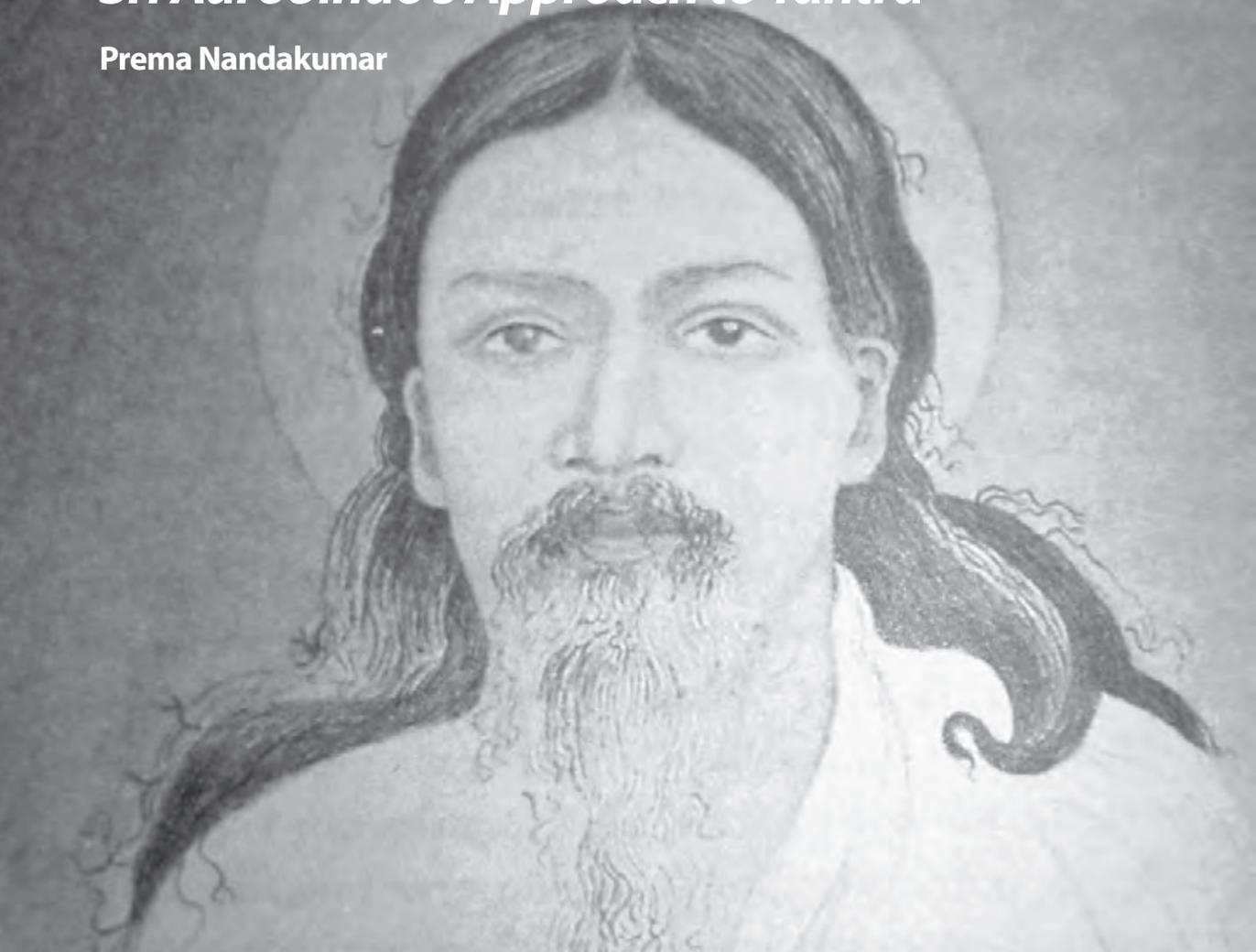


# Sri Aurobindo's Approach to Tantra

Prema Nandakumar



PAINTING: BARINDRA KUMAR GHOSE

**S**RI AUROBINDO (1872–1950) wrote a series of articles on *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the journal *Arya* from 1914 to 1921, published from Pondicherry. Several years later, when it was decided to publish the articles as a book, he revised parts of the work lightly and a good deal of it thoroughly. This revised work was published in 1955 by the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre.

Prema Nandakumar is a literary critic, translator, author, and researcher from Srirangam, Tamil Nadu.

Hatha yoga and raja yoga apart, Sri Aurobindo gives a very detailed treatment of jnana, karma and bhakti yoga in his book. While each pathway can be taken to achieve realisation when pursued with single-minded sincerity, Sri Aurobindo wonders whether these yoga can be integrated for the benefit of aspirant humanity. Of course they cannot be combined like a building-block toy. An individual might pursue them one after another but one may not have the swiftness to go to the centre of the yoga and gain all

its fruits so that one could turn to the next. Not that it is impossible, says Sri Aurobindo:

And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge. Such an example cannot be generalised. Its object also was special and temporal, to exemplify in the great and decisive experience of a master-soul the truth, now most necessary to humanity, towards which a world long divided into jarring sects and schools is with difficulty labouring, that all sects are forms and fragments of a single integral truth and all disciplines labour in their different ways towards one supreme experience.<sup>1</sup>

However, Sri Ramakrishna had shown the way. Could one integrate the yogic pathways in a manner acceptable to be pursued by the common person? For Sri Aurobindo could never think of an individual's transcendence or perfection alone. One could not ignore the call of the humanity around. One needed to gain something more than personal salvation. Humanity needs the help of these great achievers and it needs to be given the key to rise to a higher plane of consciousness. What then is the catalytic agent that could fuse these yogas and prepare an instrument for achieving self-perfection for all? Of course, the integration of the yogas should not be a potpourri. There ought to be an instrument that could make them all work in unison towards progress. And it will not be an instrument that had to be prepared newly. Like the yogas, it should also have had an immemorial

existence. Ah, a central principle, a tremendous power which moves all of them!

Scouring the past, his attention fastened upon a system of yoga which had suffered almost total neglect from the Vedantic schools. Tantra comes into his vision. Tantra, which had found a 'great dynamic force of Nature' as Nature's central principle, had missed the royal pathway and lost itself in the stultifying gulleys of 'self-indulgence, a method of unrestrained social immorality'. We all know how the left-handed tantra has been a discredit to India's religious and spiritual history. However, Sri Aurobindo will not throw away tantra. The decay of the externals can be ignored, it is the principle that we need and have to put to good use now. Contrasting the way of the tantra with the schools of Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo says:

In all of them the lord of the Yoga is the Purusha, the Conscious Soul that knows, observes, attracts, governs. But in Tantra it is rather Prakriti, the Nature-Soul, the Energy, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe. It was by learning and applying the intimate secrets of this Will-in-Power, its method, its Tantra, that the Tantric Yogin pursued the aims of his discipline—mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude. Instead of drawing back from manifested Nature and its difficulties, he confronted them, seized and conquered. But in the end, as is the general tendency of Prakriti, Tantric Yoga largely lost its principle in its machinery and became a thing of formulae and occult mechanism still powerful when rightly used but fallen from the clarity of their original intention (47–8).

Tantra, to put it simplistically, is a worship of Shakti, power, or energy. However, Vedanta finds Shakti to be actually the power of illusion to help us overcome the deceptions of active energy. What else is this cycle of repeated births and deaths that finally creates disgust in us for worldly life? So, is Shakti a power or mere illusion? 'But

in the integral conception the Conscious Soul is the Lord, the Nature-Soul is his executive Energy. Purusha is of the nature of Sat, the being of conscious self-existence pure and infinite; Shakti or Prakriti is of the nature of Chit, — it is power of the Purusha's self-conscious existence, pure and infinite. The relation of the two exists between the poles of rest and action' (ibid.).

Which, of course, means there need be no ascetic denial of the world. Nor going for solitary austerities in an inaccessible place to gain the bliss of Brahman. What is asked of the aspirant here is facing and overcoming its blandishments, pain, and sorrow. This would mean a dedicated attempt to transform our lower nature that clings to worldliness in spite of our higher nature garnering knowledge and devotion-laden love for the Divine. It is for achieving this that we need a synthesis of the yoga systems with tantra as the instrument to organise an individual's approach to yoga.

If indeed our aim be only an escape from the world to God, synthesis is unnecessary and a waste of time; for then our sole practical aim must be to find out one path out of the thousand that lead to God, one shortest possible of short cuts, and not to linger exploring different paths that end in the same goal. But if our aim be a transformation of our integral being into the terms of God-existence, it is then that a synthesis becomes necessary (50).

According to Sri Aurobindo, in tantric discipline Shakti is all-important. This power starts from the very lowest point and then goes up a variously graded ladder to the summit. After dealing at length with karma, jnana, and bhakti yoga in his

text, he takes up tantra's place in attaining 'the yoga of self-perfection'. Tantra aims at liberation too, but also aspires for 'a cosmic enjoyment of the power of the Spirit, which the others may take incidentally on the way, in part, casually, but avoid making a motive or object. It is a bolder and larger system'. Briefly stated, tantra aims for mukti as well as *bhukti*, enjoyment. This leads to the question, what is Shakti, what is this Soul-Nature combine, the Purusha-Prakriti duo?

The highest and real truth of existence is the one Spirit, the supreme Soul, Purushottama, and it is the power of being of this Spirit which manifests itself in all that we experience as universe. This universal Nature is not a lifeless, inert or unconscious mechanism, but informed in all its movements by the universal Spirit. The mechanism of its process is only an outward appearance and the reality is the Spirit creating or manifesting its own being by its own power of being in all that is in Nature. Soul and Nature in us too are only a dual appearance of the one existence (862).

This Shakti is very much around us and within us, as well. It is for us to recognise it and make use of it. Sri Aurobindo points out that the familiar pranayama is itself a 'mechanical means of freeing and getting control of the pranic energy'.

This is, of course, at the level of the ordinary mind. Once we go higher up in mental planes and seek to gather in the universal energy by progressing in mental purity, we would recognise the action taking place within us. When we allow this action to go on within us as a two-in-one, we would have reached the first step of self-perfection.

For the supreme Spirit is one as Purusha or as Prakriti, conscious being or power of conscious being, and as the Jiva in essence

Sri Aurobindo



of self and spirit is one with the supreme Purusha, so on the side of Nature, in power of self and spirit it is one with Shakti, *parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*. To realise this double oneness is the condition of the integral self-perfection. The Jiva is then the meeting-place of the play of oneness of the supreme Soul and Nature (869–70).

To achieve this we must remain conscious of the divine Shakti, pray to her, call her to come down, and make all our activities to be that of her cosmic work. If we could bring the kind of dedication and full faith demanded of us, then the Divine Mother herself would go to work.

She will change the mechanical energies of the mind, life and body which now govern us into delight-filled manifestations of her own living and conscious power and presence. She will manifest in us and relate to each other all the various spiritual experiences of which the mind is capable. And as the crown of this process she will bring down the supramental light into the mental levels, change the stuff of mind into the stuff of supermind, transform all the lower energies into energies of her supramental nature and raise us into our being of gnosis. The Shakti will reveal herself as the power of the Purushottama, and it is the Ishwara who will manifest himself in his force of supermind and spirit and be the master of our being, action, life and Yoga (870).

This is all well as a general assurance, an overview of the way tantra yoga works when we allow the mother power the Nature-Soul, to take charge of our aspirations and aims. However, Sri Aurobindo has given plenty of technical details also on the workings of tantra. *The Synthesis of Yoga* has a chapter on 'the Action of the Divine Shakti', which teaches us to recognise the fact that we are not the persons who are executing action, it is Shakti who is the doer. The I-ness has to be completely eliminated. Once we inch towards the successful implementation of this

rule, we move into a vaster world of consciousness. The 'I' and the 'You' may remain for practical uses but they do not imprison us anymore into ourselves. Thus do we slip into the universal and feel 'one with the total power of the spirit in Nature'. Even if we gain this plane of consciousness, we have to remain wary for at anytime our past of ego-centeredness may leap upon us and choke our aspirations. Sweeping aside the ego, the sadhaka must learn to have a double vision as it were about this million-hued creation as the presence of Prakriti with Purusha in the background. It is they who activate me!

The sadhaka has therefore first to keep the idea and get the realisation of a one self or spirit in all behind all these workings. He must be aware behind Prakriti of the one supreme and universal Purusha. He must see and feel not only that all is the self-shaping of the one Force, Prakriti or Nature, but that all her actions are those of the Divine in all, the one Godhead in all, however veiled, altered and as it were, perverted—for perversion comes by a conversion into lower forms—by transmission through the ego and the gunas. This will farther diminish the open or covert insistence of the ego and, if thoroughly realised, it will make it difficult or impossible for it to assert itself in such a way as to disturb or hamper the farther progress (872).

The universal Shakti does help us by sending down her revelations, but we must be wary of mistaking the revelations as hers totally. As the divine power comes down the mental, vital, and physical planes to transform them, inevitably it also gets mixed up occasionally with the lower powers, in case our aspiration has not been total. Sri Aurobindo says that these ups and downs in yoga 'must be regarded as the natural vicissitudes of a process of transformation from the normal to the spiritual being'. One must strive to gain equanimity; or else, be prepared to make a total surrender. Such a surrender helps us not

claim something from the Divine but accept a fulfilment of the Divine in us 'content with the delight of oneness in being, content to leave the supreme Self and Master of existence to do whatever is the will of his absolute wisdom and knowledge through our more and more perfected Nature'.

These are indeed difficult, even dangerous experiences. Closeness to Shakti achieved by surrender might occasionally get disturbed by the ego which is still hidden somewhere in us; this ego could be tempted to use the mighty Shakti within our grasp for selfish or gross purposes. For a while it is all excitement, pride, *rajasic* delight and the person may even use the power for evil purposes. Shakti has not given her or him power to do this! Hence the aspirant who takes to the way of the tantra must simply allow Shakti to enter her or his being and guide her or him, nay, use her or him for her delight, for her plans for one's transformation. This would mean a surge of self-mastery in us to do Mother's work. This is when the Purusha is not just a witness to the doings of the Shakti in us, but is also the Ishvara, a doer. The jiva becomes 'the meeting-place of the play of the dual aspect of the divine, Prakriti and Purusha', and soon the aspirant is constantly aware of the presence of the Lord.

The distinction between the Shakti and the Ishwara begins to disappear; there is only the conscious activity in us of the Divine with the great self of the Divine behind and around and possessing it; all the world and Nature is seen to be only that, but here it has become fully conscious, the Maya of the ego removed, and the Jiva is there only as an eternal portion of his being, *amśa sanātana*, put forth to support a divine individualisation and living now fulfilled in the complete presence and power of the Divine, the complete joy of the Spirit manifested in the being (880).

To gain a drop of the illimitable power of

Shakti is no easy task; even more difficult is to retain this power granted by the Divine Mother as she pervades the aspirant's personality. In matters of teaching yoga Sri Aurobindo's patience is infinite. He points out that having come thus far, what the aspirant would need to have in abundance is *shraddha*.

This soul faith, in some form of itself, is indispensable to the action of the being and without it man cannot move a single pace in life, much less take any step forward to a yet unrealised perfection. It is so central and essential a thing that the Gita can justly say of it that whatever is a man's *śraddhā*, that he is, *yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ*, and, it may be added, whatever he has the faith to see as possible in himself and strive for, that he can create and become. There is one kind of faith demanded as indispensable by the integral Yoga and that may be described as faith in God and the Shakti, faith in the presence and power of the Divine in us and the world, a faith that all in the world is the working of one

Goddess Maheshwari



divine Shakti, that all the steps of the Yoga, its strivings and sufferings and failures as well as its successes and satisfactions and victories are utilities and necessities of her workings and that by a firm and strong dependence on and a total self-surrender to the Divine and to his Shakti in us we can attain to oneness and freedom and victory and perfection (881–2).

But the 'soul faith' is not easy to gain either. An enemy who cannot be spurned easily is skepticism, a common enough presence to weaken our faith in the Divine Mother. Another is envy, which is described as 'the constant carping of the narrow pettily critical uncreative intellect'. Fortunately if our dedication and surrender is wholesome and complete, if we hold on to *shraddha*, Shakti herself will strike down the enemies of promise. For *shraddha* is the result of Shakti's call to our inward soul and that never fails. Whenever a doubt or difficulty attacks us, just turn to the Shakti within, for to the heart of abundant faith, she descends to direct the sadhaka on his onward journey. Remember, she is the supreme Mother! So we have a breathless sentence from Sri Aurobindo:

She is Maheshwari, goddess of the supreme knowledge, and brings to us her vision for all kinds and widenesses of truth, her rectitude of the spiritual will, the calm and passion of her supramental largeness, her felicity of illumination: she is Mahakali, goddess of the supreme strength, and with her are all mights and spiritual force and severest austerity of tapas and swiftness to the battle and the victory and the laughter, the *aṭṭahāsya*, that makes light of defeat and death and the powers of the ignorance: she is Mahalakshmi, the goddess of the supreme love and delight, and her gifts are the spirit's grace and the charm and beauty of the Ananda and protection and every divine and human blessing: she is Mahasaraswati, the goddess of divine skill and of the works of the Spirit, and hers is the Yoga that is skill in works, *yogah karmasu kauśalam*, and the utilities of divine

knowledge and the self-application of the spirit to life and the happiness of its harmonies. And in all her powers and forms she carries with her the supreme sense of the masteries of the eternal Ishwari, a rapid and divine capacity for all kinds of action that may be demanded from the instrument, oneness, a participating sympathy, a free identity, with all energies in all beings and therefore a spontaneous and fruitful harmony with all the divine will in the universe (892).

Since tantra yoga was not looked upon favourably by spiritual aspirants in those days as it had slipped into 'left-handed' practices, disciples kept questioning Sri Aurobindo about the subject and the importance given to it in Integral Yoga. Again, was not this world an illusion, maya as taught by the great philosopher, Acharya Shankara? Sri Aurobindo rejected these mental formulations outright in letters to his disciples:

It is only if you approach the Supreme through his double aspect of Sat and Chit-Shakti, double but inseparable, that the total truth of things can become manifest to the inner experience. This other side was developed by the Shakta Tantrics. The two together, the Vedantic and the Tantric truth unified, can arrive at the integral knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

In his answers to his disciples explaining the Integral Yoga, tantra with its mother-image gets evoked often. Here is a dream of a disciple getting an explanation:

It is in answer to your aspiration that the Mahakali force descended—the serpent is the Energy from above working in the vital answering to the Serpent Kundalini which rises from below. The white fire is the fire of aspiration, the red fire is the fire of renunciation and tapasya, the blue fire is the fire of spirituality and spiritual knowledge which purifies and dispels the Ignorance.<sup>3</sup>

The colourful image of the kundalini is central

to tantra. The coiled power at the base which loosens itself to rise and reach the *sahasrara* at the crown has been visualised as a serpent that lies coiled in the box of the snake-charmer. The siddha poets of Tamil Nadu have used this image very often to describe their yoga. Sri Aurobindo accepts the serpent-power's presence in the Integral Yoga but says it has less to do with the forms and rituals of tantrics engaged in yoga. Once the prayer is heard by Mother and her descent takes place, the pressure automatically opens the six centres in a human body. Though Integral Yoga is not interested in the descriptions of experience as is found in tantric books, Sri Aurobindo said, 'the ascent of the force from the Muladhara does take place'.<sup>4</sup> He has given a visual experience of this movement in yoga, in his epic poem *Savitri*:

As in a flash from a supernal light,  
A living image of the original Power,  
A face, a form came down into her heart  
And made of it its temple and pure abode.  
But when its feet had touched  
the quivering bloom,  
A mighty movement rocked the inner space  
As if a world were shaken and found its soul:  
Out of the Inconscient's soulless  
mindless night  
A flaming Serpent rose released from sleep.  
It rose billowing its coils and stood erect  
And climbing mightily, stormily on its way  
It touched her centres with its flaming mouth;  
As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,  
They bloomed and laughed  
surcharged with light and bliss.  
Then at the crown it joined the Eternal's space.  
In the flower of the head,  
in the flower of Matter's base,  
In each divine stronghold and Nature-knot  
It held together the mystic stream which joins  
The viewless summits with the unseen depths,  
The string of forts that make the frail defence  
Safeguarding us against the enormous world,  
Our lines of self-expression in its Vast.



Goddess Mahakali

An image sat of the original Power  
Wearing the mighty Mother's form and face.  
Armed, bearer of the weapon and the sign  
Whose occult might no magic can imitate,  
Manifold yet one she sat, a guardian force:  
A saviour gesture stretched her lifted arm,  
And symbol of some native cosmic strength,  
A sacred beast lay prone below her feet,  
A silent flame-eyed mass of living force.<sup>5</sup>

After the siddhi or spiritual perfection attained by Sri Aurobindo in 1926, he retired into near-total seclusion. In the very first year of Sri Aurobindo's seclusion, came out his slender book, *The Mother*. It is a seminal document which reveals the combination of Vedanta and tantra in his yoga. The book was published in 1928. This was the time when Mirra Alfassa Richard from France—who had come to Pondicherry and settled down to follow yoga—had been asked to take charge of the ashrama. When T V Kapali Sastri, one of his disciples, asked Sri Aurobindo whether the book was about 'our

Mother', the answer was 'yes'. This statement in the book makes this clear: 'Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.'<sup>6</sup> At the transcendental level we may not be able to envision the Mother figure. That is why the great rishis of the past visualised innumerable cosmic godheads seen by them in their meditation. Of these Sri Aurobindo had chosen four—Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati—and placed them as inspirations for the yoga of self-perfection in his *The Synthesis of Yoga*. He gives a more detailed explanation of these powers in the last chapter of *The Mother*.

The chapter itself was originally written as a reply to Kapali Sastri who had asked questions about the place of the deities in Integral Yoga. Once a student of Kapali Sastri, Sankaranarayanan, told him he could see that of these four personalities in *The Mother*, only Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati were invoked in the *Durga Saptashati*. How was he to identify Maheshwari then? Sastri assured him that Maheshwari is very much in the scripture and that is why Sri Aurobindo had included her among the four great and powerful personalities of the Mother. Sastri recited a verse from the *Durga Saptashati* and said that she combined all the other three personalities as one. After the destruction of Mahishasura by Mahasaraswati, the gods hail the Divine Mother: 'Devi! You are Durga, the boat that helps us cross the terrible sea of birth; you are the knowledge-formed Medha (Saraswati),

the essence of all the scriptures; you are Lakshmi who resides in the heart of the slayer of Kaitabha, Vishnu; you are Gauri of Mahadeva who wears the crescent moon.'<sup>7</sup>

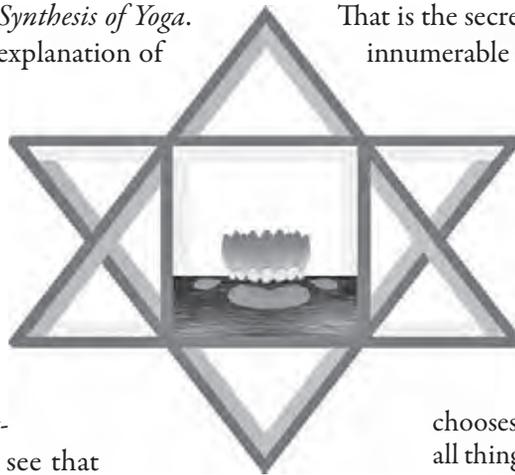
Sri Aurobindo begins with Maheshwari describing her as 'the mighty and wise One who opens us to the supramental infinities and the cosmic vastness, to the grandeur of the supreme Light, to a treasure-house of miraculous knowledge, to the measureless movement of the Mother's eternal forces.'<sup>8</sup> She is absolutely calm. These cosmic powers who chisel human beings are not interested in mechanical productions.

That is the secret of this creation which has innumerable forms where even two leaves of the same tree are never exact twins. Maheshwari brings maternal love as also a high detachment to her work:

Nothing can move her because all wisdom is in her; nothing is hidden from her that she

chooses to know; she comprehends all things and all beings and their nature and what moves them and the law of the world and its times and

how all was and is and must be. A strength is in her that meets everything and masters and none can prevail in the end against her vast intangible wisdom and high tranquil power. Equal, patient and unalterable in her will she deals with men according to their nature and with things and happenings according to their force and the truth that is in them. Partiality she has none, but she follows the decrees of the Supreme and some she raises up and some she casts down or puts away from her into the darkness. To the wise she gives a greater and more luminous wisdom; those that have vision she admits to her counsels; on the hostile she imposes the consequence of their hostility; the ignorant and



Symbol of Sri Aurobindo Ashrama

foolish she leads according to their blindness (ibid.).

One may wonder whether it is possible for people to reject grace when it comes to them, but nothing should surprise us in this vast, many-tinted creation. In fact, these tests themselves are imposed by the Divine to make the person a disciplined soldier of the Mother. If the individual is not prepared to undergo the



Goddess Mahalakshmi

discipline, the Mother leaves him alone. He will learn it after a long interval of suffering. However, Mahakali does not leave rebellious people alone. She takes disciplinary action on the spot. As we draw closer to the ways in which Sri Aurobindo has brought in the central tenets of tantra into his yoga, it is fascinating to note how carefully Sri Aurobindo has studied tantra. Maheshwari may seem a trifle remote to our experience, but Mahakali is familiar to us all:

Mahakali is of another nature. Not wideness but height, not wisdom but force and strength are her peculiar power. There is in her an overwhelming intensity, a mighty passion of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle. All her divinity leaps out in a splendour of tempestuous action; she is there for swiftness, for the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it. Terrible is her face to the Asura, dangerous and ruthless her mood against the haters of the Divine; for she is the Warrior of the Worlds who never shrinks from the battle (19).

The Mahakali force is very important in the cultural history of India. Invoking the Durga power for battle victory has been the tradition ever since we hear Sri Krishna asking Arjuna to pray to Mother Durga before commencing

the battle in Kurukshetra. Arjuna immediately leaves his bow and arrows in his seat, gets down from the chariot, stands with folded palms and begins: 'I salute you, O Durga, who lives on the Mandara mountain and are an accomplished commander of army.'<sup>9</sup> The fourteen-verse prayer in the Mahabharata is by itself a tantric text. The prayer is answered by a vision of Ma-

hakali when she assures Arjuna that in a short while he would achieve victory: 'O Pandava, you will conquer your enemies in a short time' (6.22.16.35). Whether it was the rulers in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, or Andhra Pradesh, they invariably offered prayers to Mahakali for victory before starting out for battle. In recent times we had Shivaji of Maharashtra praying to Bhavani to bless him with victory. It is interesting to note that to achieve victory in spiritual life also, Sri Aurobindo wrote a hymn to Durga in Bengali and Swami Vivekananda has recorded his vision of the Divine Mother in 'Kali the Mother':

Dancing mad with joy,  
Come, Mother, come!  
For Terror is Thy name,  
Death is in Thy breath,  
And every shaking step  
Destroys a world for ever.  
Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!  
Come, O Mother, come!  
Who dares misery love,  
And hug the form of Death,  
Dance in Destruction's dance,  
To him the Mother comes.<sup>10</sup>

Mahalakshmi is almost a contrast to the Mahakali experience. The tantric texts do not give any special place to Mahalakshmi though



Goddess Saraswati

Kamala of the ten *mahavidyas* has the attributes of Mahalakshmi. The Pancharatra texts of Vaishnavism do have a Lakshmi tantra where Lakshmi is seen as the active force while Vishnu is identified with transcendent Brahman. The tantra texts do not give any special place to her but Sri Aurobindo thinks we need not only wisdom and force, but also grace and tenderness. She is the very image of harmony, an ideal we would do very well to imitate in our outer and inner lives.

For she throws the spell of the intoxicating sweetness of the Divine: to be close to her is a profound happiness and to feel her within the heart is to make existence a rapture and a marvel; grace and charm and tenderness flow out from her like light from the sun and wherever she fixes her wonderful gaze or lets fall the loveliness of her smile, the soul is seized and made

captive and plunged into the depths of an unfathomable bliss. Magnetic is the touch of her hands and their occult and delicate influence refines mind and life and body and where she presses her feet course miraculous streams of an entrancing Ananda.<sup>11</sup>

But then, there is the major problem of living an ideal life in a world which poses a challenge every moment. There needs to be a willingness to work patiently, keep the mind alert for shortcomings and remain focused on the goal. This is the realm of Mahasaraswati, who is 'the Mother's Power of Work and her spirit of perfection and order' (22). This power is that of the well-organised builder, administrator, and artisan. If Mahakali is invoked for battle heroism, the Mahasaraswati spirit has to infuse us so that we can give our full attention to the details and never lag in our work. We may move forward slowly, but with her grace we move surely towards our goal. Beware of her wrath as well! 'Carelessness and negligence and indolence she abhors; all scamped and hasty and shuffling work, all clumsiness and *à peu près* and misfire, all false adaptation and misuse of instruments and faculties and leaving of things undone or half done is offensive and foreign to her temper' (23). But she is kind and smiling if we are ready to rectify our mistakes and proceed patiently. This persistence itself brings the reward of perfection in course of time. Sri Aurobindo now comes up with an aphoristic sentence which is by itself a Mahasaraswati Upanishad:

A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives us towards the integrality

of the higher nature. All the work of the other Powers leans on her for its completeness; for she assures the material foundation, elaborates the stuff of detail and erects and rivets the armour of the structure (ibid.).

We do put before her our inexhaustible wants, desires, aspirations but this does not make her tired at all. She is a mother who understands her child's cravings, does not get angry and proceeds to help us find fulfilment by our own strivings. She is a mother who teaches her child to walk, speak, read, write, and swim. The Divine Mother knows what we need, she listens, smiles, and gives, for she is a mother. Only, we must have the absolute trust that a child has for its mother. This Mother of all-love is also indicated by Sri Aurobindo so that we can hold on to her with hope and proceed on the path of yoga. These powers do not exhaust the facets of the Divine Mother, says Sri Aurobindo:

There are other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, but they were more difficult to bring down and have not stood out in front with so much prominence in the evolution of the earth-spirit. There are among them Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation,—most of all one who is her Personality of that mysterious and powerful ecstasy and Ananda which flows from a supreme divine Love, the Ananda that alone can heal the gulf between the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter, the Ananda that holds the key of a wonderful divinest Life and even now supports from its secrecies the work of all the other Powers of the universe (23–4).

Sri Aurobindo's message has a sterling simplicity about it: 'Be conscious in your mind and soul and heart and life and the very cells of your body, aware of the Mother and her Powers and their working' (24). In short, be conscious of

the Mother always. If we do that we would have caught the core idea of tantra, which has been set up as the central pillar of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. 

## References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo International University Centre, 1955), 45–6.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, 2 vols (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 2013), 2.448.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 976.
4. *Letters on Yoga*, 2.460.
5. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri—a Legend and a Symbol* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), 528–9.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 2012), 14.
7. *Durga Saptashati*, 4.11.
8. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, 18.
9. Mahabharata, 6.22.16.7.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.384.
11. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, 20–1.

Sri Aurobindo's Symbol

