

# Being and Becoming-Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara - Maya, Prakriti, Shakti

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## ABSTRACT

According to Sri Aurobindo, the powers and forces at work in the cosmic play of consciousness and the aspects of Brahman-Ishwara-Purusha and Maya-Shakti-Prakriti are not dual but one, manifest in different forms of their existence. The force in Brahman is Maya, the power that is conceptively creative; whereas the force in Purusha, the Soul is Prakriti, a power dynamically executive to its soul. Nature executes in a dynamic way according to the soul vision. Moreover, when the Reality is viewed as Ishwara, the God, the Divine Being, its power becomes Shakti, puissance. And this puissance has the character of both Maya and Nature, conceptively creative and dynamically executive. So this chit-shakti, Consciousness-force of the Reality casts itself in three forms corresponding to the three aspects.

## INTRODUCTION

Sensory knowledge is the base from where most people act and react. When the sensory knowledge is negated then there opens out to man a new category of knowledge. This is the secret or occult knowledge. It is secret and occult because it is outside the purview of the senses.

Sri Aurobindo has entitled the Fourth Canto of the Book One in epic *Savitri* as 'Secret Knowledge'. Through which Aswapati becomes acquainted with that knowledge on plane after plane. This secret or occult knowledge is the way to understand the mystery of human existence and its relation with the spirit, the universal Form and Absolute.

Without having this secret knowledge of powers and forces, nobody can acquire the complete knowledge of the cosmos. It is also the highest knowledge through which Sri Krishna has given Arjuna the secret and occult knowledge described in chapter nine of the Gita, as 'param guhya gyana'-the secret knowledge. It is the ultimate and transcendental knowledge of all Vedic philosophies.

According to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, Existence manifests itself in relation to the universe in three aspects - Brahman (Self), Purusha (Spirit) and Ishwara (God).

The Absolute is indeterminable and unknowable. However, it is identified as Sachchidananda in its quality of the immortal Soul. Sachchidananda has three aspects, namely, Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness) and Anand (Bliss), but these aspects are interrelated and indivisible. The Absolute, though formless and featureless, is recognized as Existence-Consciousness-Force-Bliss. Now the question arises - what is Existence? Who manifests itself in relation to universe in three aspects: Brahman – Purusha – Ishwara?

Existence, *Savitri* reveals, is the omnipresent reality. It is pure, indefinable, infinite and absolute. It is a static Being; but it causes the movements of Becoming. *Isha Upanishad* affirms:

That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads* 64)

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo says that existence is really the substratum of becoming:

The very conception of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose and betrays itself as an activity of some existence; the very idea of energy in action carries with it the idea of energy abstaining from action; and an absolute energy not in action in simply and purely absolute existence (84)

Existence is essentially indeterminate. *Shvetashvatra Upanishad* calls it 'without parts, without activity, tranquil, irreproachable, without blemish' – *niskalam niskriyam shantam nirvadyam niranjanam*. (V 19)

True, existence is indeterminable by any determinants; but it is capable of self determination. The indeterminability of existence is natural and necessary for the creation of infinite determinations. The indeterminate existence alone can manifest myriad determinations because it cannot be identified with them.

Existence has thus two aspects- the indeterminate (Nirguna) and the determinate (Saguna). For Sankara existence is the indeterminate; for Ramanujan it is determinate. But Sri Aurobindo believes that existence is both indeterminate and determinate, Nirguna and Saguna simultaneously.

Existence is said to be Consciousness-Force. Now the problem is: how can pure existence be a force at the same time? Sri Aurobindo, like the Upanishadic seers, believes that force is inherent in existence.

Shiva and kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none the less and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered. (*Life Divine* 92)

The Absolute possesses Force: but It is not subject to Force: It manifests itself as force in both its static and dynamic aspects and at the same time it transcends both the aspects. Here the question arises: what is the nature of force? Is it conscious or unconscious? Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that force is conscious; for the phenomena of consciousness cannot come about from unconscious Force. Unlike the materialists Sri Aurobindo holds that matter itself is the form of Consciousness-Force. The Absolute, *Savitri* reveals, creates the cosmos out of its Consciousness Force:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force  
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush  
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep  
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.  
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
Has entered with his silence into space:  
He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;  
He has built a million figures of his power;  
He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;  
Space is himself and Time is only he. (*Savitri* 67)

As Existence manifests itself in relation to the universe in three aspects, similarly, Consciousness-Force too appears as maya, prakriti and shakti, corresponding respectively to the three aspects of existence. So there are Brahman-Maya, Purusha-Prakriti and Ishwara-Shakti. The Brahman expresses itself as the atman of all existence. Atman is perceived as the individual-universal in each being. Maya is said to be the self-power, atma-shakti of atman. It is only through maya that atman creates itself into many forms.

He whose transcendence rules the pregnant Vasts,

Prescient now dwells in our subliminal depths,  
A luminous individual Power, alone, (67)

Maya, the atma-shakti of the Brahman, is the divine spouse in the vast cosmic game. In this play of hide and seek, He hides himself in each of the million forms, while Nature seeks Him through these very same forms.

A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,  
One came upon the dubious whirling globe  
To hide from her pursuit in force and form. (60)

Purusha is said to be the conscious Being of the Absolute; prakriti is its consciousness-force. Purusha is intimately related to prakriti. In fact, purusha supports prakriti:

His soul, silent, supports the world and her,  
His acts are her commandment's registers. (63)

In references to the play of the Purusha and Prakriti, Sri Aurobindo has portrayed this dynamic relationship of the creator with his creation.

He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;  
To her he abandons all to make her great.  
He hopes in her to find himself anew,  
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace  
To her creative passion's ecstasy. (62)

The Purusha is her blind admirer who looks for love and grace to her. It is the relationship between the creator and his creation. This relationship is similar to that of Krishna and Radha where Krishna forgets himself in his love for Radha.

A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,  
His bliss in her to him is his whole world: (62)

He also witnesses the acts of prakriti and is driven by her commands, whether good or bad.

A witness and student of her joy and dole,  
A partner in her evil and her good,  
He has consented to her passionate ways,  
He is driven by her sweet and dreadful force. (63)

He also enjoys the works of prakriti and becomes what she wants him to be:

He rejoices in her every thought and act

And gives consent to all that she can wish;

Whatever she desires he wills to be: (66)

In the state of ignorance Purusha is always led by the powerful forces of Prakriti. But when he realizes his independent identity, he keeps himself back from the movements of prakriti.

At last he wakes to a memory of Self:

He sees within the face of deity,

The Godhead breaks out through the human mould:

Her highest heights she unmasks and is his mate.

Till then he is a plaything in her game; (65)

Sri Aurobindo's conception of purusha-prakriti differs from that of Sankhya philosophy. The Sankhya philosophy says that purusha and prakriti are two distinct entities, purusha is conscious but inactive, while prakriti is active but unconscious. But Sri Aurobindo thinks that prakriti and purusha are essentially one. True, prakriti is apparently inconscient; but it conceals a secret consciousness. Similarly, purusha seems to be led by prakriti; but in reality, purusha controls prakriti because he is his own prakriti. Even in the state of ignorance and passivity, prakriti acts only when she has the consent of purusha.

The Two who are one are the secret of all power,

The Two who are one are the might and right in things. (63)

Ishwara is recognized as the Lord of Creation. He is both supracosmic as well as intracosmic. He is the divine inhabitant of all the individual beings and the underlying reality of the universe. Shakti is itself the power of Ishwara. Thus, in the first aspect of the Reality, Brahman creates out of His Maya. In the second aspect, Purusha does what Prakriti wants him to do. In these two aspects Reality is not perceived in any definite form. But in the third aspect Reality is overtly seen. There he is the Lord of his Shakti and of all things.

Ishwara is the Divine Purusha, the Supreme Lord, the one who is present in every thing and in every material. Shakti is itself the power of Ishwara, draws all her Power for his work.

He is the substance, he the self of things;

She has forged from him her works of skill and might:

She wraps him in the magic of her moods

And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams. (61)

He is the sole origin and himself the object of all vision, action, knowledge and experience. His relations with the world do not cease with its creation; in fact he constitutes himself as the world,

He is the Maker and the world he made,  
He is the vision and he is the Seer;  
He is himself the actor and the act,  
He is himself the knower and the known,  
He is himself the dreamer and the dream. (61)

The Supreme Reality, the Divine is one. But for the purpose of manifestation, for the wonder-plan of Delight, the one becomes the two.

There are Two who are One and play in many worlds; (61)

*The Life Divine* emphasises the same truth:

Brahman is in this world to represent Itself in the values of Life. Life exists in Brahman in order to discover Brahman in itself. Therefore man's importance in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. To fulfil God in life is man's manhood. He starts from the animal vitality and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective. (43)

Again Sri Aurobindo explains the fact with an analogy:

There can be this simultaneous multiplicity of self-presentation of one Reality, we see that there is no impossibility in the co-existence of a Timeless Eternal and a Time Eternity. It would be the same Eternity viewed by a dual self-awareness and there could be no oppositions between them; it would be a correlation of two powers of the self-awareness of the infinite and eternal Reality, - a power of status and non-manifestation, a power of self-effecting action and movement and manifestation. Their simultaneity, however contradictory and difficult to reconcile it might seem to our finite surface seeing, would be intrinsic and normal to the Maya or eternal self-knowledge and all knowledge of Brahman, the eternal and infinite knowledge and wisdom-power of the Ishwara, the consciousness-force of the self-existents Sachchidananda.

(*Life Divine* 381)

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