

Consciousness as Energy

BY NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

A live wire—through which an electric current, say of several thousand volts, is passing—looks quite innocent, motionless, inactive, almost inert. The appearance, needless to say, is deceptive. Even so the *still life* of a Yogin. Action does not consist merely in mechanical motion visible to the eye: intra-atomic movements that are subtle, invisible, hard to detect even by the most sensitive instruments, possess a tremendous potency, even to unimaginable degrees. Likewise in man, the extent of muscular flexions does not give the measure or potential of his activity. One cannot say that the first line infantryman who rushes and charges, shoots, bayonets, kills and is killed is more active and dynamic than the general who sits quiet behind in a cabin and merely sends out orders. Vivekananda wandered about the whole of India, crossed the seas, traversed continents, undertook whirlwind campaigns—talking, debating, lecturing: it was a life superbly rich in muscular movements. By his side, Ramakrishna would appear quite tame—inactive, “introvert”: fewer physical displacements or muscular exercises marked his life. And yet, ask anyone who is in touch with the inner life of these great souls, he will tell you, Vivekananda is only a spark from the mighty and concentrated Energy that Ramakrishna was.

What is this spiritual or Yogic Energy? Ordinary people, people with a modern mind would concede at the most that there are two kinds of activity: (1) real activity—physical action, work, labour with muscle and nerve, and (2) passive activity, activity of mind and thought. According to the pragmatic standard especial, if not entire, importance is given to the first category; the other category, “sicklied o’er with a pale cast of thought”, is held at a discount. The *thoughtful* people are philosophers at the most, they are ineffectual angels in this workaday world of ours. We need upon earth people of a sterner stuff, dynamic people who are not thought-bound, but know how to apply and execute their ideas, whatever that may be. Lenin was great, not because he had revolutionary ideas, but because he gave a muscular frame to them. Such people alone are the pragmatic, dynamic, useful category of humanity. The others are, according to the more radical leftist view, merely parasitic, and, according to a more generous liberal

view, chiefly decorative elements in human society. Mind-energy can draw dream pictures, beautiful perhaps, but inane; it is only muscular energy that gives a living and material body—a local habitation and name—to what otherwise would be airy nothing.

Energy, however, is not merely either muscular (physical) or cerebral. There are energies subtler than thought and yet more dynamic than the muscle (or the electric pile). One such, for example, is vital energy, although orthodox bio-chemists do not believe in any kind of vitalism that is something more than mere physico-chemical reaction. Indeed this is the energy that counts in life; for it is this that brings about what we call success in the world. A man with push and go, as it is termed, is nothing but a person with abundant vital energy. But even of this energy there are gradations. It can be deep, controlled, organised or it can be hectic, effusive, confused: the latter kind expresses and spends itself often in mere external, nervous and muscular movements. Those, however, who are known as great men of action are precisely they who are endowed with life energy of the first kind.

The Yogi—the Hatha Yogi, the Raja Yogi, the Tantrik—seeks consciously to master this life energy, to possess and use it as he wills. The Yogi, the true Yogi aims at a higher quality, a deeper potentiality of the life energy: it may be called the Inner Life Energy. This inner life energy is in a line with, is one with the universal life energy; therefore it is said when one possesses and controls this power one has command over the universal power. All other energies, visible, tangible, concretised and canalised are particular formations and embodiments of this mother energy. Even the most physical and material energies—mechanical, electrical, nervous, etc.—are all derivatives and lesser potentials of this fount and origin. The mastery of the inner vital energy is the whole secret of what is known as occultism, even magic, black or white, spell and other allied powers or miracles. The eight *siddhis* well-known to the Yogis are the natural results of this mastery. With such a mastery the Yogi controls and guides his own destiny; he can also in the same way control and guide the destiny of others, even of peoples and humanity at large. That is the deeper meaning the great phrase of the Gita—*lokasangraha*—carries. Indeed, great souls are precisely they who move with the upward current of Nature, in and through whom Nature works out vast changes, prepares the steps of evolution in the world and humanity.

But what again is this universal vital energy? This also is an instrument, not the ultimate agent. After all, vital energy is blind by itself; it moves instinctively or intuitively, as Bergson would say, it

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does not know consciously beforehand the next step it is going to take. Consciousness then is the secret. This is "the power behind the throne", it is this to which the Upanishad refers in its analysis of the ultimate dynamics of things as the life of Life, *Prānasya prānah*.

It is the aim of all Yoga—spiritual discipline,—finally to arrive at this consciousness, this supreme reality which is behind all existence, which is the source and the substance of all. It is in this Consciousness that the whole creation is rolled up and it is from this that it is rolled out. Only there are some paths of spiritual discipline that prefer and follow the movement of in-rolling and others that seek the one of out-rolling: the former is the path of *nivritti*, the latter that of *pravritti*.

Thus consciousness is not merely a status of being, but also a force of becoming. All that is to take form and be active, whether in the grossest, the material mode or in the most subtle, the ideative mode is originally a seed, a stress, a point of concentration of this consciousness. The Yogi becomes potentially all-powerful, because he is one with the All-Power, the Mother Consciousness. The perfect spiritual man not merely dwells with or close to the Divine (*sālokya*), he is not merely made in the image of the Divine (*sārūpya*) and again he is not merely unified and one with the Divine (*sāyujya*), but what is most marvellous, he has the same nature, that is to say, he has the same powers and capacities as the Divine (*sādharmya*).

The dynamic becoming, becoming a power and personality of the omnipotent Divine is a secret well-known to the Yogis and mystics. Only it has not been worked out in all its implications, not given the full value and importance rightfully due to it. The reason is that although the principle was discovered and admitted the proper key had not been found, that could release and manipulate the Energy at its highest potential and largest amplitude. Because the major tendency in the spiritual man till now has been rather to follow the path of *nivritti* than the path of *pravritti*, this latter path being more or less identified with the path of Ignorance. But there is a higher line of *pravritti* which means the manifestation of the Divine, not merely the expression of the inferior Nature.

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The force of consciousness is not simply the force an idea or thought may have. The distinction between the two is not usually understood. In reality, however, thought or idea is a form of energy-action in the mind and mind is only one field or grade—not the most

dynamic nor direct or immediate—among many for the play of consciousness, as I have already said. Mind energy, Life energy, physical or material energy are various forms and stages in the expression of consciousness-energy (Chit-Tapas). The nature and function of consciousness-energy we may elucidate and understand in another way, by following a different line of its *modus vivendi*.

Consciousness has a fourfold potential. The first is the normal consciousness, which is predominantly mental; it is the sphere comprising movements of which man is usually and habitually aware. It is what the Upanishad names *jāgrat* or *jāgaritasthāna* and characterises as *bahihprajna*: it is the waking state and has cognition only of external things. In other words, the consciousness here is wholly objectivised, externalised—“extravert”: it is also a strongly individualised formation, the consciousness is hedged in, isolated and contoured by a protective ring, as it were, of a characteristically separative personality; it is a surface formation, a web made out of day to day sensations and thoughts, perceptions and memories, impressions and associations. It is a system of outward actions and reactions against or in the midst of one’s actual environment. The second potential is that of the Inner Consciousness: its characteristic is that the consciousness here is no longer trenchantly separative and individual, narrowly and rigidly egoistic. It feels and sees itself as part of or one with the world consciousness. It looks upon its individuality as only a wave of the universal movement. It is also sometimes called the subliminal consciousness; for it plays below or behind the normal surface range of consciousness. It is made up of the residuary powers of the normal consciousness, the abiding vibrations and stresses that settle down and remain in the background and are not immediately required or utilised for life purposes: also it contacts directly energies and movements that well out of the universal life. The phenomena of clairvoyance and clairaudience, the knowledge of the past and the future and of other worlds and persons and beings, certain more dynamic movements such as distant influence and guidance and controlling without any external means, well-known in all yogic disciplines, are various manifestations of the power of this Inner Consciousness. But there is not only an outward and an inner consciousness; there is also a deeper or nether consciousness. This is the great field that has been and is being explored by modern psychologists. It is called the subconscious, sometimes also the unconscious: but really it should be named the inconscient, for it is not altogether devoid of consciousness, but is conscious in its own way—the consciousness is involved or lost within itself or lies buried. It comprises those movements and impulsions, inclinations and disposi-

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tions that have no rational basis, on the contrary, have an irrational basis; they are not acquired or developed by the individual in its normal course of life experience, they are ingrained, lie imbedded in man's nature and are native to his original biological and physical make-up. As the human embryo recapitulates in the womb the whole history of man's animal evolution, even so the normal man, even the most civilised and apparently the farthest from his ancient moorings and sources, enshrines in his cells, in a miraculously living manner, the memory of vast geological epochs, the great struggles and convulsions through which earth and its inhabitants have passed, the basic urges of the crude life force, its hopes, fears, desires, hungers that constitute the rudimental and aboriginal consciousness, the atavism that links the man of today not only to his primitive ancestry, but even to the plant world—even perhaps to the mineral world—out of which his body cells have issued and evolved. Legends and fairy tales, mythologies and fables are a rationalised pattern and picture of the vibrations and urges that moved the original consciousness. It was a collective—a racial—and an aboriginal consciousness. The same lies *chromosomic*, one can almost say, in the constitution of the individual man of today. This region of the unconscious (or the inconscient) is a veritable field of force: it lies at the root of all surface dynamisms. The surface consciousness, *jāgrat*, is a very small portion of the whole, it is only the tip of the pyramid or an iceberg, the major portion lies submerged beyond our normal view. In reflex movements, in sudden unthinking outbursts in dreams and daydreams, this undercurrent is silhouetted and made visible and recognisable. Even otherwise they exercise a profound influence upon all our conscious movements. This underground consciousness is the repository of the most dark and unenlightened elements that grew and flourished in the slime of man's original habitat. They are small, ugly, violent, anti-social, chaotic forces, their names are cruelty, lust, hunger, blind selfishness. Nowhere else than in this domain can the great Upanishadic truth find its fullest application—Hunger that is Death.

But this is the seamy side of Nature, there is also a sunny side. If there is a nadir, there must be a corresponding zenith. In the Vedic image, if man is born of the Dark Mother, he is also a child of the White Mother (*krishnā* and *swetī*). Or again, if earth is our mother, the Heaven is our father—*dyaus me pitā mātā prithivīrīyam*. In other words, consciousness extends not in depth alone, but in height also—it is vertically extended, infinite both ways. As there is a subconscousness, or unconsciousness so also there is at the other end superconscousness.

Now this superconscousness is the true origin of creation,

although the apparent and objective creation starts with and is based upon Unconsciousness. All norms and archetypes belong to the superconsciousness; for the sake of material creation they are thrown down or cast as seed into the Unconscious and in this process they undergo a change, a deformation and aberration. All the major themes of dream myths and prehistoric legends which the psychologists claim to have found imbedded in man's subconscious consciousness are in fact echoes and mirages of great spiritual—superconscient—realities reflected here below. The theme of the Hero, of the Dual Mother (Dark and Fair), of Creation and Sacrifice—these are, according to Jung,—dramatisations of some fundamental movements and urges in the dark subconscious nature. Jung however throws a luminous suggestion in characterising the nature of this vast complex. The general sense, Jung says, is that of a movement forward, of a difficult journey, of a pull backward and downward, of yawning abysses that call, of a light that beckons. It is an effort, a travail of what lies imbedded and suppressed to come out into the open, into the normal consciousness and thus release an unhealthy tension, restore a balance in the individual's system. Modern psychology lays great stress upon the integration of personality. Most of the ills that human nature suffers from, they say, are due to this division or schism in it, a suppressed subconsciousness and an expressed consciousness seeking to express a negation of that subconsciousness. Modern psychology teaches that one should dive into the nether regions and face squarely whatever elements are there, help these to follow their natural bent to come up and see the light of the day. Only thus there can be established a unitary movement, an even consistency and an equilibrium throughout the entire consciousness and being.

So far so good. But two things are to be taken note of. First of all, the resolution of the normal conflict in man's consciousness, the integration of his personality is not wholly practicable within the scope of the present nature and the field of the actual forces at play. That can give only a shadow of the true resolution and integration. A conscious envisaging of the conflicting forces, a calm survey of the submerged or side-tracked "*libidos*" in their true nature, a voluntary acceptance of these dark elements as a part of normal human nature, does not automatically make for their sublimation and purification or transformation. The thing is possible only through another force and on another level, by the intervention and interfusion precisely of the superconsciousness. And here comes the second point to note. For it is this superconsciousness towards which all the strife and struggle of the under-consciousness are turned and directed. The yearning and urge in the subconsciousness to move forward, to escape

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outside into the light does not refer merely to the march towards normal awareness and consciousness: it has a deeper direction and a higher aim—it seeks that of which it is an aberration and a deformation, the very origin and source, the height from which it fell.

This superconsciousness has a special mode of its quintessential energy which is omnipotent in action, immediate in effectivity. It is pure as the purest incandescent solar light and embodies the concentrated force of consciousness. It is the original creative vibration of the absolute or supreme Being. Sri Aurobindo calls this supreme form of superconsciousness-energy the Supermind. There are of course other layers and strata of superconsciousness leading up to the supermind which are of various potentials and embody different degrees of spiritual power and consciousness.

We have spoken of the Inner Consciousness. But there is also, we must now point out, an Inmost Consciousness. As the Superconsciousness is a consciousness-energy in height, the Inmost Consciousness is a consciousness-energy in depth, the deepest depth, beyond or behind the Inner Consciousness. If we wish to put it geometrically we can say, the vertical section of consciousness represents the line from the superconsciousness to the subconscious or *vice versa*; the horizontal section represents the normal waking state of consciousness; and there is a transverse section leading from the surface first to the Inner and finally to the Inmost. This inmost consciousness—the consciousness most profound and secreted in the cave of the heart, *guhāhitam gahbhareshtham*, is the consciousness of the soul, the Psychic Being, as Sri Aurobindo calls it: it is the immortal in the mortal. It is, as has often been described, the nucleus round which is crystallised and organised the triple nature of man consisting of his mind and life and body, the centre of dynamic energy that secretly vivifies them, gradually purifies and transforms them into higher functions and embodiments of consciousness. As a matter of fact, it is this inmost consciousness that serves as the link, at least as the most powerful link, between the higher and lower forms of consciousness, between the Superconscious and the Subconscious or Inconscious. It takes up within itself all the elements of consciousness that the past in its evolutionary career from the very lowest and basic levels has acquired and elaborated, and by its inherent pressure and secret gestation delivers what was crude and base and unformed as the purest luminous noble substance of the perfectly organised superconscious reality. Indeed that is the mystic alchemy which the philosophers experimented in in the Middle Ages. In this context, the Inner Consciousness, we may note, serves as a medium through which the action of the Inmost (as well as that of the Uppermost) takes place.

We can picture the whole phenomenon in another way and say in the devotional language of the Mystics that the Inmost Consciousness is the Divine Child, the Superconscious is the Divine Father and the Inferior Consciousness is the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*): the Inner and the Outer Consciousness are the field of play and the instrument of action as well of this Divine Trinity.

Man we thus see is an infinitely composite being. We have referred to the four or five major chords in him, but each one has again innumerable gradations of vibration. Man is a bundle or dynamo of energy and this energy is nothing but the force of consciousness. To different modes or potentials of this energy different names are given. And what makes the thing still more complex is that all these elements exist simultaneously and act simultaneously, although in various degrees and stresses. They act upon each other, and severally and collectively impress upon the nature and character of the individual being and mould and direct his physical status and pragmatic life. A man can however take consciously a definite position and status, identify himself with a particular form and force of consciousness and build his being and life in the truth and rhythm of that consciousness. Naturally the limits and the limitation of that consciousness mark also the limits and limitation of the disposition he can effect in his life. When it is said that the spiritual force is not effective on the physical plane in mundane affairs—Buddha, it is said for example, has not been able to rid the earth of age, disease and death (although it was not Buddha's intention to do so, his purpose was to show a way of escape, of bypassing the ills of life, and in that he wholly succeeded)—it only means that the right mode or potential of spiritual energy has not been found; for that matter even the mightiest mundane forces are not sovereignly effective in mundane affairs, otherwise the Nazi-Force would have been ruling the world today.

Still it must be remembered that all these apparently diverse layers and degrees of being or consciousness or energy form essentially one indivisible unity and identity. What is called the highest and what is called the lowest are not in reality absolutely disparate and incommensurable entities: everywhere it is the highest that lies secreted and reigns supreme. The lowest is the highest itself seen from the reverse side, as it were: the norms and typical truths that obtain in the superconsciousness are also the very guiding formulas and principles in the secret heart of the Inconscience too, only they appear externally as deformations and caricatures of their true reality. But even here we can tap and release the full force of a superconscious energy. A particle of dead matter, we know today, is a mass of stilled

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energy, electrical and radiant in nature; even so an apparently
inconscient entity is a packet of Superconsciousness in its highest
potential of energy. The secret of releasing this atomic energy of the
Spirit is found in the Science of Yoga. +