

A Modern Sufi Looks at Aurobindo

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It is first necessary to explain what is meant by **modern Sufi** and then go on to examine certain aspects of Sri Aurobindo's teaching.

The term "Sufi" is in a certain sense a misnomer. No one is a Sufi because he accepts certain philosophy, or is able to explain the erudite writings of some Islamic sages. It is been posited (in theory only) that there is a transmission outside of scriptures which is handed down in some way from person to person, from generation to generation. The Sufic line, called **silsila Sufian** is not different. Only he who has had certain inner experiences, and especially he who has "caught on" to this chain-of-transmission is entitled to the term "Sufi," and even then it is used with caution. The exception is when a qualified spiritual teacher openly bestows the right to use the term upon a pupil. In the case of the writer it is now accepted by practically all the Moslems in the San Francisco Bay area, while rejected by many non-Moslems who are regarded by non-Moslems as authorities on Islam!

Here "modern" does not mean contemporary. There are millions (literally) of contemporary Sufis. Some have been members of the cabinets of their country and many have occupied high positions in the world's diplomatic corps. At least one new nation (Libya) is practically controlled by people who have some knowledge of Sufism. But these peoples have not, with few exceptions, been educated in modern scientific and philosophical lines; few are acquainted with the new developments of philosophy in the West, and fewer still have done pristine scientific research work.

Aurobindo appears at first as a rather complete man. He had a modern education and this is certainly evident in his tremendous command over the English language. He also lived as a man "down among men" in his social life. Later he put more and more stress on esoteric and mystical values. He may differ in our outlooks and opinions, but opinions which are not based upon some direct participation in experience are, of necessity, ineffective.

Sufis of all times have been trained to see life from the point of view of others as well as of themselves. They do not come out and stress any **anatta** philosophy and after so doing become critical of all points of view which may differ in any respect from their own. We can see, in the life of Moin-ed-din Chisti, how he recognized the Hindu sages. Nilla Cram Cook has been writing recently of the interchanges between the Sufis and Shiva-Shaktis in Kashmir. The poetry of the Mogul Abul Fazl and of the much later British Richard Burton stress this all-encompassing view.

At the opposite extreme are the non-participants. The non-participants made their greatest mark in history in their persecutions of Galileo and Bruno. There were many later schools of non-participants who attacked the "church" for its attitude on these two men and on Darwin at a later date. These N. P.'s take their cue largely from Bacon. They make Bacon the founder of something they call "modern philosophy" of which he was the originator about as much as he was the creator of Shakespeare. The aristocratic, economic-self-sufficient sage is still the ideal for many of these people.

Those later N. P.'s always bring their justification with an attack on the "church" and on various aspects of Christian tradition and orthodoxy. They successfully persecuted the Austrian Von Reichenbach and were nearly as successful with the Danish Finsen and French Pasteur. Just as their

predecessors acclaimed Galileo, they acclaimed Pasteur and turned their guns on the great English physicist Crookes. They refused to look through “the telescopes” at his psychic research. It is true that J. J. Thomson included **all** the work of Crookes as within the realm of science. But the Baconian N. P.’s still dissent.

A few years ago the writer was thrown out of intellectual society because he was advocating some of the work of the French Charles Richet. Six weeks after that, the French Academy, for the first time in history voted Richet as France’s greatest scientist **unanimously**. The writer stayed out of intellectual society.

If this be true of material science, how much more true it is of super-material science. The non-participant has only an axe to grind; he has no telescopes to enhance his vision. **Truth is one** and the experience of that **truth** differs in vocabulary, not in outlook.

To confine ourselves here to just one aspect of Aurobindo’s teaching. He has posited **mind**, **supermind** and **overmind**. A sort of chart may be given:

Sanskrit Term	English	Grade	Sufic Term	English	Sufi Plane
Sanjnana	Supermind	Deva	Malak	Angel	Djabrut
Adhijnana	Overmind	Gandharva	Djin	Genius	Malakut
Manas	Mind	Manusha	Insaan	Man	Nasut

This chart may be elongated and the correspondences carried on further. For instance St. Paul gives us **pneumatic**, **psychic** and **earthy** men. It is the same. One who has cosmic experience has cosmic experience; one who does not have cosmic experience cannot fit it into his intelligence. It is as simple as that.

The outlook of man, genius and angel-man can hardly be correlated. The genius has an integrated outlook (using **integration** in its mathematical sense) as before man; the angel has an integrated outlook as before the genius. Or putting it in another way, the genius can only **analyze** the angel, he cannot be him; man can only **analyze** the genius, he cannot be him. Or putting it in semantic terms, the intellectual man can make maps, he cannot become territories.

Consequently it can be questioned whether any process of analysis can bring any picture of Aurobindo that is in any way justifiable.

Some analogies will be presented. The Zen Buddhist will ask, “Show me the face you had before your mother and father were.” Mohammed discountenanced the use of portraits. Although it is said that this was done because of his opposition to idolatry, this is only a superficial view. What is the true face of a man? Surely not a glimpse or glance at a particular moment or even at many sittings. This tells so little when the whole personality is considered. Man is a myriad times greater than any derivative-picture.

Aurobindo did not only present a theoretical philosophy of man, overman and superman, he functioned them. He not only proved his teaching, by function, he perfected each of those functions.

His participation in the social, economic and political life of his country is so great that those who delve only into theoretical philosophy cannot grasp it. It is rather unfortunate that while the great enlightened Buddha put so much emphasis upon sorrow, its rise, persistence, cause and eradication, many today seem to delight in turning their backs on all problems of sorrow, pain and suffering as if these were imaginary (especially when they happen to others). Instead of that, Aurobindo extended his investigations into some aspects of life which are rather disagreeable to Baconian N. P.'s.

It was from the standpoint of overmind and overman, i.e. genius that most of his books were written. But it is not always easy to control the genius function. It runs along as if by itself and those who have experienced it readily recognize that at times the whole dictionary, if not the whole encyclopedia seems to be at one's command. Not only that, but the thoughts, which at such times seem so well delineated, come into the consciousness fully clothed with rather astounding verbiage. It is as if a painter were called upon to work with a tremendous number of brushes and pigments. Then as his inspiration came, perhaps unconsciously (from the ego standpoint) he rushed, or was pushed, rapidly into his work until the whole thing was consummated. It must be pointed out here, and even stressed, that the manasic intellectual, with his still retained egocentricity, can select words as he will. The inspired genius finds his words, thoughts, inspirations all tumbling together as if a flood. Those who have not had this flood-experience may dissent. All Baconian N. P.'s will dissent. The dissents will go by even as he dissents against Galileo, Darwin, Pasteur and Crookes.

But Aurobindo always demonstrated supermind. It is one thing to mention, or to stress non-verbal transmission. It is quite another to transmit. To the N. P.'s the darshan will be a show, a spectacle. Perhaps it is. But to the one who knows what man is, who knows what blessing really means, who has felt heart-communication, it is quite different. The darshan is a real activity, an activity in which man becomes a channel for supernal vibrations. These vibrations take on the characteristics, or the essence of life, love, light, bliss and peace.

When Inayat Khan brought Sufism to the West there were few things he criticized. But on one point he was adamant and that was in the judgment of persons who had arisen beyond the human stage of evolution. This same teaching was brought before him right here to San Francisco by Shaku Soyen who gave us the Sutra of Forty-two Sections. In view of that we ought to be very careful, if we have any appreciation of Karma at all, to examine carefully the possibilities of the fulfillment of the stage of supermind before going half blinded into any criticism.

There is one thing that is certain to those who have experienced it, and that is the gradual, or the sudden disappearance of bars between self and self. That is why, even in Christian art, angels are so often pictured as kissing. That is the nearest the artist's concept could bring him. But merging is more than that. It may begin by bringing one's physical body into the presence of the Master, as was done by multitudes of devotees at Aurobindo's ashram. It may continue onward so that heart may commune with heart regardless of any and all circumstances; regardless of the whole universe of samsara.

Although the deva or Superman stage is the highest one we can refer to and still use words of any kind directly, art has given us significant symbols which fit in exactly with the Jungian **archetypes**. The Egyptian goddess, Hathor or Hath-or meant literally "house of light," But in art we find her depicted as a **cow with many breasts**. She is always referred to as a cow and yet her meaning, literally, is quite different. Yet the Egyptians conceptions of the Divine mother are not always poles

apart from those found in India, and, in my opinion (as in those of Gerald Massey), there are still parallels to be investigated.

In the consideration of the meanings of “go” by Sri Aurobindo one must not go too far afield into analysis because while this might be of great psychological value, it fails in the field of integration and the whole spirit of the Sanskrit language is missed. For at the other end of the scale we not only find strange variations in the meanings of terms in the **astika** schools, but even more so in the **nastika** schools, which, while rejecting the Vedas, used the same literary idiom.

It is unfortunate but explicable when there are differences in strictly material interpretations. But when there is a claim to higher wisdom, by the opening of various channels of consciousness through various means, and this leads to disputations, one can but conclude that the realization has been imperfect. Through Purna Yoga this is impossible. This logic, as well as the logics of Fourth Dimensional Mathematics and the corresponding recent logical development of the West, show that the terms “same and different,” “is and is-not,” and all the pairs of opposites lose their validity. They are only valid at certain levels. The word **truth** may remain but the adjective **true**, standing alone or before its counterpart **false**, loses its significance.

I only want to present one other word from the Vedas, one of the first, and one which must be considered some time in detail as Sri Aurobindo has discussed go, and that is rasa. It does not have a single translation into English or any other European Language. It does not function on a single plane but on all planes.

Next the very literary form of the Vedas is that which, by its poetical rendition shows a high plane of consciousness. The very descriptions are more than descriptions. The Hebrew Kabbalah and the Gnostic “**Pistis Sophia**” dissertate upon the meanings of the Psalms at various levels. The literary form of the Psalms and some of the Vedas is the same. Surely the level of consciousness was the same. Surely the enfoldment of each will bring companionate wisdom.

The work of Sri Aurobindo has hardly begun.