

## Epitome of Consciousness

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### Abstract

Consciousness is one which pervades the whole existence; from material to vital and mental world and beyond. Not only mind or its awareness, nor matter nor senses alone; every being, everything is replete with consciousness. Everything is conscious, from stone to human being, at different levels. Consciousness is an inner space. Sri Ramana Maharshi conceived consciousness as a force behind every object and living form. He identified it as the Self, the Atma, absolute silence. Ordinary consciousness is awareness through intellect, mind and senses. Cosmic consciousness is beyond them. It is awareness at the universal level; universal matter, energy, mind and forces. Spiritual consciousness is awareness of Self, Spirit and the Divine.

**Keywords-** Conscious, Soul, Existence, Bliss, Wakefulness, Spiritualism, Materialism

Sachchidananda (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss) is usually conceived as the highest state of consciousness. But Supramental consciousness is the next state of consciousness as realised by Sri Aurobindo; its descent took place in his body and Mother worked with it till her last days of physical existence on earth, transforming her body to the extent possible. Sri Aurobindo said that there are further heights, not yet explored. Referring to Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose's findings in plants and metals Sri Aurobindo observed in *The Life Divine*, "There is a superconscious in us as well as subconscious, a range of conscious faculties and therefore an organisation of consciousness which rise high above that psychological stratum to which we give the name of mentality. And since the subliminal self in us thus rises in superconscience above mentality, may it not also sink in subconscious below mentality? . . . If so, we must suppose in the plant and the metal also a force to which we can give the name of consciousness. . . . The seeking and shrinking of the plant, its pleasure and pain, its sleep and its wakefulness and all that strange life whose truth an Indian scientist has brought to light by rigidly scientific methods, are all movements of consciousness . . . . Mind and Matter are rather different grades of the same energy, different organisations of one conscious Force of Existence." (Divine 18/ 86-88)

### Pioneers in the field of Consciousness

The words like consciousness and spirituality are often heard but used for purposes which do not connote full sense or accurate meaning. Stream of consciousness does not carry

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the exact idea. Spirituality is not an elevated thinking, aesthetic living or anything highly ethical or moral. They are good in their own places but not spiritual in essence. When we hear or find the word consciousness the faces that flash first in our mind's sky are of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as they dwelt on, experimented with and applied higher consciousness in their lives and conferred most on the subject: **consciousness**. They reached the confluence of vast numbers of cultures and languages of the world with commanding positions.

### **Sri Aurobindo**

Sri Aurobindo was master of Thoughts and Ideas; a journalist, poet, essayist and author of volumes of books. He mastered some half a dozen Indian languages including Sanskrit and Vedic after coming to India and settling in Baroda as he had mastered similar numbers of European languages including Latin and Greek while living in England. He was the fount of many-hued culture. Satprem's biography of Sri Aurobindo is titled *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Sri Aurobindo rediscovered consciousness in modern terms. His spiritual expeditions were in the realms of consciousness. He analysed the subtle nuances of it. Sri Aurobindo and Spirituality are synonymous.

### **The Mother**

Both parents of the Mother were of Sephardic Jewish origin; Mother's father, Maurice Alfassa was a banker from Adrianople and her mother, Mathilde Ismalun was from Alexandria. She was a descendant of the family of Egyptian Pharaoh. In those days Alexandria was the most cosmopolitan city. There was full amity among the Arabs, Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese and Italians. Maurice Alfassa and Mathilde Ismalun were married at Alexandria. When Mirra (The Mother) was born in Paris in 1868, Mirra and Mira were the short forms of the Hebrew name Miriam. She was named Mirra Alfassa. Her devotees later found MA in her name pronounced as Ma meaning mother in most Indian languages; Mother was a universal Mother from her birth.

There was admixtures of all cultures at the place and time of her birth. She had many extraordinary experiences during her childhood which were occult, beyond the reach of a materialist. She beheld pages of books transparent with different and accurate history other than what was written there. Beginning her Yoga from the age of four without knowing, she had series of occult, spiritual experiences. To learn occultism she remained in Algeria for some time. Moving in many European countries she came to India to meet Sri Aurobindo and remained forever near him in Pondicherry but in between her meetings with him she travelled and stayed for some years in Japan and visited China. Everywhere she worked and had ever new experiences. She inherited and cultivated a myriad culture before she took her seat as the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India. She practised and experienced the work of Supramental consciousness in her body which was first manifested in Sri Aurobindo's body. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were the exponents of Consciousness.

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“Consciousness has been given to man so that he can progress, can discover what he doesn’t know, develop into what he has not yet become, and so it may be said that there is a higher state than that of an immobile and static peace: it is a trust total enough for one to keep the will to progress, to preserve the effort for progress while ridding it of all anxiety, all care for results and consequences. . . . The next step is to face the problem, but with the calm and certitude of an absolute trust in the supreme power which knows, and can make you act. And then, instead of abandoning action, one can act in a higher peace that is strong and dynamic.” (Mother 9 /305). But for this, Mother asks man to avail the fount of his spiritual resources by surrendering to the Divine, the most potent action in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga.

“And it is only with this spiritual capacity of rising to a higher level and replacing the animal’s unconsciousness by a spiritual super-consciousness that there comes into the being not only the capacity to see the goal of existence and to foresee the culmination of the effort but also a clear-sighted trust in a higher spiritual power to which one can surrender one’s whole being, entrust oneself, give the responsibility for one’s life and future and so abandon all worries.” (Mother 9 /303-04). She calls this to be a new way of success, an achievement through spiritual realisation while remaining in spiritual consciousness. “This is what could be called a new aspect of the divine intervention in life, a new form of intervention of the divine forces in existence, a new aspect of spiritual realisation.” (Mother 9 /305)

### **Material Attitude to Life**

We must remember that apart from consciousness, religion and spirituality the basic concept of the world is matter giving birth to a materialistic outlook. With matter we begin though we do not end there. But there are large numbers of people who deny the other aspects of life and find all within the boundaries of matter. It is their way and we must respect differing ways of different people.

Materialists are mostly atheists. Atheists deny the reign of religion. And in between theist and atheist are the agnostics who do not matter much. Materialism stands as a contrast to spiritualism. Communism is the best example of materialism. We have the direct experience of how the communist world butchered millions of men to establish the right of the proletariats but in the process millions of proletariats were ruined and only Dictators surfaced. The inner stories of communist movements have been written by competent writers. Communism has changed faces in countries infected by it but it has been banished from most of them. It is awaiting its further banishment. In the 1960s Existentialism came to possess the intellect of some people. It was a complete negative idea about human life. As a movement Existentialism has lost its footing.

### **Religion**

When we talk of consciousness and spirituality we have to remember that most devout persons live with their respective religions which is basically a God ward journey. Though its aim is spirituality it is dwarfed by man’s ordinary consciousness. The position of religion is as below.

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Thirst for beyond and glimpse of it gave birth to religion. It was later distorted with all rules and narrow separatism so much that most religionists forgetting the essential humility in such matters felt that their religion was superior to the others and hence they quarreled and fought with each other. Some people of one of the ultra religions aim at eliminating all other religions violently as they do not adhere to their faith. Ruinous bestiality was being perpetrated by them jeopardizing the global life. Mother of Pondicherry always condemned religions and spoke in favour of spiritualism. The opposite of spiritualism is materialism. Religion is in between them. Religion gets rusted through superstition so great people have advised to go beyond religion embracing spirituality which is finer and wider than rules and regulations. This is not to deny that the age old spiritual practices included religions rituals. The truth of pure religion remains. Sri Aurobindo asserted that, “Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion, and in the larger ideas of it that are now coming on us even the greatest religion becomes no more than a broad sect or branch of the one universal religion”. (Culture 427)

### **Spirituality**

Spiritualism is a faith on existence beyond what we see before our nose and a humility that I and my knowledge are not the end of the world, that there are vast things which I have yet to grasp and know, that my past and future neither were nor are fixed. Guessed by intuition and verified by experiment man conceives that there are phenomena beyond reasonable explanation. And accordingly he believes in the beyond with faith on something like God. India has given birth to large numbers of great Rishis and Munis who uttered the highest words of wisdom through Vedas and Upanishads as heard and realised by them. India is the birth place of some great religions. “Indian culture has been from the beginning and has remained a spiritual, an inward-looking religio-philosophical culture,” Sri Aurobindo said. (Culture 52)

Yogi Sri Aurobindo realised that “Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.” (Divine /19/ 857)

For the progression from mundane to the spiritual, to establish divine life on earth he depended entirely on spiritualism, “To discover the spiritual being in himself is the main business of the spiritual man and to help others towards the same evolution is his real service to the race . . . an outward help could succor and alleviate, but nothing or very little more is possible” (Divine 19/884-85). In his *The Ideal of Human Unity* Sri Aurobindo stressed that the ultimate union between the nations would be possible through spiritual means and that would be in a spiritual age but, “The spiritual age will be ready to set in when the common

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mind of man begins to be alive to these truths and to be moved or desire to be moved by this triple or triune Spirit.” (Unity 244)

### **Spiritual Poems by Swami Vivekananda**

Swami Vivekananda’s poems are examples of his spiritual realisation; vibrant, ever living poems, expressed in simple and direct poetic utterances. His poems exude peace and spiritual confidence. He realises God as immanent, everywhere in Nature;

I feel Him standing by  
Over hill and dale, high mount and vale,  
Far away and high

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He feels God nowhere else than in himself. Repeating Shankaracharya’s words that the world is a dream, a Maya, he tells in the same breath that it is True; God is the truth, living in him.

This world’s a dream  
Though true it seem.  
And only Truth is He the living!  
The real me is none but He  
And never matter changing!

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### **Delight of true Spiritual Life**

Surmounting all obstacles true spiritual consciousness, above all other consciousness, releases humanity from all pitfalls. Let us hear the charm of spiritual life as Sri Aurobindo tells us: “The delight of the Spirit is ever new, the forms of beauty it takes innumerable, its godhead ever young and the taste of delight, *rasa*, of the Infinite eternal and inexhaustible.” (Divine /19/1069)

### **Epitome of Spiritual Consciousness**

We present below the examples of highest aspirations and intense emotional and psychic surge to meet the God, realise God from the lives of three great spiritual personalities, at the beginning of their spiritual journey. All the three achieved God and continued to inspire people of the world to achieve personal wellbeing, health and higher manhood leading towards universal peace and unity up to the last days of their lives. Even after their passing they continue to guide and illuminate the lives of millions of their followers and all those who turn to them for help. All of them were God realised souls; Paramahansa, Mahayogi and Maharshi.

A very significant thing to be noticed is that the Divine induced each of them to seek it; leading and guiding him until he realised the Truth of Divine Reality in him, above and pervading the material universe. Goddess Kali engaged Sri Ramakrishna as her priest to show him the way. Narayana the God sent Sri Aurobindo to Jail to train him and the Divine Self suddenly gave Ramana Maharshi the experience of Death so that he could overcome it to

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realise the Self, Soul or God in him. Each of them represents the peak of spiritual consciousness. They did everything while living in that consciousness and still act as the beacon in the lives of their devotees

### Sri Ramakrishna's Kali Darshan

About his emotional and psychic life Sri Ramakrishna himself once narrated a story of his first ecstasy and trance while viewing birds' free movement through the sky (as symbol of God's presence in Nature). "I was six or seven at that time. One morning I was going over a ridge of the earth in the field while munching puffed rice. A beautiful piece of cloud pregnant with water was floating in the sky-I was eating while beholding it. Instantly the cloud covered almost the whole sky and by this time a flock of milk white cranes were flying in the lap of the black cloud. What a scenic beauty! In an ecstatic mood I lost my awareness and fell down. Puffed rice scattered around the ridge. I can't say how long I was lying there in such a state until people raised me up and took me home" (Saradananda Book 2 Chapter 2 p.22). It happened again and again, While rambling through the vast field with friends, the boy suddenly fainted observing the rows of geese flying through pregnant clouds in the sky. This he explained to his parents who were worried to get him medically treated for epilepsy, that there was nothing to worry about it as he had fainted due to a wonderful feeling deeper in his being giving rise to a great fount of joy. Such ecstatic moments and trance from the very childhood showed the days of a great saint of the future; involvement from his childhood in the worlds beyond gave birth to a Paramahansa in him later, hailed by all who adored him as the direct representative of the divine on earth, an Avatar at this age of material civilization.

His eldest brother Ramkumar, who was older than him by 31 years, had fatherly affection for Gadadhar. He was a teacher and priest by profession. He taught his brother how to do the God worship following all rituals. He took him to Dakshineswar where the pious great lady of the time, Rani Rasmani, had established her temple of Kali and other Gods and Goddesses. Ramkumar as priest of the temple initiated his brother as his follower but observing brother's devotion and love for the Goddess Kali, his intensity and force of worship, Rani and her representative, son-in-law Mathur Babu, intuitively felt Gadadhar as superior to Ramkumar for the worship of Kali. He was engaged as in-charge of Kali temple while his elder brother was asked to worship the other gods. After the demise of Ramkumar, soon after their coming to Dakshineswar, Gadhadhar was the only and chief worshiper there. He was a teenager then.

But he was far from an ordinary priest, far from worshipping Kali following the age old traditions and practices. He found the Divine Mother of flesh and blood in her clay image. He established his relationship with her as her son. Jesus was son of his Father; the God, Gadaadhar was son of his Mother; the Goddess.

At the beginning, after the usual worshipping of the Goddess, he used to sing before her the songs composed a century before him by Ramprasad, the great worshipper of Kali, who had seen and realised her. Ramakrishna would sing full throated songs; he had very good

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voice and ability to sing. He would sing songs after songs by Ramprasad and other composers and implore the Goddess to appear before him. Why not, if she had appeared before Ramprasad? Claimed Ramakrishna. He would constantly pray for her Darshan and cry, telling her, “Mother, are you not hearing my repeated calls? You gave Darshan to Ramprasad, would you not bless me with your presence?” (Saradananda Book 2 Chapter 6 p.56). His intense eagerness to see the Goddess and the story of his first bliss of meeting her, having her Darshan, was described by him to one of his closest disciples:

“Not being able to see her I felt intense pain in my heart. It seemed as if someone was squeezing my heart as one does to bring out all water from a *gamchha* (a light towel). I became extremely restless conceiving that I would perhaps never see her in life. My restless thought was that this life then needn’t be preserved. My eyes instantly fell on the sword that was kept in Mother’s room. Running like a mad as I tried to get hold of it with the idea that this very moment I would terminate this life, I had a wonderful vision of the Mother and instantly I fell down senseless. I couldn’t guess what happened then in the outside nor how that day and the next were passed. But inside my heart was flowing a coagulated stream of joy for having realised the wonderful presence of the Mother” ((Saradananda Book 2 Chapter 6 p.57). On another day the Master elucidated the wonderful vision:

“The room with its door and the temple vanished, as if there wasn’t any such thing before, I see an infinite and eternal luminous sea of consciousness! Wherever I cast my eyes I find the roaring luminous waves rushing to swallow up with tremendous speed. Instantly they came over me and drowned me in its depth. Gasping for breath, fidgeting, I fell down senseless.” (Saradananda Book 2 Chapter 6 p.57). It is said that when he regained least of sense, he was heard uttering the sound, “Ma, Ma”.

After this there was always heard a suppressed cry aspiring to see her, appealing her to appear before him. Sometimes he could not control himself; weltering on the floor he would cry in pain restlessly uttering, “Be merciful Mother, appear before me!” The cry was so intense and loud that people would gather round him.

Explaining his feelings during the time the Master said later to his disciples, “The people standing around me seemed to be shadowy figures or images in pictures; irrelevant. For that I didn’t feel least of hesitation or shame. During the time I used to faint at times due to unbearable pain and just after it I used to see the gracious Divine self of the Mother; she laughed, talked, giving consolation and lessons.” (Saradananda Book 2 Chapter 6 p.57)

The Master used to say, “I have touched the nose of the Mother (earthen image), she was really breathing. Searching minutely I never found the shadow of the Divine Mother falling in the temple. From my own room I heard the Mother going up the stairs of the temple like a happy girl making sounds of the jingling bells on her anklet. Quickly coming out of the room I really found the Mother standing in the balcony on the first floor of the temple with her loosened hairs spread over her shoulders; looking towards Kolkata or viewing the Ganges” (Saradananda. Book 2 Chapter 6 p.59). How intimately the priest behaved with the

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clay image of the Kali has been known from an eyewitness, Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, who was his constant companion during the time. He would suddenly enter the temple or peep from behind to observe how the priest worshipped Mother Kali. The clay image was a living being, the World Mother Kali to the priest. "I used to see my maternal uncle come ready with offering of hibiscus flower and marmelos leaf (*Bilva patra*) to the Mother but first he touched them to his own head, chest and other parts of the body including the feet and thereafter offered it at the lotus feet of the Mother.

"I used to see his breast and eyes red like that of the drunkard and in that condition he would get up from his seat and come to the throne of the deity to adore her holding her chin and then talk to her, cut jokes and sing songs. And then holding the hand of the deity he would dance.

"I used to see him suddenly get up while offering rice with other foods to the deity and taking a handful of such food come to the mother. He would then touch the food to the mouth of the Mother (clay image) and ask her to eat, telling, 'Eat it Mother, eat with relish.' And then, asking her, as if in answer to her order, 'Shall I take?, O.K. I am taking,' telling this, partaking a portion of the food in hand he would offer the remaining food to her, telling, 'I have eaten, now you take.' "One day I saw my maternal uncle feeding the special food offering to a cat which entered the temple while mewing, asking, 'Shall you eat Mother, shall you eat?' "I used to see him soliloquizing after arranging for the retirement of the Mother at night, 'Mother, Mother, are you asking me to sleep with you? O. K. I am so doing,' telling this he would enter the silver bed of the Mother and sleep for a while. "And I observed that sometimes entering the temple for doing the Puja he would be so immersed in meditation that for quite some time he would lose all awareness of the outer world." (Saradananda. Book 2 Chapter 6 p.60)

Hriday further said that his uncle while plucking flowers alone in the morning for her worship would cordially talk to someone; sometimes humorously, sometimes with childish claim. And that at night he never found the Master sleeping; he would either soliloquize, sing to himself or going under the five banyan trees engage himself in meditation.

### **Sri Aurobindo's Sadhana in the Alipore Jail**

Sri Aurobindo was not a *bhakta* from birth like Sri Ramakrishna or mad after knowing the Self in him like Raman Maharshi. He didn't question his Guru to prove the existence of God like young Vivekananda. He simply ignored the issue, giving more stress for the work in hand. He has stated clearly, in spite of his experiences; "When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all." (Speech 117)

Sri Aurobindo was primarily a poet and politician. Back to India he was a secret revolutionary and a political leader. The interest of the country was most dear to his heart, second to none. Though he began yoga practices through pranayama and had some occult

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experiences; he was on his yoga path. He sought the divine to gain strength and power so he could help achieve the freedom of his motherland; didn't seek the divine whole heartedly. But God pushed himself in his life and compelled him to accept Him.

He was arrested for political reasons with charges of sedition in 1908. "My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. The Next year on May 6, I was released", Sri Aurobindo wrote. (Prison Life 12). "I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and I could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail or cease." Sri Aurobindo said. (Speech 110)

After his arrest, Sri Aurobindo said, "He spoke to me again and said, 'The bonds you had not the strength to break I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue . . . I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.' Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita . . . . I realized what the Hindu religion meant." (Speech 110)

Firstly God compelled him and then entered into him to mould him to be a great *bhakta* with unwavering faith on God. "Troubled by mental listlessness I spent a few days in agony in this manner. One afternoon . . . I could feel that the mind's regulating power was about to cease.... I called upon God ... prayed to him.... That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and without fear, on the lap of his mother, so I remained in the lap of the World-Mother.... I also realised the extraordinary power and efficacy of prayer." (Prison Life 43-44)

Strolling, he would chant mantras of the Upanishads. He would try to realise the great Upanishadic lore, *sarvam Khalu idam brahma*, on all things around. Everything seemed to him vibrating with a universal consciousness. "Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature's play; behind all this is a great pure detached Spirit rapt in a serene delight . . . . Always it seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on his lap. The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and white peace reigned everywhere. It is impossible to describe that . . . . A spring of love for all creatures gushed from within. . . ." (Prison life 47)

"I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover." (Speech 111)

While hearing Sri Aurobindo's experiences in jail we may hear about the rigorous sadhana he did there as witnessed by others; fellow prisoners and jail workers. Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, a juvenile prisoner wrote, "His black hair glistened always, as if oil were dripping

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from it. His face resembled that of a child, without any lines of thought or anxiety – a tender face perpetually filled with happy smile. His eyes were full of profound peace and tranquility. His smile was unlike ours. It was expressed in the glance of his eyes. His body exuded a fragrance like that of a baby’s tender body. His nails grew to half an inch, his hair and beard grew longer and longer. Our hair never had that oily sheen of his. “At night the warders would come and tell us, ‘Arvind remain standing the whole night, his bedding folded in the corner.’ They didn’t disturb him by pressing him to lie down. They did not even call him up at night, as was their practice with us” (Sarkar 101). Upendranath Bandyopadhyay wrote, “In a very big hall large number of prisoners of different temperament and abilities, of different growth and maturity, of different ages, mostly young, were kept together . . . They clashed sometimes, jeering at each other.

“Aurobindo Babu used to keep still and silent among these warring parties. He never gave his opinion even with yes or no in any affair. We used to hear strange stories of his behaviours and habits from the warders of the jail. Some said that he did not sleep at night, some said that he had become mad; that he used to partake his meal with cockroaches, ants and wall lizards, that he didn’t wash his mouth, didn’t take bath, didn’t change his clothes, etc. . . . Once I took courage and asked him, ‘Do you use oil on your head while taking bath?’ “His reply was that ‘I don’t take bath’ stunned me. I asked, ‘How then the hairs on your head are so shining?’ “Aurobindo Babu said, ‘Some changes are occurring in my body in the course of sadhana that I am undergoing. My hairs absorb fat from my body.’ “Once I noticed that the eyes of Aurobindo Babu were stilled like glass, without a blink, without any movement. Somewhere I read that such things happen when all activities of the mind and heart cease . . . none had the courage of asking him about it. Lastly Sachin slowly approached him and asked, ‘What have you got through your sadhana?’ “Resting his hand on the shoulder of this tender aged boy he said, ‘I got what I was seeking.’ “We heard some of what types of tantric sadhana he was going through.” (Upendranath 61-63)

Nolini Kanta Gupta once requested him to help find a poem in English . . . and the next day Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem in English on the margin of an old letter in pencil, in want of proper paper or writing material. Once on request he recited ten or twelve lines from Homer in original Greek while in Alipore jail. In the court once a meeting was arranged while court proceedings were on, and Sri Aurobindo consented to give a talk. He spoke on the subject, “Nationalism and three qualities”. He wrote four essays in support of ‘Bomb’ which was a condemned subject . . . he wrote some more literary pieces while the court proceedings were on. Remaining most silent and unmoved he did not hesitate to write serious things . . .” (Gupta 350-353)

From the above stories an idea may be formed that in Alipore jail he did sadhana with the help of Gita (Niskama Karma; Karma Yoga), Upanishad (Advaita Vedanta), Tantrik sadhana (Shakti Sadhana) as was given to him by God. And, “The Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than

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was any guide to my Sadhana” (On Himself 68). He got from Swami Vivekananda something towards his future realisation in the realm of Supramental Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo confirmed, “It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence... The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.” (On Himself 68)

### **Tranquility and Peace: Aspects of spiritual Consciousness**

Here is an incident in the life of Sri Aurobindo, long after his sadhana in Alipore jail, when Yogi Sri Aurobindo had his permanent seat in Pondicherry. “Tranquility, says the Mother, is a very positive state; there is a positive peace which is not the contrary of strife- a peace active, contagious, powerful, which dominates and calms, puts everything in order, organises.’ An example of this “contagious peace” anticipates a little an event in Sri Aurobindo’s life: it was in Pondicherry, many years ago, in that season when the tropical rains, sometimes cyclones, sweep down suddenly and work havoc. Doors and Windows have to be barricaded with stout bamboo laths. That night a cyclone had burst with torrents of rain and the Mother had hastily come to Sri Aurobindo’s room to help him shut the windows. He was seated at his desk as usual (Sri Aurobindo spent twelve hours writing, from six in the evening to six next morning, for years together; then for eight hours he used to walk up and down “for yoga”) the windows were wide open, not a drop of rain had entered. The peace which reigned in that room, relates the Mother, was so solid, so compact that the cyclone *could not enter*” (Satprem 87). This was a state of his spiritual consciousness which could not be disturbed even by Nature; an exceptional situation which automatically rejected any intervention.

### **Ramana Maharshi’s Self-Realisation**

On 29 August, 1896 Venkataraman told his brother that he would go to school at 12 noon to attend a special class. His brother said that he shouldn’t forget to take five rupees from the box below and pay rupees two to his college as fees. He took it from his aunt. Earlier he never had a thought about the money. However, while going out he left a small letter among his elder brother’s books and papers written in Tamil. The content of the letter was, “I have, in search of my father and in accordance to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over this affair. To trace this out no money need be spent. Your school fee has not yet been paid. Rupees two are enclosed herewith” (Narasimha 27). Thus he left the letter and money among his elder brother’s books and papers.

The train from Madurai was at 12 noon. He reached the station quite late but the train was yet to arrive. While he could go straight to Tiruvannamalai with rupees three he bought a ticket up to Tindivanam. He had neither any travelling experience nor any idea of the path to cover, nor of the train fare. However, like receiving rupees three from home unexpectedly he was helped on the way by some kind hearted people unexpectedly. He was as well teased and

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chased by some miscreants. He was given food by a kind hearted lady devotee of Krishna at Villupuram on Krishna's birthday on 31. August. She gave him bundle of sweet-meat. Venkataraman had to buy food sometimes and pay train fares, sleeping anywhere on the floors or temple stairs. He took rupees four from a pawn broker in exchange of his gold earrings studded with costly stones. Going in zigzag way by train and walking miles and miles he reached Tiruvannamalai on 1 September, 1896. He was aged 16 plus. Entering the main Siva temple's Ayyankulam tank he was shorn off his beautiful black lock as asked by a barber an immediately agreed to by Venkataraman. Shaved like a sannyasi, he threw away the sweet bundle. "He then tore his cloth to shreds, and wearing one of them as a cod-piece (*koupina*) cast away the rest along with the rest of money, three rupees and half with him. He also removed the sacred thread from his body and threw it away. He was not going to touch, and never after touch money. . . he took 'the vow of celibacy.'" (Narasimha 45)

"One day when the young swami sat on the central dais of that *mantapam* and plunged in meditation, he found stones whizzing from behind him and in front of him. Luckily they did not touch his body. So he passed on to the dark recess of a large pit known as Patala Lingam in the same *mantapam*, where he hoped to be free from such attentions. The change seems to have been from the frying pan to the fire. That dark pit, Patala Lingam, in spite of its containing a sacred Lingam and Nandi (bull) was never lit, never swept, never cleaned. It was mostly moist and insect pests flourished luxuriantly there. As the young *mouni* sat there, enjoying the bliss of his soul, nettles, wasps, bees, ants, mosquitoes, and other vermin, the rightful occupants of the Patala Lingum, attached themselves to the intruder's body and rejoiced in drinking his blood. The nether sides of the thighs and legs as he sat there were full of sores from which blood and puss issued. Even when one Ratnammal, wife of Velurar . . . went into this dark pit to give him food, pointed out these disadvantages and invited him to her house, the Swami gave no response by act, word and even gesture; and when she left a newly washed cloth, requesting him to use it as a bed or a seat at least, to ward of the attack of these pests, he never cared even to touch it. Such was the intensity of his trance that he never noticed the pests. As for the kind attention of the mischievous youths, the Swami did not fully escape them." (Narasimha 47-48). At last a few ascetics from the adjoining garden and temple bodily lifted and carried him to the Gopuram-Subramanya Temple.

"The young 'Brahamana Swami' still remained unconsciousness; the eyes remained still closed, evidently he was in deep *Samadhi*. Venkatachalam and others noted the large number of sores caused by ants and fleas on the nether side of the Swami's thighs and legs, with blood and puss still issuing from some of them, and wondered that anyone could remain unconscious of his body despite such torture. Regarding it as irreverence and impertinence to make any further noise in such presence, they bowed and went away." (Narasimha 49)

The Swami stayed in the garden for some time and moved inside the adjacent temple. He was object for viewing by the pilgrims and miscreants who constantly provoked him. But

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he remained absolutely silent in meditation and did not pay attention to them. Gradually he drew the attention of some other Swamis and fellow beings who tried to protect and help him. Sometimes he begged for food but mostly he was provided food and drinks. Whether he was given such things or not was not his business. His main way to realise God was the core question: “Who am I?” which he faced at the beginning while feeling himself dying. The story behind his first awakening is like this, “It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good, that the great change in my life took place. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle’s house. I was in my usual health . . . . on that day as I sat alone, there was nothing wrong with my health. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. . . . I felt, ‘I was going to die,’ . . . I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself, then and there. “The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective or introverted. . . . I imitated as corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips together so that no sound may escape. ‘Let not the word “I” or any other word be uttered! . . . . But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound “I” within myself, apart from the body. So “I” am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by Death. . . .

“In the first place I lost any little interest I had in my outward relations with my friends, kinsmen, studies, etc. . . . The old personality that resented and asserted itself had disappeared. . . . I would sit alone by myself especially in a posture suitable for meditation, close my eyes and lose myself in the all absorbing concentration on myself, on the spirit, current or force (*avesam*) which constituted myself. I would continue despite the constant jeers by my elder brother. . . . “All my preference for and avoidance of food had gone. All food given to me, tasty or tasteless, good or rotten, I would swallow with indifference to its taste, smell or quality.” (Narasimha19-21). He acquired the core knowledge of all knowledge and expressed himself not only in talks but in write ups which included poems.

### **Our Aim must be to Reach the Perfect Consciousness**

Everything is evolving towards a higher stage: it is an evolution of consciousness which is the inner truth covering the apparent physical evolution through force and might, selection and choice. Though the evolution has been continuing in zigzag ways for millions of years, Sri Aurobindo urges on man to expedite the evolutionary process in his life to reach the Divine Consciousness, the ultimate goal as the greats reached. Physical evolution as Darwin conceived is the outer expression of evolution of consciousness; everything happens with the change and evolution of consciousness, usually from the lower to the higher ranges of life and existence. “It is a perfected and divinised life for which the earth-nature is seeking, and this seeking is a sign of the Divine Will in Nature. . . .

“An Involution of the Divine Existence, the spiritual Reality, in the apparent inconscience of Matter is the starting-point of the evolution. But that Reality is in its nature an eternal Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence: the evolution must

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then be an emergence of Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence, not at first in its essence or totality but in evolutionary forms that express or disguise it.” (Divine 19/ 682-83)

Sri Aurobindo becomes more specific in his expectations, “Our aim must be to grow into our true being, our being of Spirit, the being of the supreme and universal Existence, Consciousness, Delight, Sachchidananda. “And our existence depends on that Existence, it is that which is evolving in us; we are a being of that Existence; a state of consciousness of that Consciousness, an energy of that conscious Energy, a will-to-delight of being, delight of consciousness, delight of energy born of that Delight: this is the root principle of our existence.” (Divine 19/ 685)

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