

# Journey from Consciousness to Superconsciousness

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The NASA of USA sent the twin spacecraft, Voyager 1 and 2 in 1977 to study the solar system. These man-made objects are now at a distance of 10 and 13 billion miles away, farthest from earth. Voyager 1 has crossed the heliosphere, the magnetic boundary separating the solar system's sun, planets and solar wind from the rest of the galaxy. There is unfathomably empty space before and after them; beyond the known cradle of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

The ISRO has been launching great satellites from time to time. Countries like North Korea are daringly exploding highly powerful bombs in space. Russia, China, Britain and France are veterans in the field. Powerful countries are racing against each other using vast space. Airplanes move covering thousands of miles from country to country using the sky-space which is reminiscent of the moving chariots of the folklore across the sky driven by winged horses. These may be called journeys in the outer space. Whereas outer space is vast and infinite, consciousness is an inner space. Thousands of years ago Indian Upanishad declared, 'This is He that is awake in those who sleep.'<sup>2</sup> This Consciousness has been identified by Sri Aurobindo as the 'Superconscient Divine Purusha'.

## Scientific and speculative philosopher's ideas of consciousness

Materialism is based on solid knowledge, its proponents claim, maybe

with certain exceptions. Scientists and speculative philosophers have recently been dragged into the idea of consciousness though it appears vague even to them as they haven't got a sure clue to it so far.

Francis Crick and Christof Koch of the IT, California, have found a clue to consciousness which is related to DNA. They have held that examination of neurons and the interactions between them, their binding together, could help scientists to create a scientific model of consciousness which is analogous to transmission of genetic information by means of DNA. Laying stress on visual awareness they feel that neural underpinnings of the sense of sight may lead to an awareness of the self which is unique to humans. Their arguments are based on the fact that any interference in the functioning of the brain's 50 billion nerve cells tends to alter subjective experience in a definite way.

Researchers at Northwestern University claim that consciousness lies well within the realm of scientific inquiry. Although scientists have yet to agree on an objective measure to index consciousness, progress has been made with this agenda in several labs around the world.

'The debate about the neural basis of consciousness rages because there is no widely accepted theory about what happens in the brain to make consciousness possible,' said Ken Paller, professor in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern.<sup>3</sup>

Quantum physicists think that mysteries of the mind may be related to the mysteries of quantum mechanics. But it is more speculative than the neuron theory, for there is no definite link between the two, it has been held. Some researchers have found that the electrical activity of the brain cells fires in synchrony, but it is not known if that relates to behaviour.

Professor Ashok Sharma, former scientist at Harvard University, has tried to define the science of consciousness. He says, it is a *non-physical entity*, which is essentially different from the four basic entities of space, time, energy and matter of the conventional science. ‘Consciousness does not have any physical attribute or property or action, but is endowed with autonomous will power of creation, retention and annihilation of the knowledge of an individual or that of the universe.’ Quoting the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, (6/19) he says that consciousness itself is non-differentiable, inactive, placid, indescribable and non associative.<sup>4</sup>

Colin McGinn, a philosopher of Rutgers University, argued in his 1991 book, *The Problem of Consciousness*, that because our brains are products of evolution, they have cognitive limitations.<sup>5</sup>

David Chalmers, an Australian philosopher of Washington University maintains that ‘None of the physical theories addresses the most fundamental question about the mind: why is the performance of these functions accompanied by subjective experience?’<sup>6</sup>

Koch holds the view that philosophy has least chance of giving insight into the mind-body relationship or the question of free will, admitting that science may not be able to solve all the mysteries of the mind. He advises philosophers to remember what their forebear, Ludwig Wittgenstein once said,

‘Whereof one doesn’t know, thereof one mustn’t speak.’<sup>7</sup>

### Consciousness

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

*Sachchidānanda* (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss) is usually conceived as the highest state of consciousness. But Supramental consciousness is the next state of consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo. He said there are further heights, not yet explored. Referring to Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose’s findings in plants and metals, Sri Aurobindo observed in *The Life Divine*: ‘There is a superconscient in us as well as subconscient, a range of conscious faculties and therefore an organisation of consciousness which rises high above that psychological stratum to which we give the name of mentality. And since the subliminal self in us thus rises in superconscience above mentality, may it not also sink in subconscience below mentality? . . . . If so, we must suppose in the plant and the metal also a force to which we can give the name of consciousness . . . . The seeking and shrinking of the plant, its pleasure and pain,

its sleep and its wakefulness and all that strange life whose truth an Indian scientist has brought to light by rigidly scientific methods, are all movements of consciousness . . . . Mind and Matter are rather different grades of the same energy, different organisations of one conscious Force of Existence.’ (Divine 18/ 86-88)

### **Religion**

When we talk of consciousness and spirituality we have to remember that most devout persons live with their respective religions. Though the aim of religion is spirituality, it is dwarfed by man’s ordinary consciousness.

A thirst for the beyond, a glimpse of it, is what gave birth to religion. Later it got distorted by all dreary rules and narrow separatism so much that most religionists, forgetting the essential humility in such matters, felt that their religion was superior to other religions and quarrelled and fought with each other. Some people of one of the ultra religions aim at eliminating all other religions violently as they do not adhere to their faith. Ruinous bestiality is being perpetrated by them jeopardizing the sanctity and peace of global life. Mother of Pondicherry always condemned religions and spoke in favour of spiritualism. The opposite of spiritualism is materialism. Religion is in between them. So great people have advised all to go beyond religion and embrace spirituality which is finer and wider than the ordinary rules and regulations. This is not to deny that the age-old spiritual practices included religious rituals. Sri Aurobindo asserted that, ‘Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion, and in the larger ideas of it that are now coming on us even the greatest religion becomes no more than a broad sect or branch of the one universal religion.’ (Culture 427)

### **Material attitude to life and God**

We must remember that apart from consciousness, religion and spirituality, the basic concept of the world is matter which has given birth to a materialistic outlook. Of course with matter we begin but we should not end there. But there are large number of people who deny the other aspects of life and seek everything within the boundaries of matter. It is their way and we must respect differing ways of different people.

Materialists are mostly atheists who deny the reign of religion. And in between the theists and the atheists are the agnostics who do not matter much. Communism is the best example of materialism. In the 1960s Existentialism came to possess the intellect of some people. But it was completely a negative idea about human life. As a movement it has lost its footing.

### **Spirituality**

Spiritualism is a faith in existence beyond what we see before our nose and a humility that I and my knowledge are not the end of the world, that there are vast things which I have yet to grasp and know, that my past and future neither were and nor are fixed. Gessed by intuition and verified by experiment man conceives that there are phenomena beyond reasonable explanation. And accordingly he believes in the beyond with faith in something like God.

India has given birth to large number of great Rishis and Munis who uttered the highest words of wisdom through Vedas and the Upanishads as heard and realised by them. India is the birthplace of some great religions. Indian culture from the beginning has remained to be a spiritual, ‘inward-looking religio-philosophical culture’, Sri Aurobindo said. (Culture 52) He realized that ‘Spirituality is in its essence an

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

‘To discover the spiritual being in himself is the main business of the spiritual man and to help others towards the same evolution is his real service to the race . . . an outward help could succor and alleviate, but nothing or very little more is possible.’ (Divine 19/884-85)

In his *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo stressed that the ultimate union between the nations would be possible through spiritual means and that would be in a spiritual age but, ‘The spiritual age will be ready to set in when the common mind of man begins to be alive to these truths and to be moved or desire to be moved by this triple or triune Spirit.’ (Unity 244)

#### **Epitome of spiritual consciousness**

We present below the examples of highest aspirations and intense emotional and psychic surge to meet the God and realize God from the lives of three great spiritual personalities at the beginning of their spiritual journey. All the three achieved God and continued to inspire people of the world to achieve personal well-being, health and higher manhood leading towards universal peace and unity up to the last days of their lives. Even after their passing they continue to guide and illuminate the lives of millions of their followers and all those who

turn to them for help. All of them were God-realized souls—Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mahayogi and Maharshi.

A very significant thing to be noticed is that the Divine induced each of them to seek it; leading and guiding him until he realized the Truth of Divine Reality in him, above and pervading the material universe. Goddess Kāli engaged Sri Ramakrishna as her priest to show him the way. Nārāyana sent Sri Aurobindo to Jail to train him and the Divine Self suddenly gave Ramana Maharshi the experience of Death so that he could overcome it to realize the Self, Soul or God in him. Each of them represents the peak of spiritual consciousness. They did everything while living in that consciousness and still act as the beacon in the lives of their devotees.

About his emotional and psychic life, Sri Ramakrishna himself once gave the account of his first ecstasy and trance while viewing some birds’ free movement through the sky:

I was six or seven at that time. One morning I was going over a ridge of the earth in the field while munching puffed rice. A beautiful piece of cloud pregnant with water was floating in the sky—I was eating while beholding it. Instantly the cloud covered almost the whole sky and by this time a flock of milk white cranes were flying in the lap of the black cloud. What a scenic beauty! In an ecstatic mood I lost my awareness and fell down. Puffed rice scattered around the ridge. I can’t say how long I was lying there in such a state until people raised me up and took me home.

(*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, by Swami Saradananda, originally written in Bengali, Book 2 Chapter 2)

And it happened again and again.

Such ecstatic moments and trance from the very childhood showed the days of a

great saint of the future; involvement from his childhood in the worlds beyond gave birth to a Paramahansa in him later, hailed by all who adored him as the direct representative of the Divine on earth, an *Avatāra* in this age of material civilization.

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

The Master used to say, 'I have touched the nose of the Mother (earthen image), she was really breathing. Searching minutely I never found the shadow of the Divine Mother falling in the temple. From my own room I heard the Mother going up the stairs of the temple like a happy girl making sounds of the jingling bells on her anklet. Quickly coming out of the room I really found the Mother standing in the balcony on the first floor of the temple with her loosened hairs spread over her shoulders; looking towards Kolkata or viewing the Ganges.' (Ibid., Book 2 Chapter 6) How intimately the priest behaved with the clay image of the Kālī has been known from an eyewitness, Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, who was his constant companion during the time.

### Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was not a *bhakta* from birth like Sri Ramakrishna or mad after knowing the Self in him like Ramana Maharshi. He didn't question his Guru to prove the existence of God like young Vivekananda. He simply ignored the issue,

giving more stress on the work in hand. He has stated clearly, in spite of his experiences, 'When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all.' (Speech 117)

Sri Aurobindo was primarily a poet and politician. Back to India he was a secret revolutionary and a political leader. The interest of the country was most dear to his heart, second to none. Nevertheless he began yoga practices and had some occult experiences. He sought the divine to gain strength and power so that he could help his motherland to become free. He didn't seek the Divine wholeheartedly. But God pushed Himself in his life and compelled him to accept Him.

He was arrested for political reasons with charges of sedition in 1908. He wrote: 'My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. The Next year on May 6, I was released'. (Prison Life 12)

'I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and I could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail or cease', Sri Aurobindo said. (Speech 110)

After his arrest, Sri Aurobindo said, 'He spoke to me again and said, "The bonds you had not the strength to break I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue. . . . I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work." Then He placed the Gita in

my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita . . . . I realized what the Hindu religion meant.’(Speech 110)

He got from Swami Vivekananda something towards his future realization in the realm of Supramental Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo confirmed, ‘It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence... The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.’ (On Himself 68)

#### Merchants of spirituality

Spiritualism has been in practice in India and elsewhere by the exponents of it from the ancient time. Apart from the masters of it some modern clever people have come to acquire snippets of this vast discipline and use them for the benefit of different groups of people including themselves in this digital age. They are professionals; they practise spirituality. The high-tech Gurus through piecemeal application of the science and art of

spiritualism try to make it a vehicle of commerce for their own benefit. This does not fulfil the spiritual thirst or attainment of it. They are therefore dangers to true spirituality. Some of them are caught for the crude practices of their ill-conceived knowledge and are publicly punished.

A newspaper reports, ‘If we go by ancient lore, enlightenment waits only at the end of a long and arduous path. It is obviously not available in spiritual supermarkets at the flash of a credit card. . . .

‘However, New Age in India is still largely an urban westernised phenomenon. Curiously enough, the urban elite have discovered Indian spirituality through the distilled versions available from the West. . . .’<sup>8</sup>

Everything is evolving towards a higher stage: it is an evolution of consciousness which is the inner truth covering the apparent physical evolution through force and might, selection and choice. Though the evolution has been continuing in zigzag ways for millions of years, Sri Aurobindo urges on man to expedite the evolutionary process in his life to reach the Divine Consciousness, the ultimate goal as the greats reached. ■

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