer, even if you do not understand it at the time that it is given or even if you note it only subconsciously, that is important to you for your growth.

*In India, an occult knowledge known as Tantra is practised. What kind of occultism is this?*

In India, Tantra is very often regarded as being synonymous with black magic. In *Mother's Agenda*, and also in her *Entretiens*, you can find instances of so-called tantric magicians using or misusing their occult powers. There is a Tantra of powers. There is also a Tantra of the sexual force. Sri Aurobindo has said clearly that if you are not a completely pure being and you practise these things, you are sure to fail and fall. But the real Tantra is the great Tantra of The Mother. While all the other spiritual systems of India have taken the Purusha as the main source for their yoga, with as their aim to escape from the world, the Tantra venerates the Shakti, the Great Mother as the Divine Creatrix. The aim of this real Tantra is to assert the worthiness of the world, to consider it a holy place, a place of the Divine and divine realisation. Actually, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga has a close relation with Tantra. Once could well call it a Supertantra:

it is the yoga of Matter, of this evolutionary world and it is the yoga of the Divine Mother. Sri Aurobindo has put The Mother, the Supreme Shakti, as the direct support and inspiration for the yoga. He did not do that in the beginning, when his yoga had more of the Sankhya: to step back, to detach oneself from the appearances and all that. But from 1926 onwards, he declared the central path of the Integral Yoga to be the full surrender to the Mother. His answer to the question "Is thinking of the Mother yoga?" for instance, was a simple "Yes".

*That brings us to the question about the place of occultism in yoga.*

Occultism is part of the phenomena of the world in which we live and evolve, and since the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo embraces everything in the world in its minutest detail, occultism must have a place in integral yoga. Sri Aurobindo has written about it, and the Mother has very often taught pure occultism to the children in the Ashram.

*Do you believe that with the advent of the Supramental Consciousness the role of occultism has come to an end or will change drastically?*

The supramental consciousness is a unity-consciousness, where you know everything because you are identified with it. As the Mother has described so strikingly in *The Agenda*: "I *was* the mountains. I *was* the Gods." When somebody asks her to explain, she replies, "I cannot explain because to explain I would have to use words. I *was* that." Actually, one cannot explain anything. One can try and write beautiful prose or poetry about whatever one was, but it is not an explanation, it is just an attempt to express whatever one was, but it is not an explanation, it is just an attempt to express what one has experienced. In the supramental consciousness nothing will be hidden anymore, nothing will

be occult anymore. Everything will be revealed, known and concretely experienced in the one Unity which is all. In such a state of consciousness there is no longer any place for occultism.

On the way towards it, however, occult knowledge will be more and more important – real occultism, which is an essential aspect of yoga. Normally, an ordinary human being, sincerely practising yoga with good intentions, has a long way to go during which, even if he obtains some initial realizations, the greater part of him remains an ordinary human being subject to the ordinary laws of nature. This implies much suffering and many problems, and the farther one goes in yoga the more problems one will have to solve; for in this yoga, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, when one has solved one's own troubles, one takes up the problems of the rest of humanity. The measure of one's positive realizations is equal to the measure of the resistance. One's occult knowledge, obtained through one's realizations, will help to overcome the resistances.

*In conversation with Carel  
As published in Auroville Today # 76,  
May 1995.*

**On Writing about  
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**



# 12

## *How Does One Write about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?*

The first question an author has to ask himself is if he has anything original or worthwhile to write about. There is so much rehash of themes one can find better in the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother themselves.

Another question is: from what perspective does one write? Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are my life, and more than my life. If I am here, it is because I have been brought here by Them. So I write as a student of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. My study is an endless journey of exploration, going from discovery to discovery. It is a constant dialogue



with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's words, and with the interesting and knowledgeable people who are the authors of the other books I read. Particularly reading Sri Aurobindo and *The Mother*, I can never know something definitively, for the next page or book may open a quite new, unexpected view, even when I have read the passage many times before. What I write is what I believe I see and know at the moment of writing. Everybody is welcome to have a different opinion and to correct me if I have been wrong.

A third question is: what kind of public does one want to address? The public one has in mind will determine the choice and arrangement of the subject matter, and the tone one adopts. Most of my books are written for people interested in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for Aurobindonians, although I am amazed that *Beyond Man* and other books of mine have spread far outside that circle.

Actually it has taken many years before some people, who knew me from the time of my arrival in the Ashram and later in Auroville, accepted that a fellow like me might have something worth writing. I have been hurt by the fanatical attitude of a group of Aurovilians who treated me like a leper because they disagreed with a few phrases or sentences in *Beyond Man*. Likewise, I was hurt because *Overman* is not for sale in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram as there seem to be objections against the term 'overman'. I cannot understand how somebody who prides himself or herself on being a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can become a fanatic and insult or hurt others who see things differently. An Aurobindonian should have the largest encompassing mind in the world, while in his yoga being one-pointed and totally surrendered.

It has been said and written that I am not a historian. It has never been my intention to be a historian in the sense

of a person who studies past events and personalities from a materialistic, positivist, academic standpoint. Anything connected even from afar with the paranormal, with spirituality or mysticism – or other matters many academics have never tasted – is automatically blackballed by them. Then how can a historian of this kind have any understanding of what thousands of years of Eastern tradition, research and experience represent? How can he approach great historical beings like the Rishis, Krishna, Vyasa, the Buddha, Meister Eckhart, or the countless anonymous realized beings who have concentrated their lifelong effort on reaching and exploring a higher, greater life? How can his mind be open to the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo?

Can a positivist academic convince another positivist academic of things spiritual? I would say 'yes' in the exceptional circumstance that such a positivist academic has a living soul, perhaps without being aware of it. This is why one should always be cautious about condemning things with which one does not agree, for the Force may use them in ways our mind cannot foresee. But on the whole I think trying to convince academics in an academic way is a vain exercise, because their 'mental formations' are fixed. Changing their mind would mean changing their career and their whole life.

To me a fact is a fact. And I am grateful for the biographical information which has been gathered about the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Now Sri Aurobindo would no longer have to write a book to contradict the false rumours about him. But scientists and philosophers also tell you that facts are only understandable in a context. How could I write about the external, physical lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and leave the reality inside and behind out of the question? Does writing about that 'real reality' make me a 'hagiographer'? There is a line between

mindless adulation and a search for the truth, taking reality into account on its various levels.

Sri Aurobindo called his own method 'spiritual realism'. Matter, the vital and the mind, as well as the spiritual levels and the supermind, are realities. If there are people who prefer to remain stuck in the one-dimensionality of matter – Wilber's 'flatland' – that is their choice. I try to write for intelligent people as an intelligent, dedicated student. My subject is the vision and realization of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I have experienced certain aspects proving the existence of the spiritual worlds, and I find in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother a coherent philosophy which explains it all to me, and a guidance which allows me to put it into practice to the extent of my limited capacities. People on the same frequency, knowingly or instinctively, may read my writings if they have the time and the inclination. If not, they should read or do something else, in agreement with the need of their soul.

*Personal reflections on understanding  
the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother  
as published in Auroville Today # 246, August 2009.*

# 13

## *Preparing for the Miraculous*

“My heart is causing me problems”, Georges says, slightly panting. “This first series of talks at the Town Hall really took it out of me and now I have to take rest. But I want to give the second series of talks, because I like to explain my way of studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and how I try to live according to them.”<sup>1</sup>

We are sitting in his small house, surrounded by hundreds of books. They illustrate the wide range of his interests. “I spend years studying before I embark on writing another book”, he explains. “It has become clear to me that,

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1 These first series of talks have since been published in the book *Preparing for the Miraculous*.

if you read only Sri Aurobindo, you cannot truly understand him, for you miss the wealth of his references and the depth of his erudition. Who can read profitably, say, *The Renaissance of India* or *The Ideal of Human Unity* without any knowledge of the historical facts and circumstances mentioned in them? The same goes for the writings of *The Mother*. Their work relates to the whole world, and one has to acquire something of that global spirit to understand them. It was not for nothing that Sri Aurobindo was born in the East and the Mother in the West, he afterwards thoroughly absorbing the Western culture and she the Eastern. Their vision encompassed the world – and many other worlds.”

### Studying Sri Aurobindo

He continues, “I approach the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by studying the times in which they lived, the historical background. For instance, to know the significance of the Mother’s relation with the ‘Cosmic Movement’ in Paris and Tlemcen, one has to know that Max Théon’s thinking was mainly kabbalistic, and that his wife was an extremely skilful occultist – which is how the Mother, at that time, encountered the ‘archetype’ of the Supramental Being (the subject of one of my talks).<sup>2</sup>

“It is also necessary to study the wider historical happenings. Take, for example, the statements of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on their work and interventions in the Second World War – ‘the Mother’s war’, as Sri Aurobindo so significantly called it – and about the asuric influence behind Hitler and his associates. I wanted to try and find out if this was somewhere corroborated. It led to my studies

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2 See ‘Adam Kadmon and the Evolution’ in *Preparing for the Miraculous*, pp. 1-23

on Hitlerism and the environment in which it originated. This became the subject of my book *Hitler and His God*, the result of five years of exhausting but rewarding work. It was exhausting, for the study of hundreds of books on the war brought me constantly, for months and even for years, into contact with an extremely negative atmosphere. It was rewarding because, though one cannot physically 'prove' Sri Aurobindo's or the Mother's interventions in the war, I was able to show that the historical facts corroborated their statements. They said explicitly that Hitler acted under a demonic influence, – a being the Mother called the Lord of Falsehood, one of the four great Asuras. The study also gave me more insight into what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have done for humanity in that period."

Georges' approach to studying Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is still rather uncommon. "I do not think that much research is being done in this way", he says. "The knowledge of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has become more or less standardized. Present day commentaries are still very much based on the writings of the first *sadhaks*. These writings are, of course, immensely interesting as direct testimony, but they are also limited, as those *sadhaks* had for the most part only access to Sri Aurobindo's writings published in the *Arya*, and to the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*.

"We have now much more material to study: Sri Aurobindo's Letters, the series of articles *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* written in 1950, his *Savitri*, his *Record of Yoga* and *Autobiographical Notes*, his early writings assembled in *Essays Divine and Human* and *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, and so on. There are also the *Questions and Answers* of the Mother and her private conversations in the last years of her avataric Yoga, many of which have been recorded and published as *Mother's Agenda*, and

much more. With the wealth of all this material at our disposal, we should explore the Aurobindonian vision as having a direct impact on an evolving world and as a work in progress rather than as a dogmatic system.”

### **Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary**

“Sri Aurobindo’s activities as a revolutionary, as leading freedom fighter and an extremist in politics belong to his standard biography. But he was even more a revolutionary in spirituality, and this is less realized.

“You see, when Sri Aurobindo agreed with Paul Richard to publish the monthly magazine the *Arya*, he had studied and put into practice the wisdom of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* and he had reinterpreted the *Vedas* and compared the wisdom of India with the other great wisdom traditions in East and West. But at the time he had also developed his own Integral Yoga based on the scriptures and his own experience.

“In the *Arya* he not only formulated his own new spirituality but he had also to show why this new spirituality was valid and how it related to and differed from the existing religions and philosophies – most of which are still dominating the life and thought of India and, outside India, are usually still regarded as the core of Indian spirituality. Just see how ardently he wrote against all fossilized ‘religions of the book’ in the very first paragraphs of his *Essays on the Gita*, and in so many other places. When reading his writings on those ancient texts, it seems to me that he has the greatest respect for their intrinsic values, which he has applied in his own Yoga, but that he wants them reformulated within the framework of his revolutionary vision.

“Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have often spoken about their own path as ‘a dangerous adventure in the

unknown', which was the topic of another of my talks. They, after all, took it upon themselves to bring humanity to an entirely new level. This involved many steps forwards and quite a few backwards. That 'adventure in the unknown' also brought many doubts, and it is no wonder that Sri Aurobindo once wrote to a disciple that no one had had such wrenching doubts as himself. And we know from the *Agenda* a little bit of what the Mother went through in the process of transformation of her body. A 'dangerous adventure in the unknown' indeed.

"When they left their bodies, the next step of the adventure, the result of the descent of the Supramental consciousness, went into full swing. As the Mother said: 'those who have the eyes will see.' She asked for people to develop the capacity of attention, for, as she said, 'this is the time of the unexpected' – the effectuation of the Aurobindonian vision towards the transitional species." I called another of my talks 'Preparing for the Miraculous' – preparing for this great adventure the Mother invited her children to.

## Savitri

The tendency to develop a dogmatic Aurobindonian system, says Georges, can be seen in the way some people approach *Savitri*.

Of all Sri Aurobindo's works, *Savitri* is the one that is probably most widely read. Its reading was recommended by the Mother herself. A book, she said, is an occult object, for when reading it one comes into contact with the mind of the writer. This experience, to come into contact with the 'mind' of Sri Aurobindo, is sufficient reason to read his words, especially the mantric formulations in *Savitri* – not to mention the beauty and grace of every line. Yet Georges has concerns about some of the reasons why *Savitri* is read.



“All important religious movements have their story, their myth”, he says. “Such a story explains to the followers their religion is the only true one, that their God is the only true God, and that their acceptance of that religion is the only right thing to do. It is quite interesting to follow the construction of such stories whether in Christianity – where, for example, Christ was declared to be immaculately conceived and to have resurrected after his crucifixion – in Buddhism, or in any other religion.

“The Aurobindonian movement does not yet have its myth. However, there are indications that *Savitri* might become the Aurobindonian myth, using the elements of the story which is about godlike figures acting against a mythical background. This was the reason that I showed, in an extensive article, that the Aswapati in *Savitri* was not the same as the Aswapati in the *Mahabharata*, but Sri Aurobindo himself communicating the unprecedented phases of his Yoga and explorations of ‘the world stair’, the gradations of the manifestation.<sup>3</sup> The reality about the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is much more fascinating than any myth.”

### Georges’ books

Apart from his translations into Dutch of selections from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and of several books by Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Satprem, Georges has now six books to his credit, with *Beyond Man* having been translated into several languages. A seventh book, *Evolution, Religion, and the Unknown God*, is about to be printed.<sup>4</sup>

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3 In the article ‘Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo’ published elsewhere in this book, Georges takes another view, namely that the Being introduced by Sri Aurobindo in ‘The Yoga of the King’ is not Aswapati, but that here Sri Aurobindo talks about himself.

4 This book has meanwhile been published by Amaryllis.

“Writing is an uphill battle”, he confesses. “You have no idea how often I have asked Sri Aurobindo and the Mother why I had to do this kind of job. For being an author implies taking stands and that has its consequences. *Beyond Man*, for example, though far from polemical, was at the time of its publication interpreted by adherents of Satprem as having been written against him. They have treated me for years in a way which was anything but Aurobindonian or Aurovilian, and even now ensure that my books are not for sale in the Auroville bookshops.<sup>5</sup> Another problem I have is with my book *Overman – The Transitional Being between the Human and the Supramental*, which I rate as one of my most important writings. The book deals with the intermediary being between the human species and the supramental species, which the Mother called in French ‘*surhomme*’, and which I literally and correctly translated as ‘overman’. Though the book is completely based on Sri Aurobindo’s *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth* and the Mother’s *Questions and Answers*, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram censored it. Was it because of the term ‘overman’? I was never informed of this decision, nor was I told by whom the decision was made or why, so I have never had the opportunity to defend my case.

“Indeed, one feels very vulnerable as an author, especially as a foreigner who lives in India by the grace of a Residential Permit. When I came here, the Mother herself, with that winged signature of hers, signed my application papers. I am now seventy-five and still have a long list of writing projects. *Vita brevis ...*”

## Auroville

Has Georges, who has been living in Auroville for more than thirty years, any views on Auroville’s development?

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5 This is no longer the case (eds.).

“Auroville is on the right track. In fact, it cannot but be on the right track, for it is the Mother’s work. What we see as ‘our’ responsibility is, in the best case, no more than goodwill. She is the only one really responsible, for if it is by the Divine that Auroville has been founded, it is the Divine who will (necessarily must) look after it day by day. Otherwise there would be no reason to be here.

“Those who come to participate in the Auroville adventure come to do the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This participation is yoga: not a traditional yoga of escape but an Integral Yoga of transformation. This is not a New Age goal of a happy encampment on Earth where all are smiling, dancing and loving, locked in an embrace of fulfilled brotherhood. Neither is this a path that resembles the spirituality of the past. This yoga is a spirituality without ritual.

“Most Aurovilians are so deeply involved with their daily chores and problems that they often forget the greatness of that which they have chosen, or by which they have been chosen. I believe that in most people here there is what Sri Aurobindo called ‘the God-touch’ and that is what matters. As I said in one of my talks: we here are all seekers on the quest for the Beautiful, the Good and the True. The enterprise, which has built a Matrimandir in its midst, is flourishing against all odds and under extremely difficult circumstances. Being the utopia of all utopias (divinization!), Auroville is still there and growing.”

*In conversation with Carel  
As published in Auroville Today #257,  
November 2010.*

**Articles  
about Auroville**



# 14

## *The Cradle of the 'Overman'*

In the published conversations of the Mother on Auroville, the high expectations she had of the Aurovilians stand out. "*Auroville voudrait être le berceau du surhomme*", she wrote ("Auroville wants to be the cradle of the overman").

The Mother said in a talk to the Ashram students in 1957, commenting on a passage in Sri Aurobindo's *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, that Sri Aurobindo "surely expected from us" [those present at the talk, and in general his followers] that they would aspire to become '*surhommes*', overmen – defined by Sri Aurobindo as 'a new humanity', a race of mental beings born in the usual way whose mentality would become an instrument of the Light and no longer

remain an instrument of the Ignorance. "At the highest it would be capable of passing into the supermind and from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature." It was the realization of this intermediary, overmental race that the Mother said she had taken up from the very moment Sri Aurobindo left his body.

In 1969 she also expressed this expectation for the Aurovilians. But while most of those living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram could at least be supposed to have some basic understanding of the Integral Yoga, this was not the case with the majority of the earliest Aurovilians. The question was asked why the Mother allowed such 'unworthy' people – hippies of all sorts and big-mouthed pseudo-participants in the French student revolution of 1968 – to be the pioneers of Auroville, the City of Dawn, the City of the Future. Why did she not send 'decent' people to Auroville, from the Ashram or elsewhere, who were willing and capable of leading a spiritual life? How could she expect ignorant but pretentious, lazy, half-clad and not so clean, pot-smoking youngsters to become '*surhommes*'?

### **The Supramental and Overman descents**

To answer this question we have to look at developments after 29th February, 1956, the momentous day when the Supramental manifestation took place. Mother named this day 'the Golden Day' – a day, she said in one of her most lyrical talks to the students of the Ashram School, when "a new world is born, born, born!" That day was the beginning of a new world when the presence of the Supramental Force in the earth atmosphere became a fact. The Mother declared, "[The Supermind] is at work here and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it."

Then, on New Year's Day of 1969, another momentous development took place. Mother spoke about the manifestation in the earth atmosphere of a new consciousness, and identified it after careful consideration as '*la conscience du surhomme*', the Overman Consciousness. It is this consciousness, an aspect of the Supermind, which will establish the link, or the many links, between the supramental and the human being. The Mother's identification of the Overman Consciousness occupies several pages of the *Agenda* and is evidently of direct practical importance for all those who practice the Integral Yoga, but one will search in vain for any mention of it in the literature on integral yoga produced in the latest decades.

One might consider the birth of Auroville in 1968 as part of the powerful and totally unexpected worldwide 'tsunami' caused by the Supramental 'earthquake' in 1956. There was the hippie movement, the May student revolt in Paris, the Prague Spring, the American protests against the war in Vietnam, the Beatles, the Indian gurus and the trek to yoga centres in India, Woodstock, etc. The Mother welcomed all these events as signs of and contributions to the birth of a new world – together with what she intended to be the irradiating centre of the new consciousness: Auroville.

The spirit behind those movements was principally a protest against authoritarianism based on the mind. Didn't the Mother stress time and again that the Aurovilians should try not to live in the mind, but according to the inspiration from their psychic being? She emphasized the necessity to go within, to discover the inner being, to let that be the guide of their actions. She insisted that Auroville was exclusively a spiritual undertaking initiated through a direct decision by the Divine, to whom the Aurovilians should open more and more and in whom they should grow. What was asked of them was an absolute spiritual 'one-pointedness' in their



effort and a total surrender to the Divine, even in the smallest everyday things – for if all is That, the apparently futile is That, too.

### **The early Aurovilians: unspiritual?**

In Auroville, at the time, there was probably no one with a spiritual realization, no one who could be recognized as 'advanced'. The early Aurovilians had no pretensions of being spiritual people, and about the Integral Yoga they had rather confused ideas, mixing it with many undigested traditional elements and with their own opinions of how things ought to be. But they were the ones who were given the inner Force to stay and persevere under very difficult circumstances, while the dazed hippies and the arrogant pseudo-revolutionaries left. It was 'the simple people' who lay the foundations of what was and continues to become Auroville. They were the ones who courageously and tenaciously confronted the huge problems, many of which had not even been considered at the start. They have stayed on, and many of them, now old but ever young in their dedication, are still there.

Many 'advanced' persons came to lecture the supposedly ignorant Aurovilians on what yoga really was, on the way they should relate to each other, on the way they should administer their finances, and on many other ways – but not a single one of those knowledgeable people stayed on to show how to turn their wise words into practice, for living in Auroville has never been a sinecure. Besides, most of their opinions did not express the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but projected aspects of the traditional yogas onto a yoga which is new and without precedent, 'from within outwards' in the words of the Aurobindonian formula. The true Aurobindonian attitude was invisible to eyes looking for conventional signs like a common dress code, regular and ritual meditations, a 'decent' community life, a

beatific smile and frequent embraces of 'brotherly love'. Aspiration, surrender, faith? The total dedication of one's life to the realization of a future ideal of transformation? The cradle of overman or superman? A divinized body? Did not all this sound a little 'overcooked'?

Were those early Aurovilians indeed so un-spiritual? Perhaps, outwardly. But inwardly they must have received and answered a call. If you read the life histories of the first Aurovilians – and if you happen to hear the stories of the ones who are joining Auroville now – you'll find that they always mention a moment when there was an experience, a 'contact', and a response to it immediately or after some time. It is the positive answer to that fundamental call which lights the initial spark to become an Aurovilian.

The call, of course, does not by itself spontaneously abolish a person's difficulties inherent in his or her character and temperament. The Integral Yoga is an individual path, individual because our life-stories are different as are our karmic histories, the long line of our previous incarnations. So the difficulties of the Aurovilians are a normal part of the process of inner development. Added to that is the communal aspect of Auroville. For everybody's yoga, in the course of time, should result in a growth, a widening, so that every individual path will necessarily broaden into a communal one.

### **Development guided by the Divine**

Today, we can see that Auroville has developed enormously, a development that is a clear sign of the direct guidance, support and protection of the Divine – and the presence of individuals who have opened to that guidance. The Matrimandir, built by the Aurovilians, is the first tangible blossoming of the Auroville ideal. Together with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Samadhi, it is one of the two

highest places of spirituality in the world. Its importance and effect is still little realized.

There have been other concrete realizations as well, both within and outside Auroville. Inside Auroville, a number of buildings stand testimony to Auroville's aspiration. Outside Auroville there are, for instance, the creation of the Adyar Poonga in Chennai, the restoration of Tranquebar and the work done for the weavers in Varanasi which testify to the Auroville spirit and its love for humanity and the Earth.

Some people are disappointed with the slow progress of Auroville and with the sometimes all too human problems, as there are some who have doubted the guidance and even said that "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have left Auroville and 'moved on'." An atmosphere of negativity and a lack or refusal of understanding sometimes weighs heavily on all, unconsciously. The Aurovilians represent humanity, and the human condition as such is a very mixed affair, constantly pulled down by what Sri Aurobindo called 'the downward gravitation'. Yet one must be badly intentioned to deny that there are really dedicated people in Auroville, people of goodwill, people with a living soul. They were the active incarnations of the Auroville spirit in the grey past decades, when the first enthusiasm had died down, and they will remain faithful to their ideal. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother asked for no more than a handful of sincere practitioners of their Yoga, the other, less stable elements inevitably and necessarily representing humanity. "The flaming pioneers having descended the amber stairs of birth" from *Savitri*, and those who disembarked from the '*bateau supramental*', must be somewhere – including Auroville.

### **A look into the future**

Auroville, like the avataric Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is an adventure into the unknown. When the

Mother talked to the students of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram about the Supramental manifestation and the physical transformation, she spoke about 'the Great Adventure'. This text remains applicable in all circumstances of the worldwide change that is happening, of which Auroville is on the cutting edge.

We are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak – not in its essence but in its outer manifestation – not yet recognized, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely sure of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out – nobody has gone there, nobody has done that. It is a beginning, a universal beginning. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: I invite you to the great adventure. It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails – a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will never be again in the same way. If that interests you ... well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow – I have no idea.

One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then ... set off walking into the unknown. And – come what may!

## Auroville and India

The Mother also clearly defined the relationship of Auroville with India and the world.

India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of present-day humanity. India will be the site of its resurrection, the resurrection of a higher and truer life.

And she added:

And the clear vision: the same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is occurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the ... cure. And it is for that – it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville.

At present, the world is in the throes of a process of unification in which all existing bearings have been lost, and it is often said that its future hangs by a thread. Dreadful catastrophes have been predicted for the present year 2012 (the past catastrophes like the World Wars and the threat of a general atomic destruction are no more remembered). As Auroville represents the world we should not be surprised if we share in the problems. But if we are tuned to the divine inside, as Mother said, we will traverse any ordeal protected by our inner dedication – *Ce que Tu veux, Ce que Tu voudras* – remembering to tune inwardly to the Divine and offering the stuff of our days.

It is to participate in the effort to build Auroville that our souls have chosen to be born at this point in time. The transformative change initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Two-in-One, the Kalki Avatar, when measured

against the evolutionary progress, has proceeded at a pace far beyond any imagination (a fact to which the Mother refers time and again in the *Agenda*). This is the evolutionary moment when the transformation of the world is happening. Nobody can predict how it will happen, and few even perceive that it is happening. We are still too blind. But we have been told and therefore know what to do in order to prepare ... for the miraculous. As Sri Aurobindo prophesized in *Savitri*:

*Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.  
 When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast  
 And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,  
 As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread  
 Of one who steps unseen into his house.  
 A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,  
 A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,  
 A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors  
 And beauty conquer the resisting world,  
 The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,  
 A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss  
 And earth grow unexpectedly divine.*

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# 15

## *Five Questions on Auroville*

1. *What is the relevance of Auroville in the wider world community in relation to peace, harmony and human unity? How has Auroville impacted the larger world canvass, and vice versa?*

Auroville is one expression of the movement towards a species beyond humanity initiated by the Avatar Sri Aurobindo/Mother. Auroville cannot be understood if not seen within this perspective. This is a revolutionary movement encompassing the whole globe and its offspring, humanity. The ways of Nature's evolutionary progress are always hidden, but this time, thanks to the revelations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, one can look out for them and in the measure of one's possibilities try to collaborate



(through the Integral Yoga or through working out what is best in oneself).

To answer this question, one should be a very advanced yogi who can perceive the imperceptible, for instance how, as the Mother said, an inner victory in one's yoga can have as much value for the transition towards the future as a victory on a physical battlefield.

The ultimate goal of Auroville is to be the cradle of the overman, divinized in every part of his or her being. The 'new being' can come about only when humanity has become, consciously and practically, a unified whole. To the world outside it is much easier to present the latter, secondary development than the first, spiritual movement.

*2. Auroville is a concretization of the huge leap from human to divine. Is there any proof that this has been taking or is taking place?*

In his writings in the *Arya* Sri Aurobindo has extensively described five practical goals of the new evolutionary action, of which he and the Mother were the representatives and initiators. 1. India had to become free. 2. Asia had to awake. 3. Groups of nations had to overcome their egocentrism and form the pillars of the one humanity. 4. Humanity had to become one (in diversity). 5. The essence of the Indian spirituality had to be assimilated by the whole world to enable it to realize the next step on the evolutionary ladder.

At the time this was propounded, in full First World War and its immediate aftermath, the realization of each point looked like a chimera, in other words the ravings of a 'mystic'. Now each point is, for all to see, quite advanced on the road of its realization – so far advanced in fact that, in the enormous *Umwertung aller Werte*, the world is loosing

its bearings, and that Sri Aurobindo's vision is the only applicable interpretation of what is going on.

This is rather striking proof of the truth and power of what the Aurobindonian movement stands for. In this movement Auroville occupies a prominent place. It should be a beacon for all living souls who feel the importance and the need of what is going on, and who are looking for a means to collaborate.

*3. Could you highlight what in your view are the most distinctive and important features of Auroville for the wider world community?*

The integration of humanity, of all races, nations and classes.

Dedication of one's whole life to the ideal (of which the basis is the 'surrender' of the Integral Yoga).

Mastery and development of the inner human possibilities without dogma or theatrics.

The daring involvement in a realization of the utopia of all utopias: the striving for a (divine) species beyond humanity not in a hereafter but on earth, even in conditions which, being human, seem almost the opposite.

*4. In 2007-2008, in view of the present world situation, what do you think are the significant contributions the Auroville Experiment is making or could make to the world?*

Auroville is the pioneering experiment of the goals described in my answer to the first question. Vibrations being realities with concrete effects, everything realized in Auroville must have its occult consequences in the world. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have more than once stated that during the decisive transitions the evolution of humanity is always led by a few, a 'family' of souls. Some of this

'handful' are no doubt present in Auroville, hidden to the eye of others and perhaps still of themselves by their surface personality. The Integral Yoga is an invisible yoga, except for those who have the required subtle sight.

In this context it may be pointed out that the lack of 'spectacular' spiritual realizations has a profound meaning: it prevents Auroville to become a place for cranks of all kinds, and of causing the souls with the true call to deviate into the fields of absurdity because of 'spiritual' fancy or pretension.

*5. At the time when Auroville is also facing many difficulties and challenges, could you list in your opinion what are the three greatest challenges that it is facing today and why?*

The existence of Auroville, like that of the world at present, has always been hanging by a thread and will probably continue to do so for some time to come.

- The main challenge can be formulated simply as 'overcoming the ego'. "We want a race without ego", said the Mother. Therefore it might be said that the three greatest challenges are: ego, ego, and ego. But as this looks rather too simplistic, let us formulate two other big challenges.

- One is, and will be, becoming familiar with spiritual phenomena, occult, psychic and above-mind. If we are at the time of the transitional being between the human and the superhuman, there must of necessity come a moment that one, some or several begin to have the realizations, and that they live in them. Such realizations are 'miracles', for as the Mother said: the realization of the soul is like a ball being turned inside out. People must learn to discern between a transitional experience and a true realization. They must learn to live with the occult phenomena, positive and negative. Whatever progress is made on the spiritual level,

it will be a progress in steps, in 'quanta', and each of these quantum leaps, however minor, is actually a miracle. Given the enormity of the global problems, which are Auroville's problems, only a gradual sequence of miracles can solve them and lead up to the goal Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had in view. True, all evolution is in fact miraculous, and the word 'magic' is in this context one of the most frequent in *Savitri*. But this is a time of incredible acceleration, in which the miracles will become visible.

- A third challenge is the one of knowledge, *jnana*. The general ignorance of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother actually represent is at times flabbergasting. True, knowledge is, initially, not the only way or the way of all people. But there should be an aspect of Auroville which makes this knowledge come alive, in the first place for its own development, and not less for the contact with the 'outside' world. If Auroville wants to be a shining example, it has to be an articulated example, able to enter into a dialogue with whomever. The digging up of the enormous treasures Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have put at our disposal is still being done with children's shovels.



# 16

## *On the Use of Drugs in Auroville*

The sayings of the Mother on the use of drugs are rather few; added to those of Sri Aurobindo, they would hardly fill five or six printed pages. However, they contain the only formal and explicit prohibition ever pronounced by her in connection with Auroville: "Drugs are prohibited in Auroville." Considering the fact that her whole lifelong attitude was against rules, prescriptions and prohibitions, and that in her view freedom and personal development formed the basis of all real progress, her unconditional stance on this subject surely deserves our consideration. Her words on the subject are well-known to all, perhaps so well-known that they have become little more than hackneyed phrases, often used combatively during verbal altercations in a spirit of

indignant righteousness. But the way in which they are used does not diminish their profound and lasting significance.

The whole matter depends on what one supposes Auroville to be, and the meaning of Auroville can only be understood if one knows who Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – the one Consciousness in two bodies – were, and are. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are a direct incarnation of the Divine. They have come on earth to make a new step in the earthly evolution possible, for such a step requires the intervention of an Avatar. We know that in the logical order of the evolution, man has to be succeeded by a being of a higher order often called ‘superman’, but perhaps more correctly ‘the supramental being’. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have worked out, through their yoga, all necessary conditions for the transition towards that new species. “Auroville is meant to hasten the advent of the supramental Reality upon earth.” To be an Aurovilian means to be called and to willingly participate in this process of conscious evolution.

The various tendencies, efforts, ideas and partial realizations Auroville stands for, in this time of upheaval and profound change of which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given us the key, can all be found elsewhere on the globe. There are people of goodwill and sincere searchers everywhere, and the movement towards tomorrow is certainly present as a very strong undercurrent in the present-day events. The 20th century has been a period of incredibly accelerated, condensed evolution. As always, tomorrow is present in today, but the vortices of this dizzying evolution cause so much turbulence that the presence of tomorrow is perceivable to hardly a few. Against that background, Auroville stands out because it not only represents the whole of all the positive, future-directed movements, it is also a centre of the Force that renders them possible and that even causes them. Auroville, in an occult way, stands for

the world, all problems and hopes of the world are present here. Auroville is the laboratory experiment in which the world of tomorrow is tested out and should become realizable. In fact, Auroville is the place where the impossible must become possible. It is no doubt the greatest Utopia ever. Its truth and the power of the Force behind it are evident in the fact that it still exists in spite of all impossibilities – of which the people living here and participating in the effort are most aware, of course.

To be an Aurovilian, according to the Mother, one has to believe in human unity and to work for its attainment. But she has also said repeatedly that Auroville is ‘the cradle of the overman’ and, as we have seen, that “Auroville is meant to hasten the advent of the supramental Reality upon earth.” Hackneyed phrases once again? Only for those for whom they are nothing more than mental, theoretical utterances. To be an Aurovilian implies an inner attitude, an inner effort that gives insight in such words and makes them become alive, in an awareness of who has spoken them. This inner effort one calls yoga, or spiritual discipline, or whatever. Fundamentally it is an opening to the Force that founded and supports Auroville, it is a surrender to it – ‘surrender’ being ‘the first and the last word’ of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

An important aspect of their yoga is the fact that it is a *personal* endeavour, an individual striving towards perfection. This is one of the reasons why in this yoga rules, necessarily being of a general nature, cannot be prescribed. One can seek inspiration and insight in the rich literature which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have provided us with; one can seek direct help from the Force that is theirs and that is ever present. The following of their path consists fundamentally in a tuning to their Force, to their living Presence. The first and principal aim of the effort of self-perfection,



and the basis of Auroville as a community endeavour, is a mastery over all parts of our being, to bring them in contact with the divine centre in us that is our soul. (This is the Mother's interpretation of the word 'sincerity'.) Without such a foundation all other or further spiritual movements remain in jeopardy. But a mastery over all parts of the being is inhibited by drugs.

It should be remembered, though, that humanity throughout its history and in all climes has proved most inventive in producing a wide variety of drugs. In drugs all cultures, from the most primitive to the most highly developed, have been seeking solace or escape from the harsh realities of life as well as from psychological insecurity and emotional torture. 'The human condition' has not been very brilliant up to now and humanity has often sought to fulfil its aspirations the easy way, in 'artificial paradises'.

The reasons for taking drugs in Auroville, as elsewhere, may be many; they may be even more numerous here than elsewhere. Physically speaking, matter is a rough and recalcitrant environment, and the body is most often a very uncomfortable housing to live in. Both the physical circumstances and those of the body are doubly difficult in Auroville, given its climate with extreme temperatures and humidity. The body of many Aurovilians has been born and built up in a very different climate. Everyday living circumstances and social life in India and Auroville require for them a profound and long-lasting adaptation. The habits and luxuries of the society in the country of their birth are still lacking here. Permanently living by the grace of a passport and a resident permit, without any civil rights, may create a feeling of psychological insecurity. Etcetera.

Still more confounding is the fact that Auroville is a utopian experiment in the very first stages of realization. The discrepancy at present between the highest goal humanity

has ever undertaken and the concrete attainment of that goal is very striking if not unsettling indeed. We are constantly reminded of this discrepancy – the word itself suggests a kind of infirmity – by the all too human shortcomings in ourselves and in our fellow Aurovilians, and by the denigrating evaluations from the mouth or the pen of outsiders. (So many great men are telling us what to do but none of them try it out here or show the way by their example under similar circumstances.) Human unity? One searches in vain for it in the *Auroville News*, in our meetings, and even in the building of the concrete ‘soul of Auroville’, the Matri-mandir. No religion? Some Aurovilians are more fanatically sectarian than everything they deem themselves superior to. Yoga? Spirituality? One does not perceive one single sign of their practice, say the outsiders and not a few insiders ...

So what do you do when you have dedicated your life to a place like this and when you have been living there for years in ever harrowing circumstances? Why, *bhai*, the most natural temporal solution is to seek solace, escape, forgetfulness, if only for a while. And everybody knows that the shortest way out of Manchester is a bottle of whisky. Or a joint.

Nevertheless, there once was something that impelled us to come here and dedicate our life to Auroville as a worthwhile ideal. Others continue arriving, driven by the same enthusiasm, attracted by the same aim. There is no doubt that Auroville is full of life, talent and potential, and that it continues growing in spite of everything. But the realization of our ideal takes time and life is short. So much are we steeped in the nether difficulties and hassles that we forget to stretch our back, raise our head, and look up to the beauty of everything that has been achieved in a very short while. For what is thirty years for the elaboration of an ideal like ours?

Evidently, to see matters like that, one has to be free of hankering for the satisfaction of personal ambitions. One has to live in a total, unconditional surrender in a yoga which promises few sensational experiences and which is the hardest of all yogic disciplines, for it is the yoga of matter. It might, however, been asked where else than in an artificially heated imagination – and in drugs – the flowery experiences promised by so many flowery gurus are to be found? Great expectations can only grow in the long-tilled soil of patience and dedication.

This is a new yoga, this yoga of matter. Although we have chosen to be the instruments, the results are not meant for ourselves but for humanity. Although the way is individual, we have chosen to follow it in community with our brothers and sisters in humanity. We have no creed, no ceremonies, no dress code, and early or easy outward signs of the fulfilment of our aspiration we hold for suspect. Moreover, our souls have chosen to participate in the yoga of the earth between the time that the Pioneers are no longer physically present and the time that the first results of their and our effort will become tangible. This is the most difficult time of all and it can only be traversed leaning on the staff of faith, our mind illumined by insight in the cause, and with in our heart the burning flame of surrender. What is given to us is a response to the call (the result of so many previous lives), the promise of fulfilment, and the strenght together with a few indispensable experiences to go our part of the way. Didn't the Mother say that one little change in ourselves may be more important than a historic event? The world knows about Auroville and its eyes remain turned towards it, but our inner work is hidden although its consequences be of a global nature.

It is understandable that some get tired, that their effort wavers, that their faith gets shaken. They should know,

however, that having responded to the call to participate in this great adventure their temporary fatigue is a temporary phenomenon common to all spiritual effort. Resting for a while by the wayside may restore their strength or their capacity to open themselves again to the necessary help. But the apparently easy solution of opting out through the alluring gate of drugs is deadly, sometimes physically, always spiritually, because one can no longer be faithful to oneself, because one has stepped off the chosen and protected path. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have clearly stated that drug experiences are never of the spiritual but always of the vital kind, whatever may be said to the contrary. By indulging in drugs one submits to the dominance of the vital forces over oneself. Those forces are malignant and ever trying to counter the upward evolution, which is everything Auroville stands for. Initially tempting and even apparently benign, they seek nothing but their own satisfaction. Submitting oneself to them, their domination will become so complete that one cannot but let oneself be eaten hollow by them. One will have contracted 'the habit' and though alive walk in the shadow world of the zombie.

It goes without saying that much of the above is valid for every kind of vital indulgence. A complete mastery of oneself is impossible without a mastery of the vital elements in ourselves, which in their turn are deeply rooted in the horror worlds of the subconscious. This is why the Mother so often stressed the need of heroism, not of the theatrical but of the real kind, for the battle for self-mastery is waged in the hidden, dark recesses of our being. Evidently, in this battle drugs are not the only problem, there is also sex, and greed, and alcohol, and ego, and ... you name it. Sri Aurobindo has described his yoga as 'a battle on all fronts at the same time'; nothing less will do if the result is to be a surpassing of the established human condition into a new being, a divine being. Being Aurovilian is about that.

Yes, there seem to be drugs which are mainly harmless and non-addictive, although 'mind-expanding' in this case is not exactly synonymous with consciousness-expanding. The trouble however is that there now exists a widespread, worldwide drug problem, the extent and the ugly consequences of which nobody can put into doubt. The Mother has told us how the vital forces have taken the opportunity of both World Wars to descend on the earth en masse, trying to consolidate their dominance over it, or at least to fight to the very last against the Force of the Light in its creation of a new world. Drugs, and the outright demoniacal world connected with them, are surely one of the means of the vital forces in that gigantic confrontation of which we ourselves are not only witnesses but also actors. This means that even if there are 'harmless' drugs, the fact that they are 'drugs', i.e. associated with the drug world and used here will besmirch the name of Auroville and hamper its development, influencing certain attitudes of importance for the functioning and the growth of the community. Is it asking too much of an Aurovilian to stand and act in favour of the name of the Mother's Work, which is also the Work chosen by himself?

The drug-taking youth certainly forms a category apart from the adults and should be given special consideration. After all, they have not consciously chosen to live in Auroville. As the community is a very open system, its youth are knowledgeable of the 'outside' world in all its aspects, often by a direct contact, and should be made aware of the goings-on in that outside world, of its opportunities and of its dangers. The education of its youth is one of the many problems in Auroville, and a still greater problem is the way for them to spend their free time in a meaningful way, as there is no authority that forces or obliges them in any way. A greater freedom of behaviour and choice than the freedom the Auroville youth enjoys is hardly imaginable in any other place.

This brings into question the guiding role by the Auroville adults, by the educators among them and above all by the parents. On the parents rests the main responsibility for the care and guidance of their children and for their education in general. Many parents have been and still are inclined to hold the teachers in the Auroville schools responsible for their children's education and consequently for their attitude towards life's problems. They forget that an Auroville 'school', although commonly called as such, should not function in the way ordinary schools do. An Auroville 'school' should be an open centre of information, learning and progress. This implies that the teachers cannot be considered to be teaching-professionals just like elsewhere; they are Auroville adults who have chosen the very difficult task to teach and partly educate their younger brothers and sisters, even if they are not certified teaching-professionals. Auroville as a whole, the body of adult Aurovilians as a whole is responsible as well for its youth's education as for the ways in which these youth are able to spend their leisure time. Again, as Auroville is an all-round project in its first stages, much work remains to be done in this field. The most problematic young ones are surely those of whom the parents are not there or have not stood by them in the decisive years of adolescence.

Then, how can one deal with drugs in Auroville? On the one hand, the Auroville community has always shown a great eagerness in protecting the individual freedom of its members to the highest possible degree, and that is certainly a good thing. On the other hand, Auroville, being a community located in space and time, with its own ways of development and a specific objective, needs to be guarded in order that its development may remain feasible and its aim ultimately attained. As our aim is a spiritual one, it is a sure thing that the beings, called hostile forces by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, will try to thwart it in every

possible way. One has to live here to become more and more convinced that only a very strong occult protection can explain the fact that Auroville after thirty years still exists, and not only does it exist, it is very much alive and kicking. To found it, the Mother must have been very sure of this occult protection. For the Aurovilians to live within the aura of that protection is a privilege by itself and in a way the assurance of personal progress on the path.

As to the manner in which practically to assure the protection of Auroville against attacks from without and threats to its health and life-force from within, the Mother has given two indications which, in a sense, are the two outer limits with relation to this subject.

The first indication was given on 28.3.72: "If my authority is not respected in Auroville, do you not think that there will be more difficulties there? ... Do you think they have a right to do what they like in Auroville? Have they the right to kill others if they so like? Do they understand this? ... What for are they in Auroville? To do what they like?" Does one have the right to act willingly and continuously in an anti-spiritual way in a community of which the basis is spirituality? For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explicitly declared that the use of drugs is anti-spiritual. Does one have the right to harm or even to endanger the existence of the community?

The second indication was given on 20.8.72: "There is only one way to be convincing – it is to BE that. Then we'll stand strong, we'll have all the divine force on our side. We are here to prepare a superhumanity, not to fall back into desires and an easy life – no. People must feel it; it should be so strong that the sheer force of our sincerity would drive them [i.e. the incorrigible drug users] out – that's what they have to feel. At that point, we will be what we should be. The power of the realization – of the sincerity of the realization

– is such that it's UNBEARABLE to those who are insincere ... If in all sincerity we are on the side of the Divine, we ARE all we should be. That's what Sri Aurobindo always said. If men only knew this: if in all sincerity – in all sincerity – they give themselves to the Divine and side with the Divine, they become all they should be."

So, the solution to an Aurovilian problem like the problem of the use of drugs is rather complex, but "we are not here to do easy things."

Firstly, the use of drugs is clearly an all-Auroville problem, simply because it is an all-world problem. From the Mother's second quote we can only conclude that everybody is involved in the problem, because it is a matter of the degree of BEING of everyone of us, of the measure of our sincerity, of the intensity of our personal inner effort. Considering what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written, the world outside ourselves is a replica of the conditions inside ourselves. 'From within outwards' is one of the formula's one finds time and again in Sri Aurobindo's writings. And the Mother has often repeated that the adverse forces and adverse circumstances are indicators of the status of our inner development, even that they are allowed to exist to exert pressure and to stimulate our development. "Difficulties are ALWAYS graces", she said. In how far are we ourselves pure, clean, sincere, free of desires?

Secondly, everyone of us has come here because something in the core of his or her being had been stirred by some aspect or other, or even by the general idea, by the vision of 'the City of Dawn'. As has already been said, the realization, the materialization of an idea of this magnitude is not easy, especially in the circumstances the Mother has chosen, which were perhaps the only circumstances possible because Auroville had to start from scratch and on Indian soil. We might hope that the dimmed flame in the heart



of those who have gone back on their spiritual commitment will flare up again. We might encourage and assist them in rediscovering their inner motivation, their erstwhile dedication, the choice of their soul. If necessary, we might help them to kick the habit of their enslavement. No soul can forever remain satisfied with living in an artificial paradise. The path of yoga is difficult and narrow indeed. But all help is given, as the Mother has assured us, and of the one who strays from the once chosen path will be demanded a manifold effort to find it back, in this or in a future life.

Thirdly, we should consider the Mother's words: "Have they the right to kill others if they so like?" Have they the right to harm others if they so like? Have they the right to harm Auroville if they so like? They: the incorrigible ones, people of no goodwill, the channels of influences, the carriers of germs which spread cancer in the general body, they who feed on that body without ever contributing anything to it. Freedom is possible only on the basis of an initial choice and with respect for the freedom of others, in this case the freedom to realize their soul's aspiration. It would be absurd to unconditionally endure the presence and workings of persons who act knowingly against Auroville, inviting the powerful forces for whom the Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and therefore Auroville, is THE enemy, as their survival depends on it. In such cases the Auroville community, seeking for inspiration from its inmost BEING, should defend itself and take the difficult but necessary decisions. "I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life – it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress. And those who do not want to keep up with it, should leave."

"[Auroville] is a centre of transformation, a small nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example to the world."

“Auroville has been created for a superhumanity, for those who want to surmount their ego and renounce all desire, to prepare themselves for receiving the supermind. They alone are true Aurovilians. Those who want to obey their ego and satisfy all their desires belong to a subhumanity and have no place here. They must return to the world which is their true place.”



**Articles about  
the Second World War**



# 17

## *Lest We Forget*

On 6 June 2004 the Chancellor of Germany participated for the first time in the yearly commemoration ceremony of the Allied landing in France, on the beaches of Normandy, the decisive military operation which would lead up to the end of the Nazi regime and of the Second World War in Europe. The invitation of the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, and his embrace by the French President Jacques Chirac were meant as the final gestures of reconciliation which would put, after sixty years, a definitive end to World War II. In the newspapers one could read: "Time has healed the wounds. It's time the Germans were there", and the words of Mr Schroeder, saying that

his presence was 'hugely symbolic' and that it meant that "the Second World War is finally over."

The Second World War is still very much alive in the consciousness of humanity, as shown by such successful films like *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Pianist* and the TV-serial *Band of Brothers*. There is, however, little knowledge about the historical facts. What remains in the general awareness are some vague notions of the Holocaust, the bombings of Great Britain and Germany, the SS, and the still fascinating but often caricatural personality of Adolf Hitler. Some prominent historians, like HR Trevor-Roper and Alan Bullock, admit that they cannot explain Hitler, which means, considering the importance of the Führer in Nazi Germany, that they cannot understand the war. There is much writing about Hitler's 'charisma', about the magic power his words exerted on his audiences, and about the 'evil' embodied in the SS and their reign in the concentration and extermination camps. But explanations of the gigantic and terrible event that was the Second World War there are as many as there are students of history, and most key-facts are prudently worded in the subjunctive mode.

We, Aurobindonians, have a general explanation of this war, in fact an encompassing one, provided to us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In 1942 Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple: "I affirm to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance." The emphatic force with which Sri Aurobindo wrote here was rather unusual of him.

And he continued: "It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth, and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country [i.e. India] do not dream of and cannot yet at all realize."<sup>1</sup>

For Hitler did not act on his own initiative. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have stated repeatedly that Hitler was possessed by an emanation of one of the great Asuras, 'the Lord of Falsehood' who calls himself 'the Lord of the Nations', and that he acted as his instrument. "One can say that Hitler is not a devil but is possessed by one."<sup>2</sup> Of this possession Hitler was 'very conscious', for he was 'an excellent medium'. "Without this possession he would be a crudely amiable person with some mental hobbies and eccentricities ... No one thought of Hitler as having anything in him. Then came the vital development, the vital Power holding him in his clutch."<sup>3</sup> This two-sidedness of Hitler's character is mentioned by all his biographers. Often seemingly floating and indecisive, he could suddenly, "when the spirit descended upon him", jump into verbal action and unleash a torrent of words with a power which left nobody in his presence untouched.

"The problem is to save the world from domination by the Asuric Forces", said Sri Aurobindo in September 1939.

1 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 463.

2 Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 575.

3 Purani: *Evening Talks*, p. 645. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 85.



“It would be awful to be ruled by the Nazis or Fascists. Their domination will let loose on mankind what are called the Four Powers of Hell – obscurantism, falsehood, suffering and death. Suffering and death mean the horrors of war.”<sup>4</sup> In his sonnet ‘The Iron Dictators’, Sri Aurobindo calls these powers of hell “The iron dreadful Four who rule our breath, / Masters of falsehood, Kings of ignorance, / High sovereign Lords of suffering and death.”<sup>5</sup> It may be remembered that the four great Asuras, of whom Sri Aurobindo and the Mother always spoke respectfully, were the reversal, at the beginning of the cosmic evolution, of the essential divine attributes which are Light, Truth, Life and Bliss.

Hitler is still often misrepresented as something like the droll figure in Charlie Chaplin’s parodical film *The Great Dictator*, or as a kind of screaming, half-mad sexual pervert. The fact is that he was driven by the vision inspired into him by his Lord, and that this vision was world-encompassing. The Aryans (read: the Aryan Germans) were the master race, whose rightful duty it was to submit all other peoples and rule the earth. He, Adolf Hitler, was the German Messiah, sent with the mission to lead his people towards a golden age, the Empire of a Thousand Years. As the Germans were the Chosen People, there was no place for another people which claimed to be chosen, namely the Jews, who therefore had to be eliminated by any means. The human acquisitions of intelligence, individual liberty and social fraternity, together with the virtues of the soul, were no longer of importance. They had to be replaced by the properties of power, physical strength, harshness, insensitivity, and other attitudes which would favour the global domination of the (white) Aryans.

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4 Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 232.

5 Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*, p. 136.

As each God contains in himself all the qualities of all other Gods and of the Divine as such, so each Asura contains in himself all the anti-divine qualities of the other Asuras. Falsehood, ignorance, suffering and death never exist separately, though they may be dominant according to the circumstances. In India the beings who are these powers are known as 'Asuras', the basically anti-divine cosmic powers said to be older than the Gods and who will do battle with them for as long as the divine Providence allows or deems necessary. This battle between the good and the evil Forces is the main theme of the mythology of all peoples. In the West the same four scourges are known as 'the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'.

This takes us directly to Hitler, acting under the inspiration of the Lord of Falsehood, and the background of the Second World War which necessitated the direct intervention of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is the intention of the Asuras, still lords of the earthly evolution, to maintain their reign over the earth and all beings on it, for their existence depends upon this reign. The battle between the Asuras and the Gods has always been, in essence, a fight about the possibility of evolution upon the Earth. The Asuras want to keep things as they are, for they thrive in darkness and ignorance; the Gods want to construct the path of evolution that, from that darkness and ignorance, will lead back to the divine Light, Truth and Bliss. (One can follow the gradual advance of the progress made up to the present evolutionary stage in what Sri Aurobindo calls 'the procession of the Avatars'.) The battle of the Gods has rendered the apparition upon earth of the human being possible. Humanity has now reached the critical point of transformation into a higher, supramental, divine being.

This transformation is, of course, what the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were and are about. The

sequence of hot and cold global wars of the 20th century, seen in this light, acquires a significance which explains the huge acts of destruction and death, and even the menace of the extinction of mankind. One may search in vain for another explanation which so fully and clearly fits the facts. But the concepts mentioned in the previous paragraphs are, generally speaking, not within the horizon of Western thought at present and only still partially alive in the East. Besides, our 'post-modern' era is a time of confusion.

"What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves", wrote Sri Aurobindo. "If they put themselves on the Asuric side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished."<sup>6</sup>

The human being consists of matter, the life forces and the mind. So does humanity as a whole. The possibilities of the individual being remain limited by the possibilities created in the species in the course of the long battle of the divine and the anti-divine forces during the upwardly spiralling cycles of humanity. Within humanity this battle is fought as the yoga of the select souls which carry the destiny of humanity, by the *vibhutis*, and at the most crucial moments by the Avatars. The Avatars incarnate in times of greatest need, when humanity itself, in its great souls and *vibhutis*, is not able to go beyond its capabilities. These times of greatest need have always an evolutionary significance: the Avatar comes to take evolution a step forward.

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6 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 465-466.

It would be illogical to suppose that humanity can produce the next higher being, provisionally called the 'superman', if it is not fully developed, if it has not fully explored and realized its inherent capabilities. According to Sri Aurobindo, humanity at the present point in its cycle of evolution has reached the required maturity for that unique moment in human evolution: the moment of transition into a new, higher, divine being. For this to be possible at least an upper layer of the mass of humanity had to reach the full mental development, which was the task of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The new values created in these accelerating periods of the human development were to become an integral part of the general human constitution.

"If mankind is to be spiritualized, it must first in the mass cease to be the material or the vital man and become the psychic and the true mental being. It may be questioned whether such a mass progress is possible, but if it is not, then the spiritualization of mankind as a whole is a chimeric."<sup>7</sup> "The mind and intellect must develop to their fullness so that the spirituality of the race may rise securely upward upon a broad basis of the developed lower nature in man, the intelligent mental being ... So long as the hour of the rational age has not arrived, the irrational period of society cannot be left behind, and that arrival can only be when not a class or a few but the multitude has learned to think, to exercise its intelligence actively."<sup>8</sup>

"Whatever modifications may arrive, whatever new tendencies intervene, whatever reactions oppose, it could hardly then be doubted that the principal gifts of the French Revolution must remain and be universalized as permanent acquisitions, indispensable elements in the future order of

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7 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 253.

8 *Id.*, pp.188.

the world, – national self-consciousness and self-government, freedom and enlightenment for the people and so much social equality and justice at least as is indispensable to political liberty; for with any form of fixed and rigid inequality democratic self-government is incompatible.”<sup>9</sup>

Whatever happens in history – and the path of evolution is dotted with catastrophes, which seem to be, like the wars, a means of intensified change – “to go back is impossible, the attempt is always, indeed, an illusion.”<sup>10</sup> But to counteract the unique possibility of progress now present in humanity was precisely the intention of the Lord of Falsehood who, firstly, caused an anti-Enlightenment and anti-intellect wave, called Fascism, and who, secondly, inspired Hitler with a similar, although much more radical far-reaching, programme. “God’s front is the spiritual front ... Hitler’s Germany is not God’s front. It is the Asuric front, through which the Asura aims at world-domination. It is the descent of the Asuric world upon the human to establish its own power on the earth.”<sup>11</sup> “Hitler did not want to keep the wheel of history moving, he wanted it to turn backwards”, writes the German historian Guido Knopp, who also speaks about Hitler’s intention “to go back to pre-modern, even pre-civilized forms of society”.<sup>12</sup>

There can be no doubt about this when one reads Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* – which at the time too few did seriously – and when one reads his recorded sayings about his vision. “Creation is not finished”, he said, “at least not as far as the human being is concerned. The human being stands, biologically speaking, clearly on a turning point. A new

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9 Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 345.

10 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 42.

11 Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 669.

12 Guido Knopp: *Hitler – Eine Bilanz*, pp. 176, 177.

kind of human being becomes discernible ... This causes the old species Man, as we have known it until now, to become inexorably decadent ... All the creative power will be concentrated in the new species Man. Both species will quickly separate and develop in opposite directions. The one will sink below humanity, the other will rise far above the present humanity. I might call the former 'god-man' and the latter 'mass animal' ... Yes, man is something that has to be overcome. Nietzsche knew already something about this in his own way. ... Man becomes God, this is what it means in simple words. Man is the becoming God ... Do you understand now the depth of our National Socialist movement?" Hitler asked Hermann Rauschnig, the man to whom these words were addressed. "He who understands National Socialism only as a political movement knows practically nothing about it. It is more than a religion: it is the will to create a new humanity."<sup>13</sup>

These astonishing and revealing words leave little doubt that Hitler's vision was, by way of speaking, the shadow of Sri Aurobindo's. In fact, he systematically counteracted everything the Enlightenment stood for in order to build his pseudo-Darwinist racist world in which the ideal, its 'god', would be a kind of magnificent beast of prey, and the individual a cell in the integrated body of the people or nation. "If nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with the stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one, because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile", we read in *Mein Kampf*. And in the comments to his *Table Talk* we read that Hitler said: "My pedagogics are ruthless. What is weak must be hammered away. I want my youth strong and beautiful,

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13 Hermann Rauschnig: *Gespräche mit Hitler*, pp. 231-232.

masterful and fearless. The free, magnificent beast of prey must flash from their eyes. In this way I wipe out the years of human domestication and I obtain the pure, noble material of Nature. And I will be able to create what is new."

Germany became the uniformed, drilled, militarized society which would be 'the fist of the Führer' and 'the sword of God'. (Hitler has always been convinced that he was faithfully carrying out the instructions of his 'God'.) It became "the rigid, armoured, aggressive, formidable Nazi state".<sup>14</sup> But "uniformity is death, not life", wrote Sri Aurobindo, for whom individual freedom was an absolute principle without which real growth is impossible. He wrote in the heyday of Nazism: "If this trend becomes universal, it is the end of the Age of Reason, the suicide or the execution ... of the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mental being. Reason cannot do its work, act or rule if the mind of man is denied freedom to think or freedom to realize its thought by action in life. But neither can a subjective age be the outcome ..."<sup>15</sup> We know that the subjective age is necessary for the further development of the spirit in humanity and for its transformation into a higher kind of being.

This must suffice to indicate what was really at stake in the Second World War: the future of humanity, of the earth, of evolution. "Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open – to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black

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14 Sri Aurobindo: *The Human Cycle*, p. 42.

15 *Id.*, p. 206.

servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world ...”<sup>16</sup>

Most people did not know what Hitler really had in mind, they did not realize that if they did not belong to the *white* Aryan master race, they would have to polish its boots. Especially the coloured peoples, rated somewhere with the animals, were the subject of his disdain. “To me, as a nationalist who appreciates the worth of the racial basis of humanity, I must recognize the racial inferiority of the so-called [colonially] ‘oppressed nations’, and that is enough to prevent me from linking the destiny of my people with the destiny of those inferior races”, he wrote in *Mein Kampf*. The treaty with the Japanese was only a matter of opportunity, for they were a kind of yellow monkeys, as the Nazis said behind their back. What the ‘reign of falsehood and death’ really meant became terribly clear when the gates of the concentration camps were crushed by the invading tanks, and when the documentary films and huge stacks of files were produced before the first military tribunal at Nuremberg.

Some details of the way in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother put their force behind the anti-Hitler armies can be read in Nirodbaran’s *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, in Purani’s *Evening Talks*, in Sri Aurobindo’s letters and in the conversations of the Mother. This, however, is only a small part of their real action, which was constant. The Mother would later say that in those years the situation was so serious that the avataric Yoga came to a complete standstill. This happened at a point that the descent of the Supermind was expected, as we find confirmed in K.D. Sethna. It must have been the last chance for the Asura to prevent the great turnabout the world is now subject to – the great swirling

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16 Sri Aurobindo: *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 467, September 1943.



confusion which actually is the result of the momentous birth of a new world.

It should never be forgotten that when Hitler was at the zenith of his powers, in 1940 and 1941, he had, according to Sri Aurobindo, 'a fifty percent chance of success'.<sup>17</sup> Sri Aurobindo said clearly: "He is the enemy of our work."<sup>18</sup> And in the days of Hitler's greatest triumphs Sri Aurobindo said: "There is no chance for the world unless something happens in Germany or else Hitler and Stalin quarrel."<sup>19</sup> "Now only Hitler's death can save the situation."<sup>20</sup> Sketching the tactical moves of Hitler in October 1940, Sri Aurobindo commented: "So Hitler comes to Asia Minor and that means India."<sup>21</sup> That Hitler's pincer movement, through the Balkans and Southern Russia on the one hand and through North Africa on the other, was intended to reach India, is now abundantly documented. If Hitler had won, the evolution of the world, in its most critical stage, would have been turned back 'for centuries if not for millennia'.

Now India is free, the Asian nations have taken their places among the nations of the world, the world is growing one, Indian spirituality is penetrating into the mind of the West, and the roads into the future, where man will become superman, have remained open. (These are 'the five dreams' of Sri Aurobindo as formulated by him in his radio message on the occasion of India's independence.) Few know about the role 'the Sage of Pondicherry' and his 'companion' the Mother have played in rendering these developments possible. Sri Aurobindo lived secluded in his apartment, there

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17 Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 939.

18 Purani: *Evening Talks*, p. 710.

19 Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 552.

20 *Ib.*, p. 721.

21 *Ib.*, p. 939.

on the first floor of a compound in Rue de la Marine, where apparently he sat mostly in a big chair. But in his autobiographical poems (and in *Savitri*) we read about his wounds which were 'a thousand-and-one', caused by the attacks of 'the Titan Kings'. Nobody knew of his battles, except when in one such attack his thigh was broken. Nobody knew or knows much about the superhuman work Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have done for the world.

It is Sri Aurobindo himself who has compared the spiritual battle of the Second World War with Kurukshetra. "Ours is a *sadhana* which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of Him in all things and beings", he wrote, "but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world or a force to be brought in the world under difficult conditions; then one has to see one's way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and planes, in either case *ghoram karma*: the means and times and persons differ but it does not seem to me that Nolini is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra."<sup>22</sup>

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22 Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 219.



# 18

## *Churchill's Mission*

It does not happen often that events in the occult history are confirmed by an impartial, objective source. This makes it worthwhile to report the following testimony, directly related to a crucially important phase in the history of the 20th century and of humanity.

In my book on *Hitler and His God – The Background to the Hitler Phenomenon* (Rupa & Co, New Delhi) I have written: "Hitler did not invade England [after the surrender of France] and neither did Great Britain collapse, as was generally expected. The reason was one man: Winston Churchill" ... "In Churchill Hitler found something more than an antagonist. To a panic-stricken Europe the German dictator

had appeared almost like invincible Fate. Churchill reduced him to a conquerable power." (Joachim Fest)

"Before the invasion of France Sri Aurobindo had already said in passing: 'England is quite unreliable under her present leadership', and that he and the Mother were looking for a suitable person. If the Asura had his instrument in one camp [Adolf Hitler], the White Forces needed theirs in the opposite camp once their decision had been made to engage actively in the battle. It is now mostly forgotten what a chancy affair the coming to power of Winston Churchill actually was ..." <sup>1</sup>

Several passages from Churchill's speeches indicate his awareness of the spiritual support provided to him, for instance: "... Without victory there is no survival ... no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forwards to its goal." Or: "If we stand up to Hitler, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age." And also: "I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honour to be the faithful servants." <sup>2</sup> Such were unusual words for a man in Churchill's position and under the given circumstances; they expressed a vision going far beyond the cant of nationalistic or jingoistic exhortations, and carried overtones echoing Sri Aurobindo's forceful statements about the fundamental values at stake in the Second World War.

It should be remembered that those words were spoken at a time that, according to Sri Aurobindo, Hitler had 'a fifty per cent chance' of winning the war. France had

1 Georges Van Vrekhem: *Hitler and His God*, p. 440.

2 *The Speeches of Winston Churchill*, pp. 154, 177, 233.

collapsed, and Great Britain stood alone to confront an apparently invincible enemy, practically without defence after Dunkerque, except for its fleet. Moreover, Great Britain suffered defeat after depressing defeat, and was bombed relentlessly by the Luftwaffe, London on seventy-five consecutive nights in which forty-thousand people died. No wonder that Churchill felt an immense relief when, because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the United States of America was finally forced to enter the war on its side. Fully realizing the power of its new ally, he considered the war won from that very day. "Our history would not come to an end ..." he wrote.

An even stronger formulation of Churchill's awareness of a spiritual support is this passage from a speech in the House of Commons on 13 October 1942: "I sometimes have a feeling, in fact I have it very strongly, a feeling of interference. I want to stress that I have a feeling sometimes that some guiding hand has interfered. I have the feeling that we have a guardian because we serve a great cause, and that we shall have that guardian so long as we serve that great cause faithfully. And what a cause it is!"<sup>3</sup> Many political leaders have invoked God Almighty in times of crisis or catastrophe. This is something quite different: a spiritual presence and force concretely interfering in the most drastic historical events to save a great cause. And that cause, also according to Churchill (and to Sri Aurobindo, of course), was no other than keeping the future open for the evolution of humankind.

But the strongest confirmation comes from a man who was not a politician and still less spiritual-minded. He was a down-to-earth, athletic detective of Scotland Yard's Special Branch, 'physically tough and unafraid of almost

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3 *The Speeches of Winston Churchill*, p. 149.

anything', whose name was Walter Thompson. His years with Churchill are recorded in *Churchill's Bodyguard – The Authorised Biography of Walter H. Thompson*, written by Tom Hickman (Headline Book Publishing Ltd, 2006).

Thompson was appointed Churchill's bodyguard in 1921 and would remain so, with one interval, till 1944. At the time of his appointment Churchill was Minister of Air and Secretary of State for the Colonies. The young policeman accepted his task with little enthusiasm, for he knew from colleagues that 'the impossible Mr Churchill' was a fickle and egotistical man, a headache for anybody who had to look after him or work for him.

What made Churchill still more difficult to protect was his love of danger. "He longed to confront danger", and "appeared to have no permanent sense of personal safety." After all, he had been fighting in five campaigns, one of them during the First World War, when he had been a battalion commander in the muddy trenches in Flanders' fields.

Churchill required Thompson's constant attention and thus the policeman from 'the Yard' became the person closest to him during the critical years. The Prime Minister's life was in permanent danger wherever he went for conferences, meetings or inspections – Cairo, Algiers, Casablanca, Washington ... – for he was the prime target for assassination by the secret agencies of the Axis countries. (He was reported dead on several occasions.) Besides, at the time of the bombardments, in the summer of 1940, he wanted to show the population that their bald-headed, round-bellied Prime Minister with the big cigar stood by them, and he went out in the streets even during bombardments. "I have asked the people of this country to carry on in their homes, in the streets, in the factories, everywhere", he said to Thompson. "If you think I am going to hide in an air-raid shelter, not for you or anyone else will I do it."

One day he sent his car away and went on foot “around St. James’s Park by way of the Mall, where many incendiary bombs had been dropped. My plea to him not to do so fell on deaf ears”, remembers Thompson. Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion. Churchill went back to see what had happened: where he had been walking a few seconds earlier was now a huge crater made by a thousand-pound bomb.

That night Churchill took hold of his bodyguard’s arm. He said: “Thompson, when you came to me in 1939 [after an interval during which the policeman had been replaced by another bodyguard] I told you something unusual. Do you remember?” Thompson said he did and repeated his words: “You said: I have something to do.” – “Those are the words I wanted, Thompson”, Churchill said. “Because we have come to the second phase. There is somebody looking after me besides you, Thompson.” – “Do you mean Sergeant Davies?” asked Thompson. Davies was a colleague of his who at times had to assist him. But “Churchill’s finger went heavenwards in a characteristic gesture. “No, Thompson, I have a mission to perform and That Person will see that it is performed.”<sup>4</sup>

The bodyguard and his *protégé* had developed a sort of routine for getting in and out of the car. Thompson would hold the left door open for the Prime Minister, who would step in and sit behind him. On an inspection tour ‘something curious’ happened. When getting into the car, Churchill “looked at me, then opened the door [on the right side] himself, got in and shut it”, something he had never done before. And the car took off ‘as usual travelling fast’. Suddenly a bomb exploded close by. “It lifted all four wheels from the road surface and we ran on two wheels for many yards before rocking back. Our speed probably prevented

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4 Churchill’s *Bodyguard*, p. 106.



the car from turning over. Winston was not disturbed in the slightest."

Afterwards Churchill and Thompson talked about the incident. "Walter asked him why he'd got into the car on the side he never did. Churchill told him: 'I saw you with the door open, but when I reached the other side something seemed to say 'stop', and it appeared to me that I was to get in on the other side, which I did.' Again Churchill's finger went heavenwards: 'That mission has to be carried out, Thompson.'" <sup>5</sup>

On 30 June 1944, detective Walter Thompson's time as bodyguard of Winston Churchill came to an end. Scotland Yard had decided to replace him. "Walter had lived in Churchill's home almost as a member of the family. On occasion he'd run Churchill's baths, picked up his clothes, sat beside him when he couldn't sleep, carried him when he was ill ... [Churchill had had at least two heart attacks during the war.] There was unquestionably a friendship between the pair – never on an equal footing, of course, but a friendship nevertheless."

After all they had gone through, the adieu was 'an emotionally charged scene', in which both men tried to master their feelings. Walter, puzzled that Churchill had not once looked into his face, went to the door, saying 'Good-bye'. "Suddenly Churchill looked up, his head and a finger raised in a gesture Walter knew well: 'When you came to me in August 1939', he said, 'I told you I had something to do. Subsequently I said that I had a mission to perform. Now, Thompson, before you go ... that mission has been accomplished.'" And the sturdy policeman concludes: "No words of mine could express adequately my pride at having

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5 *Churchill's Bodyguard*, p. 108.

worked at his side, and there was a huge lump in my throat as we parted.”<sup>6</sup>

Winston Churchill has been buried by a mourning nation with full honours, and is generally recognized as one of the great figures of modern history – rightly so. Few know about ‘That Person’, of whose presence and support he was so vividly aware, and about the real import of his ‘mission’.

*This article was published in  
the Indian magazine The Advent  
of 15 August 2009.*

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6 Churchill's *Bodyguard*, p. 242.



## **In Memoriam**



# 19

## *In Memoriam Satprem*

Satprem (born Bernard Enginger) passed away on 9th April, 2007 at the age of 84. Through his books, and particularly through his role in the publication of the thirteen volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, Satprem played a key role not only in introducing many people to the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but also in explaining the scope and significance of the great endeavour they had undertaken. His writings have inspired, and will continue to inspire, people worldwide with their incandescent call to take up the great work of physical transformation begun by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a work which he and his spiritual collaborator, Sujata, attempted to continue after Mother's passing.

He was also a figure of considerable influence in Auroville during the early years and during the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society, a struggle which he saw as crucial for Auroville's integrity and for the furtherance of Mother's work. Satprem was a charismatic figure who, in his uncompromising stances, attracted great loyalty from some and criticism from others. A survivor of the concentration camps, he stood against all forms of tyranny. Yet some blamed him for his fierce criticism of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and for his attacks upon those who did not follow the path which he favoured.

The following is a slightly edited version of a brief biography of Satprem as it appeared in Georges Van Vrekhem's book, *Beyond Man*.

Satprem (...) is a Frenchman who was born in Paris in 1923, but who always nostalgically remembered his youth on the coast of Brittany. In the Second World War he became a member of the Resistance. He had just turned twenty when the Gestapo arrested him; he spent one and a half years in German concentration camps. After the war, and deeply branded by those experiences, he became an exponent of the problematics and the life-view of Existentialism, although not Sartre and Camus but Gide and Malraux were the main sources of his inspiration.

In 1946, he wrote in a letter to André Gide: "I loved you, and certain passages from your books have helped me to survive in the concentration camps. From you I got the force to break away from a bourgeois and material comfort. Together with you, I have been seeking 'not so much for possession as for love'. I have made a clean sweep to stand completely new before the new law. I have made myself free ... Finally, I have broken away from you, but I have found no new masters and life keeps suffocating me.

The terrible absurdity of the likes of Sartre and Camus has solved nothing and only opens the gates to suicide."

Satprem worked briefly as a functionary in the colonial administration of Pondicherry, but he felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled everywhere and went in search of adventure in French Guyana, Brazil and Africa.

However, when in Pondicherry he had had the *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and he carried *The Life Divine* with him even in the rain forests of the Amazon. In 1953, after those wanderings, he returned to Pondicherry to meet the Mother and settle in the Ashram against his individualistic and rebellious nature. "[I was] a good rebellious Westerner and all ways of changing the world looked a priori excellent", he writes. He was at times teaching in the Ashram school, and with his remarkable literary talent he looked after the French copy for the *Bulletin* of the Department of Physical Education which, in fact, was the Mother's publication. This periodical was (and still is) a quarterly and has all texts printed in English and in French.

Satprem's first years in the Ashram were a period of dissatisfaction, restlessness, doubts, and sometimes loudly voiced revolt. He has included part of his correspondence with the Mother in the first volume of the *Agenda*; these letters present us with a moving picture of the patience, understanding and love with which the Mother treated her rebellious children. She has never accepted somebody for the Yoga without a reason, and when she accepted somebody, it was unconditionally and for ever. Time and again Satprem imagined he had to find his inner fulfilment in adventure. There is not an exotic place on Earth he did not feel impelled to go to; the Congo, Brazil (again), Afghanistan, the Himalayas, New Zealand, the Gobi desert, a journey around the globe in a sailing boat, all that and more



is dreamt of in his letters. But the Mother knew what was really prompting him and she let him become, in 1959, the disciple of a very able tantric yogi who was also the head priest of the big temple in Rameshwaram. Then, guided by another yogi, Satprem wandered during six months as a *sanyasi* (mendicant monk) through India and received the initiation of the *sanyasis*. His novel *Par le corps de la terre, ou le Sannyasin* (*By the Body of the Earth, or The Sannyasin*) is based on these experiences.

But “the bird always returned to the nest”, to the Ashram in Pondicherry, to the Mother. She started inviting him from time to time to her room, at first apparently for some literary chores in connection with the *Bulletin*. He became more and more spellbound by her. He asked questions (or she instilled the questions into him) and she answered. “At first, she had me called, and there was that big chair in which she was sitting, and I sat down on the carpet on the floor and listened to her. Truly, she knew so much. It was wonderful to listen to her. But most important, little by little she began telling her experience.”

However violently Satprem might express himself emotionally, he was a cultured man and possessed a very keen intellect, widely varied interests, and as a writer a passionate, colourful style. We have already seen that the Mother complained about the lack of intellectual eagerness and cultural as well as general interest in the people around her. She had so much to communicate, to share, her knowledge and experience were so broad in all essential domains where the human being is confronted with ‘the great questions’, but so little was asked of her. “I am a little bell that is not sounded”, she said. Here now was a man with an analytical mind, a poignant life-experience and a thirst for knowledge – the ideal instrument to communicate to others a glimpse of her unbelievable adventure. At

the same time she worked on him, in him; she did his yoga as she did the yoga of all those she had accepted and taken into herself.

Satprem started realizing the importance of those conversations with The Mother and took a tape-recorder to her room. Thus *Mother's Agenda* came about. One part of it concerned the literary work he was doing for the Mother; another part concerned his own yogic evolution, his yogic education; and the third part of the conversations was intended by the Mother as the registration, in broad outlines, of the process of her transformation. Everything the Mother said was interesting, everything was informative and instructive, though she herself most probably would never have allowed some confidential passages about persons in her entourage to be published.

After the passing of the Mother, a gap had come about between the Ashram and Satprem, with regrettable consequences. Under The Mother's directions he had written *Sri Aurobindo, ou l'Aventure de la conscience* (*Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness*), a book that has led many to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He had also read out to her *La Genèse du surhomme* (*The Genesis of Superman*), an essay highly lauded by her. Then after her departure, he wrote the trilogy *Mère* (*Mother*), in which for the first time he analyzes and comments upon the invaluable material of the *Agenda* of which he was the only possessor at that time. *Le mental des cellules* (*The Mind of the Cells*) is a kind of crystallization of the trilogy, and in *Gringo* and recently in *Evolution II* [and *Notebooks of an Apocalypse*] he reports about his own evolution (...). In a letter from 1983 one reads: "I had to take the decision to withdraw because I was no longer progressing in my [inner] work, I kept turning around in a circle. There must be at least one human being to prove, to show to the world that the way of the new species is

practicable for humans. Otherwise, what is the use of what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done for humankind?"

*As published in  
Auroville Today # 219,  
May 2007.*

# 20

## *Amal Kiran: Psychic Greatness, Mental Versatility*

*K.D. Sethna, known in the Ashram and Auroville by the name Sri Aurobindo gave him – Amal Kiran (A Clear Ray) – passed away on June 29th at the Ashram Nursing Home at the age of 107. The next day his body was brought to Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi, after which it was laid to rest in the Ashram cemetery. The following obituary was written by Georges Van Vrekhem and published in the special issue of Mother India, November-December 2011, 'Remembering the Clear Ray'.*

### **The author and editor**

It is regrettable that, generally speaking, the inner greatness of a person is recognized and accepted only after

he has passed on, while when in the body, life's strictures prevent seeing him in his true stature. Amal Kiran's extensive writings show an astonishing array of intellectual interests, always passionately suffused by the Flame within. They are variations on his central theme: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

There are still many *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* in the Ashram who have lived with the Mother and even during the lifetime of Sri Aurobindo, but with 107-year-old Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna, born in 1904) disappeared the last of the first generation of disciples. As he named some of them himself in one of his books, they were "forceful Purani, gentle Pujalal, poised Nolini, sympathetic Amrita, diligent Champaklal, disciplined Dyuman, simple Rajangam, enthusiastic Dara, scrupulous Premanand, cordial Pavitra, dignified Anilbaran and courteous Doraiswamy ..."

The spectrum of his interests knew no bounds. "Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother told me that most distinctly to their eyes I had been an ancient Athenian in a past life. My bond with Sri Aurobindo may have been close at that time too" (for Sri Aurobindo is supposed to have been Pericles). But the influence of this experience from a former life was not the only one which resonated in Amal Kiran's life, leading him to write e.g. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*. He studied Christianity in depth and wrote *Problems of Early Christianity*, *The Virgin Birth* and *The Earliest Christian Tradition*, and published his correspondence with the Catholic monk Bede Griffiths. Such knowledge also allowed him to write extensively about Teilhard de Chardin and his Omega Point, at the time often compared and sometimes opposed to Sri Aurobindo's vision.

Amal Kiran studied the latest developments in physics and biology. The result was a difficult book on the theory

of relativity and a knowledgeable use of the scientific arguments in his discussions of the relation between science and spirituality (e.g. *Science, Materialism, Mysticism*). His books and articles on the Aryan problem, among them *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, made him an authority on the subject. And all this is only part of his explorations and the well-founded formulations of his opinions concerning a wide range of matters. On the backcover of the publication from 1995 one finds a list of no less than 40 books by him. His writings on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and on the Integral Yoga in particular and spirituality in general, have been avidly read by Aurobindonians, while his scientific and historical studies have not met with the attention they deserve.

This man, intensely avid of the experiences of the Spirit, and thrilled by Sri Aurobindo's vision and its concrete application to every aspect of the world, was the ideal editor of *Mother India*. He had to keep up high and extensive standards, for Sri Aurobindo considered this 'monthly review of culture' to be his very own mouthpiece. In its issues one finds the same versatility as mentioned above, always inspired, always broad-minded. Amal Kiran's editorship rendered his relation with Sri Aurobindo, whom he had to consult time and again, still closer. And it became a living illustration of the Aurobindonian attitude, which demands the largest possible mental outlook together with a one-pointed yogic concentration in the heart – a delicate balance not always easy to maintain.

Moreover, the title of the review had to be justified by its contents, constantly focusing on the glory and the problems of Mother India for which the freedom-fighter Aravinda Ghose had put his life on the line, and of which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saw the soul and its future. Many of Amal Kiran's articles on India were collected in books like *Evolving India: Essays on Cultural Issues, India and*

*the World Scene, The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, titles which speak for themselves.

## The Poet

Amal Kiran was the most talented among the English-writing poets blossoming under Sri Aurobindo's guidance and spiritual stimulation. Their writing of poetry was actually an exercise to open their access to the spiritual levels above the ordinary mind, 'overhead', and was therefore an exercise of yoga. Sri Aurobindo never tired of counselling them, correcting their poems, and sending them the force which gave them their inspiration. (The ease with which he identified in their poems the levels of the 'overhead' inspiration, even of single lines, remains an object of wonder.) "It was interesting", said Amal Kiran in a late interview, "to realize that by silencing one's mind and keeping the consciousness looking upward, as it were, it was possible to write the highest spiritual poetry now and again without being stationed on those overhead levels." Most of his poems have been collected in *The Secret Splendour* (1993).

As an evaluation, Sri Aurobindo's comment upon his poem 'This Errant Life' says it all: "... a beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect. If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either. I consider they can rank – these eight lines – with the very best in English poetry."

Amal Kiran has written volumes on the poetry of Milton, Blake and Mallarmé. The main centre of his interest, however, was Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, by which he remained permanently spellbound, and of which he had received the honour, on 25th October 1936, of being sent the sixteen opening lines of Canto One (as they stood then).

From that day onwards, a kind of dialogue about the poem had started, Sri Aurobindo sending passages of what he had written to the poetically most gifted and knowledgeable disciple close to him. These exchanges resulted in many of the revealing commentaries transmitted to us by Amal Kiran on a poetical and spiritual masterwork, written to confront the ages.

### **The Yogi**

“Amal told me that the Mother said if someone came to her even once she did two things: she linked their outer being to their psychic being and the other was that she put out an emanation of herself to go with that person for all of their lifetime.” Thus writes Anie Nunnally in her interview with Amal Kiran which took place towards the end of 1999. In this interview he says that, from the very beginning of his yoga, it was his aim to have the psychic realization. “... several times I made the Mother touch me with her hand in the middle of my chest asking her to break me open there and at last there was an opening”, six months after he settled in Pondicherry in 1927.

Times were quite different then. This is so tangibly shown in an anecdote Amal Kiran relates from around the same time. “One morning, meditation in my room (which by the way had been Sri Aurobindo’s own room for nine years and was itself a gift of Grace), I felt a keen urge in the heart to go to the Ashram and up the staircase leading to the apartment on the first floor where all heaven seemed situated because the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived there. I just went and stood on the landing between the two sections of the staircase and looked at the door upstairs. Suddenly the door opened and the Mother stood on the threshold. She looked down and softly said: ‘Would you like to come in?’ I was surprised beyond words for a second. Then I



stammered out: 'Oh yes. May I?' She took me inside and let me do a *pranam* to her. She gave her blessing and a flower and saw me to the door. After this it became a daily event that after the general *pranam* I should go up to her. She would hold my hand and take me right inside to what used to be a small dressing room. She would sit down on a pouf and, after my *pranam*, do again the hand-in-hand walk and see me out."

His constant aspiration and experience in the Integral Yoga, together with the humility of his never-denied humanity, has resulted in Amal Kiran becoming a guide to his readers and to the many who wrote to him privately, looking for help and enlightenment. His writings on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and on their Yoga, based on his direct communication with them and on his own yogic effort, are a source of information and exploration for us, and will remain so for others after us. To mention a few: *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, *Our Light and Delight: Recollections of Life with the Mother*, *The Mother: Past-Present-Future*, three volumes of *Life-Poetry-Yoga*. There is also the refreshing *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry*, a series of talks full of humour he and Nirodbaran gave for the students and teachers of the Ashram School in 1970-71, and which I was lucky to attend.

### **An open mind**

Amal Kiran was a seeker for Truth, and when he was blessed to find it in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he constantly continued to explore this boundless domain in order to integrate it into his whole personality, in his physical body, his life force and his mind.

The term 'Renaissance Man' has been used in connection with him, and his own characterization of himself as

‘versatile’ means in fact a largeness of flexibility of mind trying to capture as much as he found in the personalities, the sayings and the writings of his Masters. They carried in them the East and the West, the past, present and future. Amal Kiran was the example of a disciple who realized this and tried to live according to it, as he realized that the foundations, the Two-in-One, the double Avatar, had to be worked out in all their aspects. Few have been mentally aware of as much, hopefully many will follow his example.

The dangers of the Second World War brought many people to the Ashram, where some inmates, used to their tranquil daily routine, were not exactly happy with the new circumstances. About that situation Amal Kiran wrote: “At times an attempt seems to be made to lift some rules out of their old context and set them up as if intended for all periods. Any warning that neglect of them might have undesirable consequences strikes one as ill-conceived. To apply a practice from early days wholesale to living-styles very different would be unrealistic. Of course, discrimination as regards the outside world has always to be exercised by the Ashramites, but there is little room for doctrinaire restrictions which everybody knows to be obsolete if not obstructive under present circumstances.” In fact the world never stops changing, and with it the external circumstances of the Yoga, which have to be tackled ever anew.

I had the occasion to thank Nirodbaran on several occasions for his invaluable texts as a witness who gave us, eager for such information, glimpses of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother we otherwise never would have had. I saw Amal Kiran and his wife Sebra practically every day pass by in a rickshaw in the years when they and I lived in the Rue Suffren, but I have had only a single conversation with him in connection with the first issue of *Next Future* which I was to edit. One of the dearest pictures in my memory is

he and Nirodbaran, his 'close friend', the last two of the old guard, together at the Samadhi, talking in short sentences about mysterious things perhaps of yesteryear, with long intervals of silence.

I express my homage and thanks here to a great Aurobindonian, to whose writings I have often gone, as shown by the references in my books, for information and understanding.

## **On Himself**



# 21

## *Nihil Humanum A Me Alienum Puto*

The motto of the European Renaissance was: *Nihil humanum a me alienum puto*, which is Latin for “Nothing that is human do I deem alien to me.” It became my personal motto as soon as I learned about the Renaissance, and it was this fundamental outlook which resonated with the ideal of Auroville when I got acquainted with it, and which brought me here. It has never changed.

For me this motto represents something of the essence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s endeavour. In a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote: “The technique of a world-changing yoga

has to be as multiform, sinuous, patient, all-including as the world itself ... It is the *Mahabharata* of a Mahabharata that has to be done." This may give some idea of the dimensions of the task to realize the Auroville of the Mother's Charter, and of its function as a representative of humanity.

The same attitude of feeling nothing human as alien is one of the basics of the Integral Yoga. Starting at the point where one makes the decisive individual step, one has gradually to explore one's own complex personality. This leads to the increasing realization that one is a cell in the body of humanity, and that one has to acquire the consciousness of the self of that whole body before, as Sri Aurobindo taught us, one can even intend of going farther or higher.

On my talking tours I have often met with people who are looking in the direction of the Auroville ideals. If on those occasions I met such people, there must be so many more in the world who have that dream, even subconsciously, and are looking for ways to make it real. In fact, many are intuitively practicing what we try to practice, often in circumstances which are much more difficult because surrounded by a complete ignorance and a very egocentric or materialistic environment. Here at least we have some idea of what we are doing. The Mother has spoken several times about the occult influence of Auroville on humanity. I have no doubt that the Force which is upholding Auroville also radiates out in that one big body of humankind to which we all belong. May we through our effort make that Force more and more materially concrete and keep it as pure as possible.

Sri Aurobindo has written more than once that science has been a great force in the direction of globalization, that it has 'drawn mankind together'. This force has increased manifold. True, he also wrote that science caused humanity to be burdened with commercialism, a crushing technology and a

blinding materialism. But if, as he stated, "Nature makes no mistakes", for She is the executive Power of the Divine, then the gigantic development of science and technology certainly must have a deep sense. How else would the ideal of human unity have been able to take shape in such a short time, no more than the blink of an eye on the evolutionary scale?

Another aspect of modern technology may be that it is preparing humanity as a whole for the next step in its evolution. We can cover long distances in a short time; we fly from continent to continent; we hear far and see far; we become more and more conscious of all parts of humanity as a global unity. From the farmer behind his plow and the traveler or warrior on horseback we are becoming beings who can do amazing, miraculous things formerly known only to the gods – things which we enjoy, but which also fill us with unease if not with fear.

The world is for the first time in known history involved in a total, global crisis which causes many to doubt that humanity has a future. The only positive interpretation of the present I know of is the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They told us that humanity is in the critical process of transformation into a new, higher species, and to this change into a better life we have dedicated our lives. But how the transformation will take shape, we do not know. I suppose that many of us – myself included – do not even know how the elementary personal transformation, psychic or spiritual, actually takes place. For every permanent realization is a miracle for which we can prepare ourselves, but which we cannot bring into effect at will. Similarly, the transformation of humanity and the coming about of the future, as outlined for us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, can only be the result of a series of miracles – as the growth of present-day Auroville into the 'cradle of the overman' can only come about by a series of miracles. "This is the



time of the unexpected." As the Mother said to her young audience at the Ashram Playground: "No, we cannot effectively build tomorrow, for we are ignorant, and as long as we are ignorant we are powerless; but we can aspire for it and consciously contribute our effort to its realization."

To end with a question: if the present technology is so important for holding humanity together, would it not be a dreadful catastrophe if, for some reason or other, this technological world collapsed? Would such an event not bring about a return to some kind of Middle Ages? But we have been assured that the transition into a new world is happening now, and the signs of the evolutionary acceleration are clear to those who have eyes for them. Therefore part of our attitude should be to get ourselves prepared for the miracles of the unexpected, individually as well as on the level of all our human sisters and brothers together.

## 22

### *The Journeying Years – from Belgium to India*

I was brought up as a Catholic, like everybody else at the place I come from. I enjoyed enormously being a choir boy. You can run around in a special garb while the others have to remain kneeling. Later I studied at an institute run by priests. There I learned to play the piano and especially the church organ. I would play the organ for hours all alone high in the big space of an often dark church. If I remember correctly, I must have played the organs of seventeen different churches.

My future brother-in-law was the direct cause that I lost my faith. He was a militant liberal and for the first time I heard something different from the teachings of the priests. I was also very much interested in occultism, and when this leaked out, the priests regarded me with suspicion. Eventually, after seven years of studying with them, I was put before the choice: leave or be thrown out. They never showed any degree of concern with me. I am still somewhat bitter about this. On the other hand, their institution was the best I could have been in, for there was music, theatre practice, artistic shows, (censored) films and sports.

I had to earn a living and my liberal brother-in-law found me a job at the Magistrate Court in Ghent. To live in a big town was at first a disorienting experience. But Ghent is a very beautiful town which has kept its medieval centre intact, and it would become the city of my heart. I had to join the army for obligatory military service and became a second-lieutenant in the infantry, commanding a platoon of heavy mortars. The army was a dreary affair, but it gave me a thorough physical training and experience in much that, many years later, would be useful for writing *Hitler and his God*.

After my military service I returned to Ghent and my job as a clerk of the court. I thought I would go mad with boredom among the stacks of files and the cultural empty-headedness. I became known as a poet at that time, and through a concatenation of coincidences got involved in the local theatre life. At that time there appeared out of nowhere very small semi-professional theatres in many Flemish towns. The theatre, like the circus, always had a strange attraction for me – it may have something to do with its particular scent of make-up, old clothes and cavernous dark spaces behind the scenery, and with the presence of women in circumstances different from everyday

life. My first play was performed, successfully, when I was twenty-four.

When, through my liberal brother-in-law, I got a job as a supervisor in a school for teachers, I was saved from becoming mad as a court clerk. The job provided me with much free time, and even on the job I had plenty of time to read. Together with my activities as a poet and a playwright, I practically every day went on some assignment as a local journalist for the press, and I had a weekly programme on the radio.

One day, a professional theatre company was founded to play the big theatre between the belfry and the cathedral in Ghent. Strange to say, on one of my visits there, years before, I had had an almost painfully strong feeling that some time in the future my destiny would lie in that theatre. And indeed, I became the 'dramaturg' of the new company and would end up as the artistic manager. A 'dramaturg' is the man in charge of the literary aspect of a repertory company. I saw some two hundred performances per year, in our own theatre and elsewhere, and on one occasion counted the talks I had given in the past season: seventy-five. But having to distribute the parts, and by so doing intervening in the careers of twenty-three king-size ego's is no sinecure. And as a manager you never enter your theatre without at least one serious problem awaiting you.

Somewhere in the autumn of 1964, after having been at the late show of a cinema, I stopped, as was my habit, in front of the window of a bookshop. There I saw a newly published book *Sri Aurobindo, ou l'Aventure de la Conscience*. Although religion, and certainly India, did not belong within my horizon, 'something' told me to buy that book. The next morning it was the first thing I did. French books at the time were still bound in a way that you had to cut

them open. After cutting the first pages, I read a quotation from Sri Aurobindo saying that a person could become anything he felt like, for that God was in him. Something indescribable happened at the top of my head, and that was why I am here.

I started reading anything I could find in connection with Indian and Eastern spirituality, quite chaotically. And I started meditating and practising some hatha-yoga postures usually after midnight, when I came home after my rather worldly occupations. I was given the necessary experiences which supported me in my lonely search. For more than five years I have been living in that way. Two times I tried to talk about what really occupied my mind, once with a director and once with a set designer, who I thought were my friends. In both cases the reaction was uproarious laughter.

I felt less and less at home in the theatre where I was working. I had long ago discovered that behind all their airs the actors were very petty bourgeois, and so were my colleagues in management. The call to go to India became ever stronger. At long last I quit my enviable position, played the guide on touring buses through Western Europe during one season, and when I had been swung around sufficiently in that way, I bought a plane ticket to India. I did not know whether the Mother was still alive, and imagined the Ashram as a white building under a blue sky, with a tall palm tree next to it.

My nearest relatives did not realize what a step this was for me. For many months I had been travelling all the time, so they thought that this was another one of my trips. But I felt in my heart that, although I told myself that this was only a visit, I was leaving them for good. And to their amazement I burst out crying above my fried eggs on the eve of my departure.

Having arrived in Pondicherry after a rather traumatic journey – the India thirty-seven years ago was not how it is today – and having deposited my luggage in a hotel at the sea-side, my first steps were directed towards that Ashram, with my jacket slung over my shoulder. I expected a building with a BIG gate, and having seen a picture of the Samadhi, I expected to see the small tiled roof behind it. But as at first I had not been brought farther than the entrance, I kept walking around the Ashram for three days (not continuously), asking everybody I met where it was and not believing them. At long last somebody accompanied me around the corner of the reading room, and there I saw the Samadhi and the tiled roof behind it, and I had arrived finally.

I have described my first visit to the Mother and the power of her public *darshans* elsewhere [see the article: “Moments That do not Fade – Meeting the Mother”, on page 305]. I had the privilege of meeting her personally several times. I stayed in the Ashram for eight years. In the meantime I became acquainted with most of the first Aurovilians, some of whom came to consult me about their horoscope. And it was while calculating a horoscope that an inner voice told me to move to Auroville. As this was at the time of the ‘events’, it was not easy to acquiesce. By that time, however, I had read more of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s writings, and I knew that one cannot disobey an *adesh* except at one’s peril. And see, I am still here.

### Talking to Georges in 2008

What had brought me to India were the ideals of Auroville, yet I stayed eight years in the Ashram. The reason was quite simply that I would not have been able to live in Auroville in that early stage of its existence, for the circumstances were really primitive, and one can only have the

greatest admiration for the first courageous people who chose to settle in the 'City of the Future'. Except for the urn and the amphitheatre there was nothing but a couple of sheds in the Centre; there was Forecomers with Bob and Deborah, Utility with Mali, Certitude with Frederick and Shyama, one or two huts in the Green Belt, and the first huts in Aspiration, in what was still open goat country. In the beginning of 1970 it was possible to loose one's way when going down from Aspiration, through the fields, to Chinnamudaliarchavady on what is now the East Coast Road. It may now sound hardly believable, but at that time the centre of the activities in connection with Auroville was Promesse in Moratandi, on the Tindivanam road.

When I wrote to the Mother for an occupation, she made me a physical education coach with the New Groups. These were the newly arrived children and the special cases, some of them thrown out of the regular groups. They had all ages from six to twenty-two. I still see myself walking the very first time in the Nandanam garden holding on each side the hand of a tiny tot and feeling foolish. But the Mother knew what was good for me, of course, and gradually I learned to understand the reason behind it all. I continued being a sports coach for four years, after which I began to translate the first of the twelve or thirteen books I have translated into Dutch.

In the meantime I studied astrology, and several other divinatory arts, very seriously. Before long I was consulted not only by Ashramites but also by outsiders. If I had wanted I could have become a rich man by asking the fees most would pay willingly. By this time the Auroville population had increased and my renown as an astrologer spread there too. And this is how I met many future fellow Aurovilians, especially from the French speaking population. I also met many of them when taking visitors to Auroville.

Then came the moment that, while calculating a horoscope, an inner voice told me to go and live in Auroville. This was a tough decision to make, for the girl who is still my partner wanted to stay in the Ashram. But when you receive the command, there is no gainsaying. And so, behind the bullock cart which carried my scarce furniture and my books, I cycled to Auroville through a Pondicherry in full festive mood, for it was the eve of the Mother's centenary.

Many of my acquaintances in the Ashram did not forgive my move; some of them talked to me again only after twenty-five years, others never. What made the decision still tougher was the fact that it happened in full 'events', the painful separation of Auroville from the Sri Aurobindo Society, and that much of this happened in a rather fanatic atmosphere.

Friends had seen to it that a hut was built in Aspiration, a hexagonal one-brick wall and a keet roof. There I lived for twelve years. I soon became involved in the revived Last School, where I had some excellent teaching years to children who are now having their own children. In the meantime I continued translating and sometimes functioning as the football referee of rather recalcitrant sportsmen. On the very day I wanted to start the preparatory work for my first own book, I had a severe heart attack. Having survived the attack, I taught for about three years young village children in New Creation, which was an endearing experience. And when that was no longer possible for health reasons, I became a full-time student and writer – which I am to this day.

*As published in the book*  
The Journeying Years – How they came to Auroville  
*by Dianna Bowler.*





# 23

## *Moments That do not Fade – Meeting the Mother*

I left Belgium on the 17th of January 1970 – now thirty-eight years ago. I flew via Frankfurt. 17th January: the airport was white, under the snow. We flew through the night on a Boeing 707 of which the name was Lhotse, one of the high mountain tops in the Himalayas, I'll never forget that name. Then we landed in Bombay, 5 o'clock in the morning, 30° C – hot sunshine! Another world. Then Madras. There I had to take a bus. At that time, thirty-eight years ago, there were not so many buses as there are today. Then I arrived in Pondicherry, in a state of shock. I did not even know

whether my luggage was on top of the bus or not. But luckily it was there. Then I landed in a small hotel at the seaside that is no longer there, just next to the Ashram Press. And after I had put my luggage in my room, I threw my jacket over my shoulder and went out to see the Ashram.

In my head the Ashram was a white building with a palm tree next to it under a blue sky. Whether the Mother was there or not, I didn't know. So I started walking. There is a church nearby there, and in front of that church was a European lady talking with somebody. A very fashionably dressed lady, in shorts and well made up. So I asked her: "Where is that Ashram here somewhere?" She answered in English with an accent. I said: "Oh, you are French!" "Well, yes", she said. "See, you go on and you come to the Consulate with the French flag, and there you go to the left and you will see the Ashram." So I did.

It was a Sunday afternoon, very quiet. You didn't see many people in the street at that time. I entered the School courtyard, the gate was open. And there I saw all those timetables signed by the Mother, with that very specific signature. I thought: "Where on earth am I!" All at once a voice behind me said: "Are you looking for something?" It was the voice of a young Frenchman, Jean Pierre, who afterwards became Guruprasad. He is still in Auroville – Goupi. "I'll take you to the Ashram", he said. But I understood 'La Chambre' instead of 'L' Ashram'. So I thought: "Oh, there must be a holy room here somewhere." And I went with him.

He took me across the street, through a gate. There, on the chairs known so well by all of you, sat four old, grey-bearded people. It looked as if that was the entrance to heaven with St. Peter and other saints. Then Goupi asked somebody: "When can he meet him and where?" (I had asked Goupi to meet the only person whose name I knew.)

Behind my back, somebody answered, the same woman's voice I heard in front of the church. I turned around and there was that same lady, no longer in shorts and fashionably dressed, but in a long white robe, holding a plate full of flowers! I thought: "What is going on here?!" I didn't realize that I stood in the Ashram because I thought Goupi was taking me to 'La Chambre'. (That impressive-looking lady in the long robe and with the flowers was, as I found out later on, none other than Pournaprema, then still called Françoise, the Mother's granddaughter.) "You can have an appointment with the person you are looking for at the seaside around 5 o' clock", she said, and disappeared around the corner of the building.

I had the appointment, and afterwards I found a room in Goyle's New Guest House in the Rue Suffren. There I heard that the Mother was still alive and that one could meet her. You had to put your letter to her in the box that is still there at the Ashram entrance. I was told: "You go and put your letter to the Mother in that box." Unbelievable but true, for three days I turned around the central Ashram building, asking everybody: "In God's name, where is that Ashram?"

Even though Prithvi Singh (I got to know who he was afterwards), who was sitting there in the balcony street, told me: "It is here", I didn't believe him! In my opinion the entrance gate was too small to be that of the Ashram of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. So when finally I found the box and was putting my letter in it, a miracle happened: behind me stood again that same Frenchman I had met that Sunday afternoon. I asked, rather vexed: "Can you tell me at last: where is the Ashram?" He said: "But you are in the Ashram! Come with me and see."

In a French magazine I had seen a photo of the Samadhi and behind the Samadhi a kind of tiled roof, the one

in front of Nirodbaran's room. Therefore I had thought by myself: "If I see the Samadhi and that roof behind it, I am in the Ashram." And he took me to the Samadhi and I saw that roof and I knew that I was in the Ashram.

I dropped my letter to the Mother and she sent me in Her own handwriting an answer brought to the guest house by Suresh Joshi, who was Her messenger. The Mother's answer was – I still have the letter – "You can come..." – it was in French – "You can come... *mais ce sera une entrevue silencieuse* – it will be a silent meeting." What did that mean? I had already had so much trouble to write my letter! For what should I write – 'Madame'? 'Mother'? I had strong inhibitions against writing Mother! I had had a mother and she was dead! I have kept that letter because the Mother had written her answer at the bottom of it. She invited me to go and meet her.

On the day I went to meet the Mother a kind of ceremony took place in Goyle's guest house. But see, a lot of flowers were laid out before me; from those I had to choose some to take them to the Mother. I was not a flower man, for me such things meant nothing but sentimentality. All the guests in the guest house were standing behind my back to see which flowers I would choose. I failed the test miserably. I had chosen some flowers which I had found very beautiful – but I had not chosen Humility, which to me looked more like a herb than a flower. Then Michou (the Canadian girl whom some of you may remember and whom I met thirty years later in Montreal ) took me through the park to the Mother's room.

After some time Champaklal called my name and I went in. What was I to do? What do you do when you come in front of ... I had no more than a vague idea of who the Mother was ... What do you do when you come in front

of such a Being? For in the meantime I had seen people meditating on the wall at the seaside, I had seen people on their belly at the Samadhi, I had seen people in all postures of religiosity and meditation and all that – I felt very much disoriented and insecure. So I went through that door of the Mother's room, known to all of you, and what did I see? I saw that very thin arm of the Mother resting on the armrest of her chair. And I went in front of her ... and the rest I cannot tell, because I don't know. And when I came to myself again, there was the face of the Mother, smiling, giving me one packet of blessings, and then a second one.

Some time after I had left the Mother's room, 'it' started working in the body, in the spine, in the subtle body. And since I didn't want to be in the guest house with all those chattering visitors at that time, I walked by the seaside for some time, with tears in my eyes. Then I lay down, still with tears in my eyes. Something decisive had happened. I am such a naive fellow that everything that has happened in my life, spiritually, I have understood only afterwards. And I am happy for this because, if you try to interpret things at the very moment that they are happening, you distort them. You give them a fixed shape in your thought, which is how you will remember them.

You know where I got the explanation of what happened between the Mother and me on that 29th of January, 1970? I got it in a Temple of Freemasons in Ghent, a town in Belgium. I had given a talk in that Temple and after the talk I had conversations with many of those Freemasons. They were very interested. They were judges, professors, lawyers, priests, doctors ... They were extremely open and interested. And when I told them the experience which I have just told you, one of them said: "Oh! That is the initiation." Later I read what the Mother had said in one of her conversations: "What I call initiation is when a person meets me and

recognizes me." I suppose that in those seconds or eternities I have recognized something which I had known for a long time and which is always with me.

*Georges Van Vrekhem in  
Remembering the Mother with Gratitude,  
published by Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Studies,  
2003, pp. 95-99*

# 24

## *The Trip to Bangalore – Remembering my Years as a Teacher in Auroville*

In 1980 the idea matured to reactivate Last School, as the first generation of the children born in Auroville were growing up and in urgent need of education. I had then been living in Auroville for two years, after having been in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1970 onwards. How I came to participate in the meeting to discuss the first school activities, I do not remember. But the result was that I was asked to teach some elementary English to Tamil boys and girls from the village of Kulapalayam who wanted to join the



school. (Most of them are now active in responsible positions in the Auroville community and have their own families.) That was my first commitment to Last School, where I would teach for eight years till stopped by a heart attack.

Gradually I became more and more involved in the life of the school. I continued teaching English, but my main subjects were history and 'general knowledge', allowing me to talk about anything under the sun. I soon found out that the best way of teaching such matters was by showing video tapes of documentaries and appropriate feature films. When talking about Julius Caesar, for instance, the droning voice of the teacher can cause the eyelids of young ones to become very heavy; but if he shows them parts of a film like *Cleopatra*, however Hollywoodian, the class will be interested and acquire an idea of life in ancient Roman times. The important points are that the teacher should introduce the subject well, if necessary comment during the showing of the tapes (CDs were still unknown then), and at the end answer the questions which have risen in the minds of the young ones.

At that time and place teaching by video was not an easy thing to do, for I could find such tapes only in the shops in Pondicherry. I visited them all regularly, had their lists of available tapes copied, and spend many evenings watching my harvest on the Last School television set (I didn't yet have one of my own), often till midnight. For out of ten tapes only two, on an average, were in good condition, and out of five of these only one might be suitable to show in the school.

Another frustrating problem, this one during class hours, was the quite frequent power cuts which time after time left us unexpectedly stuck, uncertain that the power would come back and that the class could be continued.

Yet I may say that those teaching years of mine were very satisfactory. I had three excellent batches of those

children and adolescents, originating from so many different backgrounds; now most of them have gone their ways, even at foreign universities, which nobody expected them to take. For generally those youngsters were very free and considered to be 'wild ones'. But I had the privilege of being with them in a position where 'discipline' was a matter of personal relationship – in our school there was no 'punishment' – and I never had any doubt about the presence of their living souls. Even if this sounds somewhat inflated, it is the truth.

Strange to say, I had my best days with the Auroville youth not in our beautiful Last School, but in the garden city of Bangalore. It so happened that thanks to the contribution of an anonymous donor my colleagues had the idea of hiring a bus and go on a school trip to the 'boom city' of Bangalore. We had a good bus, equipped for a ten day journey like this, with an excellent driver from the Pondicherry Tourist Corporation. And early in the morning on departure day there they were, our young students, expectant, well-groomed, in their very best jeans, and with some money from their parents in their pocket.

Even before the bus started somebody put the first cassette of 'their music' on the audio system. I had some experience as a guide on touring buses in Western Europe and knew that this was not the right thing to do. One has to address the 'passengers' and make them aware that they are travelling as a group, and that this is only possible if they show consideration for their fellow travellers under all circumstances. So I took the microphone and assured everybody that we would have a great trip together but on condition that they stuck to some simple agreements, in the first place that all would be punctually present at every appointment fixed by the leaders of the group – my four colleagues and myself – even with a broken leg!

During those ten days there was not a single problem. We visited all there was to see in Bangalore, spent a day in

the old palace town of Mysore, rode out to the giant Jain statue in Sravanabelagola, visited the wonderful temples at Belur and Halebib, ate once or twice in a restaurant, went to see a movie together, and sometimes let our 'tourists' freely roam among the shops on and near Brigade Road. Each time about ten minutes before the departure of the bus I spotted them in the busy crowd of the city, drifting nearer to the bus in their twos or threes, checking their watches to be on time and ready to embark. We never had to wait for a single one of them. Nor did they make a fuss in the restaurants when we pointed out the simple dishes they could choose from because those were what our budget could afford.

Looking back, I can still see those smiling young boys and girls enjoying their trip, attentive, interested in what they met and discovered, helping each other when necessary, and courteous to one and all. I still see the youngest girl come running towards our bus with a gigantic red balloon, and one of the older boys who, with his pocket money, had bought a fat English dictionary. This was the way of educating our youth which I had dreamed of: in life and fully involved in it. At the time there was an American ship sailing around the world, a floating university, visiting country after country in continent after continent. That was what I would have liked to do with those children. At least I have had a glimpse of it.

Our 'wild ones' have now children themselves. It should be remembered that they were born in Auroville, which did not mean that they would automatically want to spend their lives here, or that they would retain any tie with Auroville's ideals. Yet all the ones whom I have been able to follow have this inner connection, also when living in far-away countries.

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Georges Van Vrekhem, a Flemish Belgian, has been living in Auroville from 1978 until his passing on 31st August, 2012.

In that period he published a number of highly seminal books on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother such as *Beyond Man, the Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (1997); *The Mother, the Story of Her Life* (2000); *Overman – The Intermediary between the Human and the Supramental Being* (2001); *Patterns of the Present – from the Perspective of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (2002); *Hitler and His God, the Background to the Hitler Phenomenon* (2006); *Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God* (2011), and *Preparing for the Miraculous* (2012), containing the eleven lectures Georges had given in 2010-2011 at Auroville's Savitri Bhavan and Town Hall.

In 2006, he was awarded the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar by the Government of Bengal.

At his passing Georges left a number of unpublished essays behind. Some of them were based on his talks in Auroville at the end of 2011, when he embarked on a second series of lectures on a wide variety of topics related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. However, first Cyclone Thane and later his deteriorating health disrupted these lectures.

This book, which contains his unpublished essays as well as some of his articles and interviews that have been published in the magazines *Auroville Today*, *Mother India*, and *The Advent*, and in the book *The Journeying Years*, is published to honour Georges Van Vrekhem in recognition of his immense work in helping to understand the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



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