

THE SUFFERING GOD ?

All Religions are agreed that Reality or God is in essence spiritually governed, that is to say, the nature of God is Love. By love it is usually held to mean that which is sympathetic to the human beings in general and to votaries in particular. There can be no antipathy to any creature in the nature of the Reality or God and therefore God cannot and indeed does not inflict injuries on His creatures. Not only that, His Love is not merely a negative fact, but the positive fact about it is this that He redeems those who are fallen, or have sinned and fallen. The human being turns to its creator in order to be saved. It prays to Him and serves Him in all the ways that it knows and in turn it expect His help and succors. The creature suffers and the creator is the redeemer from its suffering. All this means also that the creator can save and redeem , help and lead. This is an article of faith. If God be finite and limited, He may grieve over the failures and sorrows of others without being able to rescue them or relieve them or redeem them. This would be the quintessence of Tragedy. If God be infinite and omnipotent and illimitable , there is no reason whatsoever for the occurrence or continuance of grief for He could, if so minded, relieve the distress of the creatures He had created. Indeed there is no need for the creatures to suffer at all if he created properly or wisely. It would be therefore a love of self tragedy that must have led to this creation of creatures doomed to suffer and to sin !

Thus the capital fact about these two views will lead to the denial of omniscient Omnipotence on the one hand and on the other the affirmation of a kind of masochistico-sadistic delight in tragedy on the part of God. Now theism cannot accept either of these schools of thought though it seeks to reconcile God's Love with His wisdom. Some Christian theologians say that the dualism is one between the God of Love and the God of Wrath. It is stated that the love of God is seen when He acts as the helper towards peace and understanding of the creatures and that the wrath of God is seen when He punishes the traducers of the Law of Justice of God. But this takes into account only the law and the love and does not see that law my itself be a form of Love and the restoration of law may involve a recovery of love that establishes

the real and true understanding of the status of the creature in the scheme of Divine Harmony. The Hindu view has been to shew that the maintenance of Order or law or the right relationship between things is one of the most important functions of the Divine, and Divine intervention in the scheme of existence has this purpose as its foremost aim. Further, God's love is not to be measured by human criteria, though this by no means is to be excluded.

We know that Love is most fully displayed when one gives up oneself completely for the well-being of another. This passion for self-offering or sacrifice is the test of love. It is possible only when the offerer of oneself is capable of infinite sympathy with the suffering of the one for whom one is offering oneself. Thus the consciousness, of suffering. This means that when I love another not only do I suffer as the other does but also that I am prepared to take up the suffering on myself in his stead. He is thus relieved of his suffering. This is said to be testified by the great advent of God, Jesus the Christ. This maximum price of love or rather the completest exemplification of the law of self sacrifice or love for another or others, in its universal appeal, is the capacity take upon oneself the entire suffering of others and release them from the suffering that is their natural portion and desert.

Thus the ideal presented by the teaching of Jesus is to reveal that God indeed suffers not only at the sufferings of His creatures but also suffers for their sake in order to shew them that He is not at all the God of wrath that men previous to His incarnation held but the God of Love, the lord of the suffering people with whom and for whom He suffered Himself to be crucified. Thus man's callousness and unwillingness to understand the inner nature of God as Love forced God to reveal His infinite compassion to His creatures by an actual crucifixion. God died at the hands of man so that man may understand the infinite mercy and love of God and thus offer himself to Him inwardly and wholly and thus desire Him alone.

The above fact reveals that in the most critical epochs of man's civilization which usually culminate in wars of mutual aggression, when man swerves from his loyalty to

normal ideals, and begins to entertain doubts about God's mercy and love, he creates for himself a view that truly God is Love and suffers for man and that His tears are as plentiful as his own. This may give satisfaction to the condolence-minded religious man, but it does not promise liberation from sorrows. Tragedy cannot be the truth of the spirit, despite the affirmations of the Christian theologian like Nicolas Berdyaev, who writes that "History is a drama which has its act and logical development, its denouement and catharsis – i.e. history is tragedy". (M.H. p.28) "History and its conception are possible only when the world process is conceived as a catastrophic one. The catastrophic interpretation of history postulates a central fact, that of divine revelation by which the interior becomes the exterior and the spirit incarnates". (*Meaning of History p.34*).

This catastrophic view of history as a view postulates further "that the creation of the world by God the father is a movement of the deepest mystery in the relation between God the Father and God the son. The revelation of the divine mystery in the depths of the Divine and spiritual life of the inner passionate divine thirst and longing for the other self, the other self which may be the object of a great and infinite love on the part of God and that infinite thirst for reciprocity and love on the part of the other self, determines for the deep Christian consciousness the very principle of movement and process. This inner tragedy of the love felt by God for his other self and its longing for reciprocal love constitutes that very mystery of the divine life which is associated with the creation of the world and of man". (*Meaning of History pp. 48 –9*)

The movement of history of as the realization of love between the natures of the Divine as Love and as Creator, in so far as it is a fundamental revelation of the Divine Nature need not involve this tragic situation. Nor can the relationship between the two vyuhas of the Divine, the Supreme Transcendent All-Perfect and the Immanent incarnation of that self-same Being in the nexus of His creatures verily involve a sundering of the eternal unity between them so as to involve the tragic feeling of suffering. The archetype of suffering may indeed be Christ, but not all the incarnations

of the Divine typify this. Nor can it be said that tragedy is the essence of History, though it does play an important part in the lives of men.

The value of the experience of god's suffering for our sake is inestimable truly and may help the surrender of man to him, but in the ultimate analysis the goal of man is something that is different, and that is the fullest attainment of the beatific status in God and for fullest attainment of the beatific status in God and for God. Delight is the aim and end, and it is this that man seeks in God, for God is delight. It would not be out of place to state that with the Alvars in South Indian Mysticism as also in the cult of the Pancaratra, the deity has been shown to be descending into the scheme of things or history not indeed or only for a catastrophic revelation of Himself but also for a cathartic and evolutionary purpose, redeeming men by regenerating them in the life of the Divine, who is Himself the Transcendent, immanent, personal and historical Person, all rolled into one. The holy trinity is an eternal typical structure or integral Unity revealing the Transcendent Spirit-immanent self-Redeeming-Historical Personality. The expression of these three faces of the One Divine is possible and understandable only when God as Creator, Love and Spirit is understood and entered into through total surrender.

Historically efficacy of the Divine may not always mean the immediate destruction of the forces of evil; it may be that this descent of the Divine Personality (as son) into the terrestrial scheme may foundationally involve an inner transformation of the lives and character of the people and only indirectly influence the outer order of things of social life and government; it may be true also that men whose eyes are glued to the outer and the external ordering of the things, do not and cannot perceive as if by a miracle the inner changes in their own natures by the miracle of descent of God; this may be a sign of the outer defeat of God immediately considered, but a triumph of the Godhead in the progress of history which is but the working out of the inner in terms of the outer order, of that which is beyond space and time in terms of space and time and personalities of men. This is precisely how we have to remember that significant nature of the Divine in His eternal triunity or quintiplicity or septicity.

Divine Evolutionism of Śrī Aurobindo points out that the One Divine is not a Suffering God but a Perfect Personality integrally manifest on all planes of Being, historical and supra-historical ; He is above all evolution and yet the entire evolution is a grand manifestation of His ever present love of the creation which is seeking its unity in Him.

This is His Delight in existence which rings its change in Being and in Non-Being and Becoming. The processes of becoming are the descents or His eternal manyness in supreme integral oneness or unity not only as individual souls but also as avatar who is the supraconscient Descent, aware spramentally of the integral oneness of Himself with the all His transcendence and immanence and creatorship and indwellingness in all and the Goal of all creatures of the many. Thus it becomes possible to arrive at that supreme status on the part of the other souls who are not aware of their integral unity with Godhead, to perceive that in the life and activities of the avatar. The suffering of man or the pain in the many is neither the truth about the creation nor its meaning ; spirit is not enthroned in matter by the deity so that one may understand how spirit suffers crucifixion in matter, but that one may understand how matter is a possible tenement of the Divine Himself-that is what the miracles of Christ and other great avatars and seers and prophets of God have shown. It is this that is the truth of the spiritual evolution ; not the suffering God nor the suffering man. Suffering is the sign, the external sign of the historical juncture as it is at present ; and God's incarnation as Son or as avatar or Teacher is not merely or even primarily to reveal His condescending Grace and Love of man, but also to exalt and elevate and transform the human being from his lowly and suffering status and to which his consciousness constantly calls him back and society condemns him to the rediscovered Divine within. For by the light of this supreme indwelling Seer (Ekarsi) who is the indwelling truth of all creatures also, the illumined consciousness of man finds all the solace and integral unity with all creation. Man divinised by this indwelling seer-consciousness , seer-will, and delight becomes verily a ocean of delight that nothing can disturb.

The finite God, the indefinite God, the suffering God or Neronic God are all postulations of the human mind which is baffled by the supreme mystery of the Multi-manifestational Integral Deity. Delight is the essence of the movement, and delight is the essence of the ultimate integral destiny. Man and God, the Many and the One, play with the terms of Love, and suffering is a term not the whole truth of this Love.]

Wherefore he selected or made such a material when he had all infinite possibility to choose from? Because of his divine Idea which saw before it not only beauty and sweetness and purity, but also force and will and greatness. Despise not force, nor hate it for the ugliness of some of its faces, nor think that love only is God. All perfect perfection must have something in it of the stuff of the hero and even of the Titan. But the greatest force is born out of the greatest difficulty. ----- (Thought and Glimpses --- Śrī Aurobindo)