NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL MAN

The Evolutionary Aim in Yoga

In the Katha Upanishad there occurs one of those powerful and pregnant phrases, containing a world of meaning in a point of verbal space, with which the Upanishads are thickly sown. Yogo hi prabhavapayayau. For Yoga is the beginning & ending of things. In the Puranas the meaning of the phrase is underlined & developed. By Yoga God made the world, by Yoga He will draw it into Himself in the end. But not only the original creation & final dissolution of the universe, all great changes of things, creations, evolutions, destructions are effected by the essential process of Yoga, tapasya. In this ancient view Yoga presents itself as the effective, perhaps the essential & real executive movement of Nature herself in all her processes. If this is so in the general workings of Nature, if that is to say, a divine Knowledge and a divine Will in things by putting itself into relation with objects is the true cause of all force & effectuality, the same rule should hold good in human activities. It should hold good especially of all conscious & willed processes of psychological discipline,—Yogic systems, as we call them; Yoga can really be nothing but a consummate & self-conscious natural process intended to effect rapidly objects which the ordinary natural movement works out slowly, in the tardy pace of a secular or even millennial evolution.

There is an apparent difference. The aim put before us in Yoga is God; the aim of Nature is to effect supernature; but these two aims are of one piece & intention. God & supernature are only one the real & the other the formal aspect of the one unattainable fulfilment towards which our human march is in its ascent directed. Yoga for man is the upward working of Nature liberated from slow evolution and long relapses and self-conscious in divine or human knowledge.

God is That which is the All and yet exceeds and transcends the All; there is nothing in existence which is not God, but
God is neither the sum of existence nor anything in that sum, except symbolically, in image to His own consciousness. In other words, everything that exists, separately, is a particular symbol and the whole sum of existence is a general symbol which tries to translate the untranslatable existence, God, into the terms of world-consciousness. It is intended to try, it is not intended to succeed; for the moment it succeeds, it ceases to be itself and becomes that untranslatable something from which it started, God. No symbol is intended to express God perfectly, not even the highest; but it is the privilege of the highest symbols to lose in Him their separate definiteness, cease to be symbols and become in consciousness that which is symbolised. Humanity is such a symbol or eidolon of God; we are made, to use the Biblical phrase, in His image; and by that is meant not a formal image, but the image of His being and personality; we are of the essence of His divinity and of the quality of His divinity; we are formed in the mould and bear the stamp of a divine being and a divine knowledge.

In everything that exists phenomenally, or, as I shall prefer to say, going deeper into the nature of things, symbolically, there are two parts of being, thing in itself and symbol, Self and Nature, res (thing that is) and factum (thing that is done or made), immutable being and mutable becoming, that which is supernatural to it and that which is natural. Every state of existence has some force in it which drives it to transcend itself. Matter moves towards becoming life, Life travails towards becoming Mind, Mind aspires towards becoming ideal Truth, Truth rises towards becoming divine and infinite Spirit. The reason is that every symbol, being a partial expression of God, reaches out to and seeks to become its own entire reality; it aspires to become its real self by transcending its apparent self. Thing that is made, is attracted towards thing that is, becoming towards being, the natural towards the supernatural, symbol towards thing-in-itself, Nature towards God.

The upward movement is, then, the means towards self-fulfilment in this world; but it is not imperative on all objects. For there are three conditions for all changeable existences, the
upward ascension, the arrested status and the downward lapse. Nature in its lower states moves upward indeed in the mass, but seeks the final salvation for only a limited number of its individuals. It is not every form of matter that organises life although every form of matter teems with the spirit of life and is full of its urgent demand for release & self-manifestation. Not every form of life organises mind, although in all forms of life mind is there, insistent, seeking for its escape and self-expression. Nor is every mental being fitted to organise the life of ideal truth, although in every mental being, in dog & ape & worm no less than in man, the imprisoned spirit of truth & knowledge seeks for its escape and self-expression. Nature in each realised state of her building seeks first to assure the natural existence of her creatures in that state; only after this primary aim is accomplished does she seek through the best fitted of them to escape from her works, to break down what she has built and arrive at something beyond. It is not till she reaches man that she arrives at a type of being of which every individual is essentially capable of realising not only the natural but the supernatural within it; and even this is true with modifications, with qualifications. But of this it will be better to speak at greater length in another connection.

Nevertheless, it remains true that the upward movement is the master movement of Nature; arrested status is a lower fulfilment, & if perfect, a transient perfection. It is a perfection in the realms of struggle and in the style of passing forms, a fulfilment in the kingdoms of Ashanaya Mrityu, Hunger who is death, Hunger that creates & feeds upon its creations; the upward movement is that which leads up through death to immortality & realises in this earth of the body the blissful and luminous kingdom of heaven; the downward lapse is destruction, Hell, a great perdition, mahati vinashtih. These are the three gatis or final states of becoming indicated in the Gita, uttama, madhyama & adhama, highest, middle and lowest, offered to the choice of humanity. It is for each individual of us to choose. For as we choose, God shall fulfil Himsel in us, towards a transient human satisfaction, a divine perfection or a decomposition of our humanity into the fruitful waste-matter of Nature.
Every nature, then, is a step towards some super-nature, —
towards something natural to itself, but supernatural to that
which is below. Life is supernatural to Matter, Mind super-
natural to Life, Ideal Being supernatural to Mind, the Infinite
Spirit supernatural to ideal being. We must, therefore, accept
the supernatural as our goal; for the tendency of our nature to
the super-nature just above it is a command of the World Power
to be obeyed and not rebelled against & distrusted. It is here
that Faith has its importance & Religion, when uncorrupted,
its incalculable utility; for our natural mind seeks to dwell in
its nature & is sceptical of supernature. Faith & religion were
provisions of the All Wise Energy to accustom the natural &
merely mental man to the promptings of the ideal soul in him
which seeks even now to escape out of twilight into light, out
of groping into truth, out of the senses & reasoning into vision
& direct experience. The upward tendency is imposed on us &
we cannot permanently resist it; at some time or another God
will lay his hands on us and force us up that steep incline so
difficult to our unregenerate treading. For as surely as the animal
develops towards humanity & in its most flexible types attains
a kind of humanity, as surely as the ape and the ant having once
appeared, man was bound to follow, so surely man develops
towards godhead & in his more capable types approaches nearer
& nearer towards godhead, attains a kind of deity, & so surely
the genius & the saint having appeared man is bound to develop
in himself & out of himself the superman, the siddha purusha.
For this conclusion no prophetic power or revelation is needed;
it is the inevitable corollary from the previous demonstrations
worked out for us in the vast laboratory of Nature.

We have to transcend Nature, to become super-Nature, but
it follows from what I have said that it is by taking advantage of
something still imprisoned in Nature itself, by following some
line which Nature is trying to open to us that we ought to
proceed. By yielding to our ordinary nature we fall away both
from Nature itself and from God; by transcending Nature we
at once satisfy her strongest impulse, fulfil all her possibilities
and rise towards God. The human first touches the divine and
then becomes the divine. But there are those who seek to kill Nature in order to become the Self. Shall we follow them? No, however great & lofty be their path, however awful & dazzling their aspiration, because it is not God’s intention in humanity & therefore not our proper dharma. Let any say, if he will, that we have made the lower choice. We answer in the language of the Gita, Sreyan swadharmo viguno, Better is the law of our own being though inferior, too perilous the superior law of another’s being. To obey God’s will in us, is certainly more blissful, perhaps even more divine than to rise to the austere heights of the Adwaitin & the ineffable self-extinction in an indefinable Existence. For us the embrace of Krishna is enough and the glory of the all-puissant bosom of Kali. We have to transcend & possess Nature, not to kill her.

In any case, whatever may be the choice for exceptional individuals, it is a general path of supreme attainment for humanity that we are seeking,—for I am not proposing to you in Yoga an individual path unconcerned with the rest of mankind,—and here there can be no doubt or hesitation. Neither the exaggerations of spirituality nor the exaggerations of materialism are our true path. Every general movement of our humanity which seeks to deny Nature, however religious, lofty or austere, of whatever dazzling purity or ethereality, has been & will always be doomed to failure, sick disappointment, disillusionment or perversion, because it is in its nature for the mass of humanity a transient impulse of exaggeration, because it contradicts God’s condition for us who set Nature there as an indispensable term for His self-fulfilment in the universe and ourselves as the supreme instruments & helpers on this earth of that divine self-fulfilment. Every movement of humanity which bids us be satisfied with our ordinary Nature, dwell upon the earth, cease to aspire to the empyrean within us and choose rather to live like the animals looking to our mortal future before us & downwards at the earth we till, not upwards to God & our ungrasped perfection, has been & will always be doomed to weariness, petrifaction & cessation or to a quick & violent supernaturalistic reaction, because this also is for the mass of men a transient impulse
of exaggeration & because it contradicts God’s intention in us who has entered in and dwells secret in our Nature compelling us towards Him by an obscure, instinctive & overmastering attraction. Materialistic movements are more unnatural and abnormal than ascetic and negative religions & philosophies; for these lead us upward at least, though they go too furiously fast & far for our humanity, but the materialist under the pretence of bringing us back to Nature, takes us away from her entirely. He forgets or does not see that Nature is only phenomenally Nature, but in reality she is God. The divine element in her is that which she most purely & really is; the rest is only term and condition, process and stage in her whole progressively developed revelation of the secret divinity. He forgets too that Nature is evolving not evolved & what we are now can never be the term of what we shall be hereafter. The supernatural must be by the very logic of things the end & goal of her movement.

Therefore, not to be ensnared, emmeshed and bound by Nature, and not, on the other hand, to be furious with her & destroy her, is the first thing we must learn if we are to be complete Yogins and proceed surely towards our divine perfection. All beings, even the sages, follow after their nature and what shall coercion and torture of it, avail them? Prakritim yanti bhutani, nigrahah kim karishyati? And it is all so useless! Do you feel yourself bound by her and pant for release? In her hand alone is the key which shall unlock your fetters. Does she stand between you & the Lord? She is Sita; pray to her, she will stand aside & show Him to you; but presume not to separate Sita & Rama, to cast her out into some distant Lanca under the guard of giant self-tortures so that you may have Rama to yourself in Ayodhya. Wrestle with Kali, if you will, she loves a good wrestler; but wrestle not with her unlovingly, or in mere disgust & hate; for her displeasure is terrible and though she loves the Asuras, she destroys them. Rather go through her & under her protection, go with a right understanding of her and with a true & unfaltering Will; she will lead you on with whatever circlings, yet surely & in the wisest way, to the All-Blissful Personality & the Ineffable Presence. Nature is the Power of God Himself,
leading these multitudes of beings, through the night & the
desert & the tracts of the foeman to their secret & promised
heritage.

Supernature, then, is in every way our aim in Yoga; being
still natural to the world, to transcend Nature internally so that
both internally and externally we may possess and enjoy her
as free & lord, swarat and samrat; being still the symbol in
a world of symbol-beings, to reach through it to that which is
symbolised, to realise the symbol; being still a figure of humanity,
a man among men, a living body among living bodies, manus,
mental beings housed in that living matter among other embod-
ied mental beings; being & remaining in our outward parts all
this that we are apparently, yet to exceed it and become in the
body what we are really in the secret self, — God, spirit, supreme
& infinite being, pure Bliss of divine joy, pure Force of divine
action, pure Light of divine knowledge. Our whole apparent life
has only a symbolic value & is good & necessary as a becoming;
but all becoming has being for its goal & fulfilment & God is
the only being. To become divine in the nature of the world and
in the symbol of humanity is the perfection for which we were
created.