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**TAGORE,  
SRI AUROBINDO  
AND IQBAL**

*Three Lectures*

**Sisirkumar Ghose**

**UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR  
SRINAGAR**

# Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

On my invitation, Dr S. K. Ghose delivered a series of three extension lectures on Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal under the auspices of the Iqbal Institute, Kashmir University, in May 1979. The lectures are now being published in the form of a booklet.

Dr Ghose is a distinguished writer and his books and articles cover a wide field. His writings on Tagore and Sri Aurobindo reveal an insight and a literary sensibility which helps us in understanding the two great poets and thinkers. His appreciation of Iqbal, which he has termed an outsider's view, shows a fine grasp of the essential Iqbal, which should prove rewarding to many.

Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal were contemporaries. Tagore and Iqbal had heard of each other. We do not know if Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal had ever met. In one sense, they belonged to different worlds and yet there are points of resemblance which would form a fascinating theme of study. These lectures are published in the hope that such a study will be made in the near future.

Sri Manik Mitra, Secretary, Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta, deserves our thanks for seeing this booklet through the Press.

Srinagar  
September 1979

A. A. SUROOR  
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## POETRY OF TAGORE : LOOKING BACK

Do not call him to thy house,  
the stranger, who walks alone in the night,  
His words are those of a strange world,  
strange too is the melody he plays.  
There is no need to spread a seat for him.  
In the feast of freedom he sings,  
he sings the praise of the newborn light.  
He will leave soon.

That is Rabindranath Tagore speaking. The music once was sweet, who hears it now? To those who have known him through translations, rather mistranslations, Tagore is but a name, perhaps less than a name. Damn Tagore, wrote the later Yeats, who, when young, had been a fervid champion. In the country of his origin he continues to be called the Poet, till the phrase has come to acquire a faintly pejorative nuance. Who reads him now? And, really, what kind of a poet was he? It is hard to be objective, especially for a Bengali, by general consent a sentimentalist.

I am one of you, the poet had once said.

Was this a hope or a reality? Why did men who had little or nothing to do with literature, and these included Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru, rate him so high? Was the respect due more to the person than to the poet? What sort of a poet *and* person was Tagore that millions throughout the world, literally from China to Peru, had thrilled to his presence and his plea for creative unity and the free man's worship? Was it a phantom hour, waiting to be brushed aside by carbon copies of Lytton Strachey? Much depends on the answer. All one can say is that there is no unanimous answer.

Perhaps neither a people's poet nor an old-time seer ("Door always open, only the blind eyes see not"), Tagore was a romantic, for ever a solitary. His transactions between tradition and individual talent give a new and even dangerous dimension to modern Indian culture. He is as much of India as of the world, the modern West. Think of the later poems and the paintings, which cannot be wholly explained in terms of the national formula. I am a poet of the world, he had written at eighty. It was not always an easy world. There were shadows numberless, not merely as a romantic backdrop, but a cosmic



chiaroscuro, waste, horror and evil, an increasingly baffled and interrogative note—a new Tagore, not everybody's darling.

Lately Tagore-baiting has become a cottage industry. As someone put it wittily, since the centenary, there has been a steady Decline and Fall of the Tagorean Empire. What had pleased once now infuriates. For most people the time for Tagore, as for Tennyson, seems to be gone for ever. Which means that the time has come to look for a different, relevant Tagore. A little search and selection will show that he exists and is worth discovering, a Tagore for you. Unfortunately, Tagore criticism, both in English and Bengali, has been less than satisfactory. (It is the same with Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal.) Edward Thompson's work, confined to the early period, is at once 'the best and the worst. Thompson was critical, but often from the outside and his knowledge of Bengali was none too good. Buddhadeva Basu was brilliant but temperamental. With a sophisticated but popular façade, Abu Sayeed Ayyub really fed sentiment rather than a spirit of scrutiny. Among old hands, neither Sukumar Sen nor Niharranjan Ray is a literary critic per se: one is a mediaevalist, the

other primarily a sociologist. More sensible than both is Subodhchandra Sengupta. S. B. Mukherji's recent *Poetry of Tagore*, part of a thesis, is comprehensive, but patently adulatory. In the task of communicating Tagore to others the Bengalis have failed. The need for a critical critic is still there, one who will show us a different Tagore, with his fascination of the difficult. As we can now see, he had been admired, in English certainly, mostly for the wrong reasons. A reaction was inevitable.

Having said that, it is as well to add that the public image of Tagore is not to be trusted. (Which public image is, pray?) Tagore was quite other than what he has been taken to be, different even from what he himself now and then wanted to pass for. For sure he was no drowsy Oriental dreamer, a mid-Victorian peddler in dainties, a glib gossamer of an unexamined, idyllic existence. His entire career is a conflict-ridden reaching out to the 'more', a yearning for the beyond, a farness never wholly reached. Too restless to be rooted anywhere, perhaps.

But the yearning had undertones of conflict. As he well knew, his poetry was a "battleground of opposing forces". In a letter

✓ he had written: "I sometimes detect within myself a battleground where two opposing forces are constantly in action, one beckoning to peace and cessation of all strife, the other egging me on to battle. It is as though the restless energy and the will to action of the West were perpetually assaulting the citadel of my Indian placidity. Hence this swing of the pendulum between passionate pain and detachment, between lyrical abandon and philosophising, between an itch to enter the lists and a longing to remain wrapt in thought." The sources of conflict were more diverse than the poet admitted. As full of pathos as of paradox, the Tagorean surface hides piercing self-revelations, little suspected, a most secret drama. What is the drama about? It is perhaps what most dramas are about, or ought to be about: the drama of man's encounter with death and destiny, with self-understanding, the clarification of experience. Will no one tell me what I am? cries the mad, old Lear on the blasted heath. This is what all mature poets are driven to ask and, if possible, answer, to tell themselves and the world. What has Tagore to say? We shall see.

## II

But first for the persisting *persona*, self-confessed. As he himself tells us, what we would have known even otherwise, he is a born romantic (*janna-romantic*). "Not here, not here, but in the bosom of the Faraway", that is typical. Nostalgic by nature—*ami chanchal he, ami sudurer piyasi*, I am restless, I am athirst for faraway things—Tagore is a nomad of the Beyond. This, an incurable, trans-social unrest, rather an un-Indian note one might think, for it was not the traditional merging into the sannyasi's Absolute, lasts almost all his life. There is also the contrary note, of sudden classic dignity and serenity hardly to be expected from a temperament like his. Listen to this:

But there, where spreads the infinite sky  
for the soul to take her flight in, there  
reigns the stainless, white radiance.  
There is no day nor night, nor form nor  
colour, and never, never a word.

Or take this, which overuse has turned into  
a textbook cliché:

Where the mind is without fear and the  
head held high,

Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken  
up into fragments by narrow, domestic  
walls;  
Where words come out of the depth  
of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms  
towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not  
lost its way into the dreary desert sand  
of habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
into ever-widening thought and ac-  
tion—  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,  
let my country awake.

A sort of free man's worship, the moralising must not mislead. And there is, at any rate, more in him, much more. These are his songs, Tagore's plenty. While the Bengalis have turned most of these into ceremonial sedatives, it is also true that these have sustained men and women in their dark hours of trial and agony, doubt and despair. Better as a composer than a writer of poems, the songs of Tagore have all the inevitability and originality of absolute creation which no tran-

slation can hope to recapture, not even his own. The Government of India's recent anthology of a hundred poems in translation is as banal as one could wish for. The singer must believe, somewhere, in some things. Maybe it was this that saved him from final shipwreck. But we anticipate.

Hostile critics have complained that the Tagore ethos resembles a fairyland. All the same an Age of Anxiety and Disenchantment may, if it so wishes, find itself reflected in the writings of the older poet, especially in the later poems and, of course the paintings. Unfortunately, these are not so well known outside the province. And yet to know Tagore is, at least partly, to know ourselves; at least *via negativa*, in terms of what we do *not* have.

But the poor translations, and "the indiscriminate haste in publishing", have done him a great disservice. In these translations what had been poems have been metamorphosed into the huge monotony of prose poems, not the best of literary forms, anyway. Or, worse, into plain prose trying to look like poetry. Another complicating factor was that, now and then, the poet loved to play

the Sage. But for a poet it is better to be sensitive than Sage.

Essentially a lyrical poet, he is better when he sings than when he states. Take this: "I have worshipped each day with songs", says Tagore. Again: "When I look at the world through my songs then do I know it truly." But in English such words and phrases cannot but sound a little old world and odd, which is not the impression one has when reading or hearing the original. There is no point in labouring the obvious: that it is best not to know the poet through translations. As it is, his songs have become a part of the Bengali landscape (both Bengals, if you like). As Ezra Pound had said long back, in an inaccurate but flashing insight, he has sung his people into a nation. Many of his poems have become national songs (*swadeshi sangeet*). If some are lullabies for the lazy, with his songs on their lips young men and women have marched against an alien power and faced the music of British bullets. (And not only British.) Tagore has the melancholy satisfaction of supplying two national anthems. I have just now referred to his *swadeshi* or patriotic songs. Here is one, understandably a favourite with Mahatma Gandhi:

If they answer not to thy call, walk  
alone.

If they are afraid and cower mutely  
against the wall,

O thou of evil luck,  
Open thy mind and speak alone.

If they turn away leaving you to  
cross the wilderness,

O thou of evil luck,  
trample the thorn under they tread,  
and along the blood-stained track  
walk alone.

If they do not hold up the light  
When the night is troubled with storms,

O thou of evil luck,  
Let the flame of thunder kiss thy pain  
and let it burn alone.

That the flame of thunder did burn alone comes out in his letter to the Governor General after the Jallianwallabag massacre. Renouncing the Knighthood, the poet wrote: "The very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of millions of my countrymen surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when



badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special decorations, by the side of my countrymen." Sometime, one feels, there is more poetry in his prose ("his prose has the power of verse") than in the translated poems. (We shall give another example towards the end.)

But if the translations are, by and large, unfair and misleading, once in a while they achieve a sudden adequacy, a melody of their own. Here is one:

Have you not heard His silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes. Every moment and every age, every day and every night, He comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mine, but all their notes have but said: He comes, comes, ever comes. In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path He comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds He comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is His footsteps

that press upon my heart and it is the touch of His feet that makes my joy to bloom.

Such a soft focus on the magic of Immanence and the deity, an eager listening to the footsteps of the Eternal Fugitive (to use another of the poet's phrases) who "comes, comes, ever comes" is, however, only one aspect of the art and mind of Tagore, not the whole of it. There is another, a wilder resonance, as in the winged movement of *Balaka* (with a celebrated poem on the Jhelum). Still later we come across a growing sense of incompleteness, of the vast undone, an inner wound or romantic guilt and the inauthentic which he had both hidden and nourished. Behind a sunlit—some would say moonlit—surface Tagore harboured areas of darkness, levels of corrosive self-awareness. One wonders how much peace the poet of the Abode of Peace had known. At the end of a long life, and what anyone would consider as covered with glory and achievement, it wrung from the old poet a heart-rending apology: "And I know I have failed, wherever my song has been left incomplete". This was no doubt a true self-assessment. But, here some of the

Leftist critics made characteristic mistakes, the incompleteness was not confined to social and historical situations alone. It went deeper and pointed towards disturbed zones, bordering upon the crisis of identity that we all have to face and the response to which determines the quality of our life and consciousness. There have been indications of this sense of failure, the sense of not-yet even before. For instance:

The song I came to sing remains unsung  
to this day.

I have spent all my days in stringing and  
unstringing my instruments.

The time has not come yet, the words  
have not been rightly set,

Only there is the agony of wishing in  
my heart.

The blossom has not opened, it is only  
the wind that sighs by.

I have not seen His face, nor have I  
listened to His voice;

I have but heard His gentle footsteps  
on the road that runs in front of the  
house.

The long day has been spent in spread-  
ing His seat on the floor.

But the lamp has not been lit and I cannot call Him to my house,  
I live in the hope of meeting Him, but the meeting is yet to be.

Waiting for Godot, *à la* Tagore shall we say? But this sense of incompleteness, a rooted melancholy is, again, only an aspect of his life and works, so full of contradictions. Still he has his bursts of fulfilment and serenity, spots of time redeemed from time. These are to be found especially in the poems of parting, a genre of which he was obviously fond. Even during the last few years, we have poems like "Blessings have I won in this life of the Beautiful" (it may sound odd in English, but that is not the impression in the original). Let me quote an earlier example. Even in translation the poem had a strange triumph. A few weeks before he was killed in action Wilfred Owen had quoted these lines in his last letter to his mother, who had passed it on to the poet. If this is not a proof of the power of the word, what is?

When I go from hence let this be my parting words: that what I have known is beyond words.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this

lotus that blooms on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed—let this be my parting word.

✓ In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of Him who is without forms.

My whole body, my limbs have thrilled to His touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come—let this be my parting word.

This is a recurring mood or motif. Everything that lives is holy. All the same it would be, I repeat, a mistake to think of Tagore, as so many do, as a poet of melody and undertones only.

The pseudo-pastoral no doubt exacts a heavy price, all the revamped "rainy afternoons filled with shadows, songs and silence" that have turned his institution almost into a weekender's trivia. Life had not withheld from him its gift of tears, sorrow and suffering. Early in life he had confessed his credo: Make me complete. It was a strange request from a young poet, especially a dreaming Bengali youth, apt to be lost in the bosom of the faraway:

Strike and strike me again  
 I can bear still more . . . .  
 Do not make my life a failure,  
 By playing only the soft tunes.  
 Let all the anguish of disappointment  
 Flame up within me,  
 Like the mad winds that blow.  
 Awake thou the whole firmament  
 And through my sorrow and anguish  
 Make me complete.

Perhaps the wish was fulfilled, in unexpected ways, and rather late. In the poet's eightieth year we find him writing, during racked midnight hours, words that would have been appropriate for a Nietzsche:

In words writ in blood  
 I saw my being manifest,  
 my own self I knew  
 through repeated hurts and pain.

On the face of this it will be facile to say that Rabindranath Tagore was a stranger to hurts and pain and had led but a charmed life. A noble defender of freedom and human dignity, Tagore was in his own way a rebel, if not an Outsider. Recently Dr. R. K. Das Gupta has called him a heretic among heretics. Is there anything comparable on the mo-

dern Indian scene to Tagore's declining of the Knighthood? When required, he could be angry and speak directly. Listen to this on bogus devotion:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling  
of beads,

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely  
dark corner of a temple with the  
doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not  
before thee!

Elsewhere, somewhat Whitmanesque, he  
almost shouts defiance:

Pilgrim, the night of the weary year is  
ended . . . .

Let the grey dust of the open road  
take you into its arms . . . .

Fear not, turn not away from truth.

Nor be afraid of the phantom of the  
unreal.

Take your last gift from him  
who takes away everything.

Has the old night ended?

Then let it end!

But at others his standards or references are  
less violent. And one is not surprised that the

same poet should use such symbols of spiritual life, awareness and martyrdom as the Buddha and the Christ. The romantic rebel was, after all, orthodox, belonged to a wider brotherhood. His only poem in English, "The Child", was the result of a visit to Oberammergau, where he had gone to see the Passion Play. The poem's infernal opening is something new in Tagore. Later on he modifies and strikes a more conventional note: "We had refused him in doubt, we had killed him in anger. Now we shall accept him in love. For in his death he lives in the life of us all, the great Victim." In a world gone wild with greed and hatred Tagore turns, easily, to the Christ. For a Christmas evening service at Santiniketan he had written a brief but bitter dramatic poem. The shadow of Hitler had fallen across Europe when the otherwise gentle poet writes:

Those who had struck him once  
 in the name of their rulers  
 are born again in this age . . . .  
 They gather in their prayer halls, in a  
 pious garb;  
 and call their soldiers:  
 "Kill, kill," they shout.



In their roar mingles the music of their hymns.

While the Son of God in agony prays:

O God, fling,

“fling far away this cup filled with the bitterest of poisons”.

The gentle Tagore is full of surprises. This is not the only one. The chameleon poet loved to paint himself as an alien (*vrātya*), enjoyed dramatising his alienation. This of course is part of the romantic outfit or trick of the trade: the use of masks. The fact is, in spite of broad social sympathies, Tagore remained a solitary. The great are perhaps always alone. He really did not belong, not to any group, not even one to which he supplied a personality cult. An aristocrat and a sophisticate, all his life Tagore had been strongly attracted by the wandering minstrels of the Bengal countryside, the Bauls. An unconventional sect, socially suspect, cutting across caste and religion, the Bauls, like the poets of Provence, have always been masters of song and poetry. They speak a simple tongue (though highly symbolised) and sing to what they call the ‘Man of my Heart’ (*maner mānuṣ*). Tagore speaks of them again

and again. Though, strictly speaking, it was impossible for him to be totally identified with them—his way of life kept him apart—he loved to assert that, at heart, he too was an outcaste. It is a strange self-portrait for one who had belonged to the upper ten and all his life had lived on Fortune's Hill. What, in this matter, is the truth like? Is the sensitive always solitary or, as Herbert Read used to insist, an anarchist? But listen to Tagore on Tagore:

I am an outcaste  
 whose offerings cannot reach  
 the God imprisoned by piety  
 and popular worship.  
 Born in the household of exile  
 I was rejected by the respectable.  
 Apart from the crowd  
 I have pursued my fancies  
 and found my solitary friends,  
 whose light and voice make history.  
 The heroes and the sages are my asso-  
 ciates—

I, the outcaste and the uninitiate.

The last lines surely give the case away!

One may ask: does Tagore want to be socially integrated or is the trans-social the true

cry of his heart? Between his pathos and affirmation one detects a drama of opposites.

If now and then he loved to play roles, at others he could face facts without flinching. One of the most direct statements to come from the ageing poet begins with a record of personal failure, or what now seems to be so, it ends with a welcome to the coming poet (who is, of course, yet to come):

How little do I know of this world . . . .  
 My ways of life have intervened  
 and kept me apart.  
 The tiller at the plough  
 the weaver at the loom  
 the fisherman plying his net  
 all sustain the world with their varied  
 labour.  
 I have known them from a corner,  
 and I know I have failed . . . .  
 So here I am, waiting for the message,  
 from the poet of the world,  
 of the peasant the comrade,  
 may he give what I have not.  
 Come, Poet of the New Age,  
 lead me to the heart of those  
 so far away, those hearts so near.  
 May they know themselves through you,  
 whom I salute.

The same year Tagore wrote a memorable testament. Read out on the occasion of his last birthday, it was called, appropriately, *Crisis in Civilization*. A monument of faith and negation, illusion and disenchantment, it begins with his unclouded faith in Western literature, Liberalism and, through rapid disillusion, reaches out to a faith in the Saviour. But more than the argument—the logic is at best tenuous—it is the passion that elevates it to the level of a poem. Says the wounded poet: "I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe. Today when I am about to quit the world that faith has gone bankrupt altogether." Again: "The wheels of Fate will one day compel the British to give up their Indian Empire. But what kind of India will they leave behind, what filth, stark misery!" He continues: "As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in human history after the cataclysm is over." And he closes with a consolatory and noble invocation to the Saviour:

The Great One comes  
sending shivers across the dust of the  
earth.

In the heavens sound the trumpets.  
In the world of men drums of victory  
are heard,

The hour has arrived of the Great Birth.  
The sky resounds with hallelujahs of  
victory,  
to the Coming of Man.

But the faith, rather fluent, in the Saviour was not the end, the last word. There was a strange sequel, of the Mystery of Man, the fifth act unresolved. Faced with the ontological riddle all props give way. In a final dialogue, or monologue, the Self is the only refuge: at once question and answer.

A few weeks before his passing away Tagore wrote, more correctly dictated, a rare death declaration—rare but not wholly unexpected. Wringing the neck of rhetoric, this is his mini-epic. The poem's communication of the solipsistic Absurd at the heart of Existence, in the occult zones of ultimate insecurity is a fitting finale to Tagore's life and poetry. The unRabindrean Rabindra here reaches heights no-man-fathomed. His single

doom symbolic of Everyman's destiny, poetry fated to doom casts its last shadow at the altar of the Unknown, before it too merges into that Silence which eludes and baffles human speech and inquiry alike. Perhaps Tagore never came so close to the forefathers as in this abbreviated ontic Odyssey of man's first and last question: *Ko'ham, Who am I?* The onto-epistemological universes meet each other for the last time before they collapse into that Nothingness which is perhaps another name for Being itself. If not exactly an illumination of existence, in terms of easy assurance, it is an encounter unlike any other and once more places him among the world poets. In this fabulous finale, where the Mysterious and the ontological become one, Rabindranath Tagore touches the romantic ultimate, what Maritain has called the frontiers of poetry. Far from fairyland, here is poetry so transparent, profound and archetypal that the poetry no longer matters. It is short enough to be quoted in full:

The first day's sun  
 had asked  
 at the manifestation of new being—  
 Who are you?

No answer comes.  
 Year after year went by  
 the last sun of the day  
 the last question utters  
 on the western sea-shore  
 in the silent evening—  
 Who are you?  
 He gets no answer.

Answer? There is no answer. Or, if you like,  
the question is the answer. Think of that: self-  
 consciousness biting its own tail, the sun of  
 consciousness become its own time and space.  
 Is solipsism the last word? A silent hara-kiri  
 on the borders of being, or non-being, the  
 diapason comes full circle in an extraordinary  
 domestication of dread, and the supreme dis-  
 covery that there is 'No answer'. Neither  
 pathetic nor problematic—because it is a  
 mystery more than a problem—the double  
 negation ("No answer comes", "He gets no  
 answer") encloses and achieves more than  
 what any plausible, otherwise comforting  
 panacea could have. This also is Tagore, an  
 undiscovered, unaccommodated Tagore, with  
 all the fascination of the difficult and the des-  
 perate. It has to be earned the hard way.

## THE BASIC POETRY OF SRI AUROBINDO

Most people know Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist, yogi and thinker, mystic and visionary. *The Life Divine* has been hailed as one of the seminal books of the century. Some of his other major works like *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* are acknowledged masterpieces in their own fields. But few know him as a poet or for the kind of poet he is and why. As it is, he has been the subject of some needless controversy, for which both parties are to blame.

Sri Aurobindo was averse to making claims about himself. He, however, upheld one claim: that he was first and foremost a poet. How far is that self-image justified? For some of us he would have been a poet even if he had not written a single line of verse. It is interesting that in the very first chapter of *The Life Divine* he should have said: All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. Only a poet could write that.

The poetry of Sri Aurobindo, spread over nearly sixty years, has its quota of pleasures no



less than problems, especially for the Indian Anglophile, apt to be more British than the British. And Sri Aurobindo is perhaps more Indo than English. For the present we shall leave out the problems, some of them genuine. Leaving out also the early writings and a chronological survey, with the help of a few examples, but without much commentary, I shall try to locate the quality of his mature works. After all, it is this that matters.

The question of poetry is more important than most people seem to imagine. One way of putting it would be that the need in the whole field of life and poetry is primarily a recognition of the true nature of man. Basically poetry is a combination of forces, a synergy, demanded by the higher development of man. A defence of poetry is a defence of creativity. And since values must be dramatised, both evolution and revolution call for their poet. Sri Aurobindo, poet of the evolution of consciousness, has made possible the recovery of the oldest tradition of the race. He can pack more experience and wisdom in a phrase than many can in a volume. The words are qualitatively different. This we might recognise easily unless we

allow our judgments to be warped by contemporary western paragons. It requires some courage and rootedness to see the poetry for what it is.

I shall not try to define the indefinable, man, value and poetry, except to mention that there are levels of poetic experience and dynamics of speech; that in its higher reaches value can be nothing other than an affirmation or celebration of existence. The experience of each new age requires a confession of its own. The modern world is waiting for its poet, who will not merely express but harmonise, give the experience a higher direction. Not in terms of a theory or ideology but vision, what is called in this country realisation and by depth psychology integration. That takes for granted an uncommon use of language: semantics and ontology are inseparable. This involves ancillary issues: such as purer modes of perception and our membership of the cosmos and the community that we create within and around us. Man is a dweller in at least two realms, in and out of time, between which there must be some kind of correspondence. The Poetic Genius, as Blake said, is the true Person. What a people can become depends on what

✓ a people can conceive. And what a people can conceive depends on what its poets and artists can make actual. Harmonious self-actualisation is the poet's real gift to the life of the race, and there is no end to it. He is the greater poet who gives us more of this self-actualisation. Judged by that standard Sri Aurobindo towers above the rest. I mean the Sri Aurobindo of the later poems. The self-actualisation does not, necessarily, reject the world; it may as well transfigure. When Jesus said to Nicodemus: You must be born from above, he was speaking as a poet.

In this rather old apology for poetry—old because I take consciousness for a fact and its transfiguration as a model—I shall not deal with the variety of Aurobindean rhetoric or analyse the growth or evidence in detail. Not that this cannot or should not be done. But without a proper perspective this is likely to support one's presuppositions. For the present I would present a few samples of his poetry, which speak for themselves. And though now and then I shall be drawing on *Savitri* I shall not be dealing with it directly.

Incidentally, Sri Aurobindo has a poetics of his own. He sees poetry as a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery. On the path to

Reality poetry is another name for that creative energy which makes us aware of the More that we have yet to be. Here is a pioneer who has gone further than most—in the longest journey inward.

## II

There is a general feeling that Sri Aurobindo is really a philosophical poet, idealist, doctrinaire, one who can say but not sing. *The Times Literary Supplement* had complained about his want of music. That of course depends on the kind of ear one has. What would the critic say to a poem like 'Trance'?

My mind is awake in a stirless trance,  
Hushed my heart, a burden of delight;  
Dispelled is the senses' flicker-dance,  
Mute the body aureate with light.

O star of creation pure and free,  
Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown,  
Storm-breath of the soul-change yet  
to be,  
Ocean self-enraptured and alone!

Or "The Dream Boat", with its lyric drama, the tender evocation of the sense of loss and



Symbol of the psychic opening and aspiration, the dream boat comes and calls. To each, according to his need and nature, the call comes. But, getting and spending, most of us do not listen or respond. The boat and the boatman pass. And then, instead, comes the horror of the blank, the one-dimensional man who has denied his soul. The tragedy of inner death when only a body and mind live to die. The life of Everyman.

From all this one must not rush to the conclusion that Sri Aurobindo writes mainly or only about gold gods and their dream boats. On the contrary, the fearful symmetry of the "strong, cruel beauty in Nature" does not escape him. Here is "The Tiger and the Deer", Darwin with a difference. The poem is in a sort of free verse:

Brilliant, crouching, slouching, what  
crept through the green heart of the  
forest,

Gleaming eyes and mighty chest and  
soft soundless paws of grandeur and  
murder?

The wind slipped through the leaves as  
if afraid lest its voice and the noise of  
its steps perturb the pitiless Splendour.

Hardly daring to breathe. But the great  
beast crouched and crept, and crept  
and crouched a last time, noiseless,  
fatal.

Till suddenly death leaped on the beauti-  
ful wild deer as it drank

Unsuspecting from the great pool in the  
forest's coolness and shadow,

And it fell and, torn, died remembering  
its mate left sole in the deep wood-  
land,—

Destroyed, the mild harmless beauty by  
the strong cruel beauty in Nature.

But a day may yet come when the tiger  
crouches and leaps no more in the  
dangerous heart of the forest,

As the mammoth shakes no more the  
plains of Asia;

Still then shall the beautiful wild deer  
drink from the coolness of great pools  
in the leaves' shadow.

The mighty perish in their might;

The slain survive the slayer.

The moral is perhaps a little too pat. But  
the control of verse, the technical skill, the  
empathy and sheer sensibility cannot be miss-  
ed. The criticism of life too is part of the

total vision or experience.

There is enough evidence to show the Sri Aurobindo was not a recluse, unaware of the mundane. Then he would not have said: All life is yoga. Not only had he a valid philosophy of history and society, but was also wholly sensitive to the world around. Nothing human, or divine, was alien to him, surely not the world's intolerable wrongs. The short poem, "The Cosmic Man", written during 1938, is about aerial bombings. Though not perhaps as existential as Edith Sitwell's "And Still Falls the Rain", it is genuine, one way of responding:

I look across the world and no horizon  
walls my gaze;

I see Paris and Tokio and New York,

I see the bombs bursting on Barcelona  
and on Canton streets.

Man's numberless misdeeds and rare  
good deeds take place within my  
single self.

I am the beast he slays, the bird he feeds  
and saves.

The thoughts of unknown minds exalt  
me with their thrill,



I carry the sorrow of millions in my  
lonely breast.

But thanks to the poet's yogic poise, he can  
look beyond the immediate horror and still  
remain faithful to "The Hidden Plan":

However long the night's hour,  
I will not dream  
That the small ego and the  
person's mask  
Are all that god reveals in our  
life-scheme,  
The last result of Nature's  
cosmic task.

A greater Presence in her bosom works;  
Long it prepares its far epiphany:  
Even in the stone and the beast the  
godhead lurks,

A bright Persona of eternity.  
It shall burst out from the limit  
traced by Mind  
And make a witness of the  
prescient heart;  
It shall reveal even in the inert blind  
Nature, long veiled in each  
inconscient part,

Fulfilling the occult magnificent plan,  
 The world-wide and immortal  
 spirit in man.

Here is another, from a sonnet called "The Bliss of Brahman", a rather un-English subject maybe. But Sri Aurobindo was writing out of his own experience, as experience earlier than his will support:

I am drunken with the glory of  
 the Lord,  
 I am vanquished by the beauty of  
 the Unborn;  
 I have looked, alive, upon the  
 Eternal's face.  
 My mind is cloven by His radiant  
 sword,  
 My heart by His beatific touch  
 is torn;  
 My life is a meteor-dust of  
 His flaming grace.

Here is controlled ecstasy, a language that the moderns have virtually forgotten—unless it be through LSD.

It will, however, be misleading to think that Sri Aurobindo lives in some euphoric or humourless universe of abstractions. He

had once written: without a sense of humour the world would have gone to the blazes long back. Here, for a change, is a mock-serious poem or contemplation on the Ashram cat: "Despair on the Staircase", which even the non-spiritual may enjoy:

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,

An image of magnificent despair;

The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise

Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.

In her beauty's dumb significant pose  
I find

The tragedy of her mysterious mind.

Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.

A musing mask is her immobile face.

Her tail is up like an unconquered flag,

Its dignity knows not the right to wag.

An animal creature wonderfully human,

A charm and miracle of fur-footed

Brahman,

Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,

Is now the problem I am wondering at.

Even Sri Aurobindo. . . .

Not that such a poet, carrying the sorrow

of millions in his lonely breast is or can be unaware of *Angst*, the existential encounter that is the price for the authentic. 'None can reach Heaven who has not passed through Hell.' A traveller along the razor's edge, Sri Aurobindo is not unfamiliar with the inner war without escape, the difficulties of the seeker for the road to the self:

In menacing tracts, in tortured solitudes  
Companionless he roamed through desolate ways

Where the red Wolf waits by the fordless stream

And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice.

And met the hounds of bale who hunt men's hearts

In footless battlefields of the Abyss

Fought shadowy combats in mute eyeless depths,

Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes

And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.

In his poem, "A God's Labour", he speaks far more simply, almost with a touch of an autobiography of a yogi, of that descent into

the darkness which awaits the adventurer  
soul at all times:

My gaping wounds are a thousand  
and one

And the Titan kings assail,  
But I cannot rest till my task is done  
And wrought the eternal will.

I have delved through the dumb  
Earth's dreadful heart

And heard her black mass's bell.  
I have seen the source whence her  
agonies part  
And the inner reason of hell.

Above me the dragon murmurs moan  
And the goblin voices flit;  
I have pierced the Void where  
Thought was born,  
I have walked in the bottomless pit.

Altogether Sri Aurobindo is the poet of Man  
the Master, the twice-born, and not of the  
beaten, battered non-man, a votary of the  
obscure, a connoisseur of chaos. If and when  
the reign of false gods—that is, false self-  
views—and the crisis of identity is over, that  
will be the time to read Sri Aurobindo again  
and marvel at his recovery of what was sup-

posed to have been for ever lost: the higher self and consciousness, the source of freedom and creativity:

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. . . .

Even when we fail to look into our souls  
Or lie embedded in earthly consciousness,  
Still have we parts that grow towards  
the Light. . . .

In moments when the inner lamps are lit  
And the life's cherished guests are left  
outside,

Our spirit sits alone and speaks to the  
gulfs.

A wider consciousness opens then its  
doors;

Invading from spiritual silences

A ray of timeless glory stoops awhile

To commune with our seized illumined  
clay

And leave its huge white stamp upon our  
lives. . . .

These signs are native to a larger self

That lives within us by ourselves unseen.

It may be objected that this is more a statement than an experience. While this is one side of his talent, the other is closer to the poetry of prayer and vision. "Rose of God" is a proof of the theory of poetry outlined in *The Future Poetry*. Here, in a peak experience, the root symbols of the Great Tradition resurrect and bloom for ever.

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,  
 Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged  
 with the ecstasies seven!  
 Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O  
 miracle, O flame,  
 Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of  
 the mystical Name.

Rose of God, wisdom-bloom on the  
 summits of being,  
 Rose of Light, immaculate core of the  
 ultimate seeing!  
 Live in the mind of our earthhood; O  
 golden Mystery, flower,  
 Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest  
 of the marvellous Hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity,  
 red icon of might,

Rose of Power with thy diamond halo  
 piercing the night!  
 Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design  
 the wonder of thy plan,  
 Image of Immortality, outbreak of the  
 Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the  
 incarnate divine Desire,  
 Rose of Life, crowded with petals,  
 colours' lyre!  
 Transform the body of the mortal like  
 a sweet and magical rhyme,  
 Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood,  
 make deathless the children of Time.

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on  
 Eternity's face,  
 Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being,  
 fire-passion of Grace!  
 Arise from the heart of the yearning  
 that sobs in Nature's abyss,  
 Make earth the home of the Wonderful  
 and life beatitude's kiss.

It may be pointed out that the first two lines in every stanza state the nature of the Divine Ground (above/within). The second line helps to explain the first, that is the fivefold



nature of the multitudinous Rose: Bliss, Light, Power, Life, Love. Thus we have, in a way, both the symbol and its key, "a self-luminous mystery". The third and fourth lines in each stanza are set in the form of a cry or a prayer from below. Always a strong, active verb is used, to imply the urgency and the force of aspiration: *leap, live, ablaze, transform, arise*. The language is that of a ritual formula or what might today be called symbolic action. Altogether the poem establishes as well as invokes the fadeless flower—the rose and the fire—to incarnate here and now.

It should not be too difficult to see how the Indian poet has compelled the vehicle (English) to yield a tenor not its own. An entire cosmology, and the myth of the sacred marriage, have come alive. We are present at the birth of a new creation, what the anthropologists call *rite des passage*, a piercing of the levels or veils between the higher and lower hemispheres, *parardha* and *aparardha*. Here is a verbal icon, *mantra* or *mandala*, worthy to be placed by the side of any other past or present.

## III

This necessarily short survey shows Sri Aurobindo as a poet of many dimensions, an amazing versatility, with an accent or music of his own, above all, as a poet of a correlative vision, whereby one sees all explicit opposites as implicit allies, truly a metaphysical poet. It may be subjective, but it is not unreal, unless one wishes to wish away a whole tradition. The ascent of poetry is the ascent to the Self—that dream of totality, as Jung called it—and its many mansions. To use the poet's own words about himself: "He explores the ceaseless miracle of himself." And this no doubt is the reason why Sri Aurobindo is first and foremost a poet. Thanks to poets like him we see the secret face that is our own, know man for the first time. If Existence-clarification is the mark of the poet, Sri Aurobindo has little to fear. In reading the text of the without from within he has few equals. All the same, the point should be clearly made, we are not holding up Aurobindean poetry for its philosophy, message or integrality, its world-view. Rather we value it for its experiential reality; a larger field of being made real with a new

reconciling vision and language wholly his own. As Wittgenstein said, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. It is in this sense that *Savitri* is that tour de force: an inner epic. Sri Aurobindo has seen life steadily and seen it whole in a total relevance of everything that happens in terms of the seen and the unseen. In brief, the yogi-poet—all yogis need not be poets, only the Rishi is—Sri Aurobindo has re-found or revived the archetypal tradition of poetry as Wisdom or Mystery. Its connection with the mystical, occult or the Orphic manner is obvious. Simply, the mature poetry of Sri Aurobindo marks the Return of the Rishi, to which possibility he had pointed in his critical writings.

Poetry such as his is not removed from therapeutics, a cure for the malady of the modern, his radical self-estrangement and estrangement from the totality of awareness. This applies with greater force to *Savitri*, which the Mother has called the poetry of tomorrow. In this poem, his extended essay on man, Sri Aurobindo has given the myth of expanding awareness a new lease of life. In the process he has also had to deal with the problems of martyrdom and resurrection

since these are part of his major theme: "the end of Death, the death of Ignorance". The kinship with what Mircea Eliade calls an "archaic ontology" has only to be mentioned. To believe Raymond Piper, *Savitri* is the most powerful artistic work in the world for the expanding of man's mind. Those who have read the poem—but the right reader is rare—are likely to agree.

Sri Aurobindo looks upon poetry and life as steps in an evolution of consciousness, sees both as processes of "the outbreak of the Godhead in man". In this view the creative imagination becomes the bridge between the Here and the Yonder. It naturally depends on a theory of correspondences. So we hear him say: "This earth alone is not our teacher and nurse/The powers of all the worlds have entrance here". Again: "Even our body is a mystery shop". At once knowledge and ecstasy, *nostos* and *logos*, occult and exegetic, Sri Aurobindo's Orphic voice brings a new hope for man and poetry, till "I become what before Time I was". Here is poetry that offers an experiential refutation of the western dualism, the splendid superficiality that has plagued modern history since the Renaissance. It is neither *cogito* nor *ergo*,

but only *sum*. To read Sri Aurobindo is once more to believe, in human potentiality, in the poetry of being, the unknown modes of being that await the adventured soul. What Claudel had said about the poetry of Rimbaud—*C'est à Rimbaud que je dois humainement mon retour à la foi*, it was Rimbaud who helped me to return to faith—applies with equal, if not greater force to the massive insights of *Savitri*, an encyclopaedia of emancipation, of altered states of awareness.

In the alchemy of consciousness poetry is Sri Aurobindo's recipe as it was of the seers and sufis of old. Reading him is like joining an initiation ceremony. With the poet as companion we too enter the kingdom of the seer, a grand *participation mystique*:

A seer, he has entered the forbidden realms;

A magician with the omnipotent wand of thought.

He builds the secret uncreated worlds.

Armed with the golden speech, the diamond eye,

His is the vision and the prophecy:

Imagist casting the formless into shape,

Traveller and hewer of the unseen paths,

He is the carrier of the hidden fire,  
 He is the voice of the Ineffable,  
 He is the invisible hunter of the light,  
 The angel of mysterious ecstasies,  
 The conqueror of the kingdoms of the  
 soul.

The thrust of such presences, the quality of their experience and utterance is plan. As the statue of Apollo in the Louvre had told Rilke: change your life. Or, earlier, William Blake: cleanse the doors of perception. This would be impossible without inwardness. The poetry of the mature Sri Aurobindo is a guarantee of that change or breakthrough from the contingent to the authentic, which is the inner sense of the human birth, the life we have lost in living. As the psychologist, R. D. Laing, has reiterated the older wisdom: "True sanity entails in one or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self completely adjusted to our alienated social reality; the emergence of the 'inner' archetypal mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth, and the eventual reestablishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer."

No longer betrayers, as we follow the poet on the upward journey, before our very eyes:

He turns to eternal things his symbol quest. . . .

He crosses the boundaries of the unseen  
And passes over the edge of mortal sight  
To a new vision of himself and things.

He is a spirit in an unfinished world  
That knows him not and cannot know  
itself:

The surface symbol of his goalless quest  
Takes deeper meanings in his inner view;  
His is a search of darkness for the light,  
Of mortal life for immortality.

Mallarmé had suggested that it was the poet's business to purify the dialect of the tribe. Sri Aurobindo goes a little further than that: he purifies the consciousness of the tribe. That is the difference between the aesthete and the yogi-poet, who referred to the divinisation of life as a greater art of life. In Sri Aurobindo we hear again, in a modern tongue and with a futuristic span, the undying voice of the Ancestors. With its recovery of gnosis, the language of the self, here is an answer to Proclus's prayer:

Nay, Gods of high and illustrious wisdom,  
 Masters and leaders, hear me, the hastener  
 Along the upward way!—Initiate me into  
 the orgiac mysteries  
 And reveal them by the ceremonies of  
 sacred words!

For those who have ears to hear the "sacred  
 words" are not wholly lost and never can be.  
 Rightly and rather simply has the poet said:

I shall leave my dreams in their  
argent air,  
 For in a raiment of gold and blue  
 There shall move on the earth  
embodied and fair  
 The living truth of you.

In the name of that living truth let us honour  
 the vertical man, the paradigm of a vast and  
 varied sensibility, Sri Aurobindo: poet.

قوله  
 اقبال

✓



## IQBAL'S CREDO: AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW

Incisive and original, poet and thinker in three languages, a controversial, contradictory Colossus, fate has been unkind to Iqbal. A man of Brahmin extraction, but versed in the mystic lore of Rum and Tabriz, these were his own words. But, in spite of the vision and the versatility, how ignored in India and Pakistan, the land of his birth and the land to which his vision gave putative birth! People have little idea of the deeper content of his thought, educational, metaphysical, religious, juridical, prophetic. For a while the wrong sort of people had made the wrong sort of noise and have been silent since. Clearly there was hurt, pathos and annoyance in his fateful 1939 Presidential Address to the Muslim League, that a national integration might have been a fact *if* the teachings of Kabir or Din Ilahi of Akbar had seized the imagination of the Indian masses. That 'if', what a leaning tower atop an exploding volcano!

No words can be as true of him as his own:

When, gathering my chattels, I forsook  
the world

All and sundry said: "We knew him  
well",

✓ Forsooth none knew about the traveller—

What he said, whom he addressed,  
whence he hailed.

It is not easy to know a poet. The design of poetry is more often hidden than palpable. With little Urdu and less Persian, it will be risky for an outsider to assess his poetry, be it *Asrar-i-Khudi* or *Javid-Nama*. Luckily, we have such expository works in English as *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* and, later, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, from which to draw a small-scale map of his faith as a poet and person, if not a politician. For an intellect like his an occasional comparison with Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo would be in order, perhaps even instructive.

## I

Though a poet, Iqbal admits religion to be a superior value, for it is man's total reaction to life. Faith, he says, has something cogni-

tive about it. More than action, feeling and what we call knowledge, religion is an expression of the whole man. But religion without knowledge, without rational support is not enough. The search for rational foundations in Islam goes back to the Prophet. And since the spirit of the Quran is "essentially unclassical", Iqbal holds Hellenic humanism largely responsible for distorting the Quranic world-view. As he says, rightly: "Socrates concentrated his attention on the human world alone." Enamoured of theory, Plato, his disciple, despised sense-perception and the concrete. It was late in life that the once sceptical al-Ghazzali admitted the intuitive components of the religious life, *ma' rifa*, an exit or opening that, by the way, did not exist for Kant.

For more than 500 years religious thought in Islam has been in the doldrums. It is time to look at its essentials in the light of contemporary experience and say, once more, 'yes' to the world or matter "and discover a basis for the realistic regulation of life". The affirmation of the spiritual self in man—which, perhaps because of an Arabic affinity and a Teutonic pupillage, Iqbal refers to as the Ego—is basic to the Quranic injunction.

A proponent of Personalism, Iqbal defines his position with the help of a catechism: "What then is life?" "It is individual, its highest form so far is the Ego (*Khudi*) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre." But the exclusive, self-contained centre, an ordinary consciousness, or aggressive Philistine, is of course not the ideal, the complete individual. As he says: "The greater his distance from God the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the complete person." But not even nearness to God can make Iqbal forget the pragmatic test. Therefore it is that "The idea of personality gives us a standard of value: it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. Art, religion and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of personality." This may not satisfy the sophisticated *avant-garde* of today; but it has a simple, no-nonsense about it. It is doubtful if he had religious doubts; if he had, he kept them in control and out of sight.

The introduction of *Asrar-i-Khudi* begins with a passionate description of his credo: "What is this centre of intuitional unity, this bright spot of consciousness which illu-

minates all human thought, serves to correlate the scattered and unlimited potentialities of human nature? What is this 'ego' or 'self' or 'I' which, although it reveals itself through actions, remains concealed so far as its true nature is concerned, and which, in spite of being the creative source of all human observations, cannot be submitted to the scrutiny of an observer? Is it an eternal Truth, or has life invented this illusion or plausible deception merely to help in the attainment of its objective? Looking from the moral and ethical standpoint the behaviour of individuals and nations will depend upon the answer to this extremely vital question."

Briefly, "the answer to this extremely vital question" is a doctrine for a sensitive but also heroic, responsible living, responsible to reality and the race. Man is the bearer and trustee of the Cosmic Intention, a creative, ascending, aspiring spirit. In a typically dangerous inversion Iqbal declares God to be a co-worker of man. What the Quran had said was slightly different: "Verily God will not change the condition of men, till they know what is in themselves."

Islam puts its emphasis on empirical experience, the concrete, but without ignoring

the claims of the heart (*Qalb*). The Prophet himself showed a critical interest in psychic phenomena. However, the first Muslim scholar to understand the subliminal self or selves was *Ibn-i-Khaldun*. Himself not unsympathetic to the mystical afflatus, Iqbal had one serious misgiving in the matter: the pragmatic test showed that the mystics tended to deny the world and serial time. This has often led to enervation or decadence, which he was not prepared to overlook. Listening to the ecstatic sufi plaints one cannot but be a little sceptical. Listen to this from Al-Hasan: "This Believer wakes grieving and goes to bed grieving . . . Beware of this world (*Duniya*) with all wariness, for it is like a snake, smooth to the touch, but its venom is deadly." Shades of the Serpent and the Rope!

Iqbal's attitude to Sufi doctrine and practice, especially to 'unityism' (*Wahdat-al-Wujud*), was highly ambivalent, one of love-hate. Yet in spite of his allergy and repeated attacks on certain features of Sufism, Iqbal belongs, as Arberry insists, to the history of Sufism. To believe Hiralal Chopra, Rumi was a sort of guru to Iqbal. He is a Sufi who is also rational, a mystic no less than a prophet.

Theoretically an activist, is he not also a restless dreamer?

Iqbal divides the religious life into three periods or categories: faith, thought and discovery, or obedience, metaphysics and psychology. His own bias would seem to be for the second, towards re-thinking. The third, tending towards the mystical, he admits to be "a genuine effort to clarify consciousness". But, for reasons already given, he tends to dismiss mysticism as a danger and a deviation. According to him, the mystical experience is essentially individual; hence incommunicable, also it tends towards the other-worldly.

Religion is connected with the idea and experience of deity. Iqbal examines the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments only to reject their claims and authority. Experience within and without lead him to a belief in the ultimate unity of being and thought (the Hindu might prefer the word 'consciousness', but both probably mean the same). Iqbal recognises levels of existence (or being) and, finally, a Creative Self, not a mechanic contriver of the cosmos. The limitations of the scientific world-view are again and again underlined. Science is as much as a

projection as any other idolatry. He quotes Eddington (*Space, Time and Gravitation*) with approval: "Is it too much to say that the mind's search for permanence has created the world of physics?" Not only science but also philosophy, since it reduces the rich variety of experience to a system, comes lower than religion. Philosophy is but theory, the other is actual experience.

The fulfilment of the religious life is in prayer, the last word on the lips of the Prophet. The motive of prayer can be understood only when the nature of the Deity is clarified. Iqbal agrees with William James that "in spite of all that science may do to the contrary, men will continue to pray to the end of time, unless their mental nature changes in a manner which nothing we know should lead us to expect." He goes forward to a brilliant *obiter dictum*: "The truth is, all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer." Iqbal has no doubt that congregational prayer secures a better communal end than the cloistered virtue of the recluse and the solitary, wrapt up in his self-intoxicated bliss of being: "Oh Shamsi Tabriz, I am so drunken in this world, That except of drunkenness and of rivalry I have no tale to



tell." Association in prayer does away with all man-made, social barriers. In a rare piece of unsolicited advice Iqbal turns to the Pharisic Hindu: "What a tremendous spiritual revolution will take place, practically in no time, if the proud aristocratic Brahmin of South India is daily made to stand shoulder to shoulder with the untouchable!" If it were that easy! Then how could Islam countenance monarchy?

But religion, man, deity and prayer centre round a basic question: "What is the nature of the ego, this 'I'?" The unity and uniqueness of the person spells his Quranic, that is heroic destiny. Yet, except perhaps for Shah Wali Ullah and Jamal uddin Afghani, Islamic thought has played down or played truant to the bold, personalist philosophy. With his modern temper and training, Iqbal seeks support from Bradley and draws a distinction between the ego's sense of time and space and that of the body. He also emphasizes the privacy of the ego, which includes its directive attitude, a free, personal causality. Wills, aims and aspirations are part of the growing personality. This suggests a different quality and direction of existence, because of the body-mind alliance, which is

not to be found in other forms of creation. As the Quran has it: "Then He brought forth men of another make." To this Iqbal adds: "The Ultimate Ego that makes the emergent emerge is innermost in nature, and is described by the Quran as 'the First and Last' 'the visible and the invisible'." Recognition of this Ultimate Ego shows prayer to be "the ego's escape from mechanism to freedom". In His will is not only our peace but our freedom.

If, in spite of such clear indications, Islam has been dogged by a depressing and continuing sense of destiny or fatalism, *taqdir* and *qismet*, and the theory of "accomplished facts", the reasons are complex: psychological, historical no less than political. Iqbal is on the side of the primacy of the will, willingly submissive to the spirit of the Law and the Lawgiver.

As for immortality, it must not be confused with the survival of the same body or the person. *Barzakh*, as the Sufis suggest, is a state of consciousness characterised by a change in the ego's attitude towards experience, especially time and space. The chance of creative unfoldment never ceases: an eternity of failure could also be one of endless opportunity, to mend and to master. The severely

biologic approach of today—rather yesterday—calls for an uptodate Rumi to give wings to the meta-biological hope of transformation and define anew the ascent of man from level to level.

I died as inert matter and became a plant.

And as plant I died and became an animal.

I died as an animal and became a man.

When did I lose my dying?

So why should I fear for losing my human character?

I shall die as a man, to rise an angel.

And when I leave as angel, it will be to reach the Ineffable.

Truly an astounding insight and inspiration, whose echoes may be heard in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. Whether this means a physical envelope analogous to the past body or not we do not know and the Quran is discreetly silent. Incidentally, Heaven and Hell, says Iqbal, are states and not locations—a simple enough statement that had caused a furore among the faithful and the literalists.

Turning to the spirit of Muslim culture, and drawing his inspiration (*wahy?*) from the

Quran and the Prophet, Iqbal underlines its prophetic and yet rational character. While the Sufis, it is true have systematised the world within, two other sources of knowledge, Nature and History, have not been neglected by Muslim thinkers. That the Muslims had a profound sense of history and evolution comes out in the works of Ibn-i-Khal-dun and Maulana Jalaluddin. Not only the principle of Cartesian doubt, but criticism of Greek logic, as well as laying down the foundation of modern science—Roger Bacon had studied in the Muslim universities of Spain—go to the credit of Islam, which would have more to show but for the mystic dis-inclination to be concerned with the mundane. As Dr. Sachau has said *à la* Iqbal: “Were it not for Al-Ashari and Al-Ghazzali, the Arabs would have been a nation of Galileos and Newtons.” The concept of power, so dear to the Renaissance and post-Renaissance science, was anticipated in the Quran: “O company of djinns and men, if you can overpass the bounds of Heaven and Earth, then overpass them. But by power alone shall you overpower them.” Of course, ‘power’ is a tricky word and should not be torn out of the context. Berating Spengler for his many mis-

understandings, Iqbal shows, in some detail, how the problem of ego as well as time and space, in fact varieties of time and space, were questions of life and death for the follower of Islam.

The world-affirming dynamism of Islam (and no doubt his own expansionist psyche) compel Iqbal to point to the need for change, or heroic "reconstruction". Eternal principles do not imply immobility. As we have seen, this is what makes him almost unduly critical of the Sufis, content with their distinction between *zahir* and *batin*, appearance and reality, content to let the world go by. Coming to the present times Iqbal had—at least to begin with—nothing but praise for the Turkish Nationalists about to make a clean sweep of the cobwebs of the past. Misled by the movement, and flying facts in the face, Iqbal asserts that a republican form of government is not only consistent with the spirit of Islam but, what is perhaps more true, in keeping with contemporary needs and pressures. He is, however, in favour of a collective Caliphate. What he is really looking for is a liberal movement in Islam, what he elsewhere calls International Islam. On the vexed question: Is the Law of Islam capable of evolu-

tion, that is change? his own answer, based on a profound study, is in the affirmative.

Taking a large view, Iqbal, poet no less than prophet, announces the universal gospel: "Humanity needs three things today—a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis" towards a spiritual democracy as part of the Islamic heritage, still but partly realised. If the "mystery of selflessness" is Islam's hidden strength, it is, unfortunately, still hidden. This is perhaps so with every institutionalized religion.

Turning to science, he underlines the limitations of its causality-bound world picture. Paradoxically, modern man's control over nature seems to have robbed him of his faith in the future. The western theories of evolution, red in tooth and claw, have little to offer to the cause of a worthwhile human becoming. He criticises Nietzsche, with whom his thought is unduly and excessively compared, to prove the point. Misled by the materially-minded evolutionists, Nietzsche had gone off the track. As for his doctrine of eternal recurrence, Iqbal, cruelly, calls it "the most

hopeless idea of immortality ever formed by man". Entirely cut off from the depths of his own being, modern man is in conflict with himself no less than with others. As for the Islamic world, sunk in the false renunciation of a mediaeval mysticism, ignorance and superstitions, there have been newer, flashy *ersatz* loyalties like Nationalism and Atheistic Socialism, none of which is enough or true to the spirit of Islam. About Nationalism Iqbal said elsewhere "I am opposed to nationalism as it is understood in Europe. . . . Patriotism is a perfectly natural virtue and has a place in the moral life of man. Yet that which really matters is a man's faith, his culture, his historical traditions. These are the things worth living and dying for and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be temporarily associated". In its higher form neither dogma nor priest-ridden ritual, religion alone can prepare man for the task facing the critical world in which the mighty forces of science and socialism are in the throes of a New Order. The meaning-value of religion, a "world of directive energy" (*Alam-i-Amr*), has still a role to play in the making of man and society. Nietzsche too, Iqbal generously admits, had an im-

perative vision—imperious no less!—but he failed because his intellectual premisses and progenitors had blinded him to the real significance of the higher life.

Iqbal goes on to assert that religion is more anxious—and no doubt more able—to reach the Real than science. There is no mystery, nothing emotional or abnormal about religious experience or what we would call realisation. It is this, the religious premise and proof, that creates the new centre of being and existence, helps the 'ego' in "rising higher than mere reflection and mending its transcendence by appropriating the eternal".

How, in man's "search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity", the self and the society interpenetrate, or could interpenetrate, has been suggested by Iqbal in a manner which illuminates the core of traditional culture. "The new world finds its foundation of world unity in the principle of Tawhid," says Iqbal and goes on to add: "Islam as a polity is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in intellectual and emotional life of mankind. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to one's own ideal nature," an



excellent equation worthy of a poet. The restless, creative Ego, or creative self-affirmation is his only dogma. Restless till one finds rest in the Real. It may be doubted if such men make good disciples or wholly belong to the here and now. The intensity of his vision isolates the visionary.

The secret of self-renewal is simple and perennial. In the closing words of *Javid-Nama*: "Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frame; and build up a new being." When we do that there shall arise, as if from nowhere, a profoundly, naturally theocratic order, not its parody, which is all that we have and all that we are likely to get from the rabble and the rabble-rousers of the world.

### III

This *résumé* of Iqbal's thoughts reveals many points of contrast and comparison with those of, say, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Though overlooked by their respective admirers, no student of the modern Indian scene can afford to ignore these.

Here we shall, in the most general terms, draw attention to a few of the striking features. As in Vivekananda, in Iqbal too there

is an unmistakable emphasis on the Will and the Ego, on what the Swami loved to call strength and fearlessness (*abhih*). And if, for his purpose of a renascent Islam, Iqbal was wary of the charms of the Sufi life-style and world-view, of Ibnul Arabi and Hafiz, the Swami too was unsparing in his criticism of the *markat vairagya* (monkeying with renunciation) and the ladylike swooning bhakti of the pseudo-Vaishnava, the inanities of theistic devotion as James phrased it. Both men looked upon the world as essentially a theatre for heroism. 'Man-making' was the motto of Vivekananda's virile life and his idea of education. "Strength is the medicine of the world's worst disease," said one. "My life is the falcon's, fanatic and stern," said the other. Both were men of *Khudi* (self) but also of *Faqr* and *Ishq*, renunciation and love, not an improbable or undesirable combination. Their definition of atheism uses almost the same language. Said the Swami: "He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says he is an atheist who does not believe in himself." Compare this with Iqbal's: "A disbeliever in God is a Kafir ac-

According to the Mulla, but to me one who does not affirm self is a greater Kafir." If some of Iqbal's opinions were frowned upon by the orthodox Mulla and Maulavi, Ash'rites and Mutazalites, so were Vivekananda's frequent sallies and *obiter dicta*. For instance: "Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will get nearer heaven through football than through the study of Gita".

By definition Islam bases itself on the fulfilment of the will of the Almighty. Vivekananda says much the same, though he uses a slightly different language: "My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is to preach to mankind their divinity and how to manifest it in every moment of life." Of course the tolerant background of Vedanta gives him a larger horizon. And so we hear him say: "We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran. That this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best." Such a higher negation would not

A
 have been to the taste of Iqbal, however independent and individual. Again, as contrasted with the implied élitism of the poet and the thinker, of the lonely Messiah, Vivekananda voices a robust grassroot revolutionary ethics that is yet to be justified: "Let new India arise—out of the peasants' cottage, out of the huts of fishermen, the cobblers and sweepers. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factories, from marts and markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and monasteries." Further, the Swami points to a trans-religious, trans-political, trans-national idealism with nothing local or limited about it, a sort of *ne plus ultra* of idealism. "I know my mission in life," said Vivekananda, "and there is no chauvinism in it. I belong as much to India as to the world. I do not believe in any politics. God and truth are the only politics in the world, everything else is trash." With much of it Iqbal would have agreed, the Iqbal who wrote, "Unknown to Ataturk and Reza Shah, the soul of the East is still in search of a body."

Between Iqbal and Sri Aurobindo, contemporaries virtually unknown to each other,

one senses in many areas an immediate kinship. Truth to tell, the differences are no less revealing. Poet and prophet, each had his model or archetype; for Iqbal it was the Quran, for Sri Aurobindo the Vedas and the Upanishads. Original thinkers, neither was an old-time conformist. Sri Aurobindo's "realistic Advaita" was consistently critical of the dominant ascetic-illusionist world-view. Iqbal was deeply suspicious of the Sufi strategy of letting the world alone. In both we find innovative interpretations in keeping with the Time-Spirit. Spokesmen for self-respect and self-determination, both make profound, relevant, rooted criticisms of the modern West, "a land unblest by visionary light", in terms of a wider and deeper harmony that goes beyond the squabble of categories and continents. Both looked upwards as well as towards the future. The Aurobindean optimism is the more striking: "No use clinging to the ice-floes of the past," said Sri Aurobindo. Again: "We belong not to the dawns of the past but to the noons of the future." Iqbal too had high hopes, but rarely so unclouded. His Naya Shivala (New Shrine) was never built. The reason for this ought to be looked into. Was it his *déraciné* role, the extra-terri-

torial loyalties that hampered him? One wonders.

A one-time extremist in politics, Sri Aurobindo later opted for the yogic life, in the process updating and giving it an integral orientation. So far as one can judge, there was no such deep inward plunge or discipline in Iqbal, who was neither sannyasi nor yogi. Another contrast is that though Sri Aurobindo is credited with large philosophical works, he himself refused to be called a philosopher. Iqbal was trained to be one; he was also a jurist and a theologian. Iqbal's intellectual equipment is impressive. Sri Aurobindo, though a thinkers' thinker, is more remarkable for his massive insights, born no doubt of altered states of awareness available to the yogi, Beyond-Mind.

Interestingly, both are aware of Bergson and Nietzsche, without being in any way followers of either. Both seem passionately involved in the idea of an ideal evolution culminating in the Superman, *Insan-i-Kamil*, the Gnostic Being, and a matching society based on a change from within. In a letter (April 7, 1920) Sri Aurobindo had written "What God wants in man is to embody Himself

✓ here in the individual and in the community, to realise God in life". In their passion for unseen psychological foundations on which the future would rest, how far were they following traditional lines? *Pace* Syed Abdul Wahid, Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the new society and the evolution of consciousness is much more exhaustive. But it is hard not to notice an overall similarity in the two heroic dreamers, who apparently worked within inherited religious framework and in complete isolation from each other. To see them together, at once, is the task of those who have come after, and who have to make sense of their twin passionate pointers for a brighter tomorrow not only for the xenophobic orthodox few but for mankind, the world's unborn soul.

In dreams begin responsibilities. Beyond the soiled and servile pursuit of politics, and of warring faiths and fanatics, lies the heaven of the ideal, the Fatherland of the sensitives of all ages. A liberal rather than a fanatic, in Iqbal's own words: The Paradise of free men is an eternal voyaging. Let us salute the ardent pilgrim, the master *musafir*, *salik* of the immemorial quest and honour, if not share,

his agony and ecstasy:

I am waiting for the votaries who arise  
at dawn,

✓ They who shall worship my fire.  
I have no need of the ear of today,  
I am the voice of the poet of tomorrow.



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