

Sri Aurobindo and J.S. Bach

Zackaria Moursi — a personal experience

More than half a century ago, I left Egypt, at the age of twenty-one, to pursue graduate studies in Germany. The memoirs of how Europe impacted me I have included in an autobiographical short story titled “Preparing for the Winter Journey.”¹ Today, I reuse a small part of these memoirs as a backdrop for the following experience:

Soon after my arrival in Germany, while leisurely turning the dial of my radio, I discovered Western classical music. Immediately a whole new world opened for me. Music soon became the haven in which I took shelter at the end of days filled with technical and mental work. As a student, I had the good fortune of renting a room in an apartment owned by a lady of some culture, who encouraged me to buy a piano and allowed me to place it and practice in her living room. She introduced me to a pianist of some renown who agreed to teach me from scratch. He did not believe in the efficacy of finger exercises, and started me immediately on the C-major Two-part Invention of Bach. This short invention, my first piece ever, I practiced for hours every day over seven months without ever tiring of it. It was the beginning of an “addiction” to Bach whose music had triggered a first psychic opening in me.

At about the same time, I came across the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (the story of how these writings have impacted me I have published under the title “The Encounter.”²) I was extremely mentally lopsided in those days and, for a long time, I had to inch my way patiently and laboriously into the world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother until they ultimately became the center and the circumference of my life. Amazingly, my entry in the world of music happened, in contrast, almost instantly, though I cannot claim any inborn musical talents..

Since these early days, half a century ago, to this day, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been my “staff of life,” while Bach has remained my main emotional-vital support. Strangely, during all this time, I took this happy arrangement for granted and was not aware of any special link between these great masters filling my life. Recently, one such link dawned on me through a remark made by the French philosopher G. Deleuze³ in a talk he gave in 1978 titled “What is the Creative Act?”⁴ Following are some excerpts from this talk:

“...there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance... What is this mysterious relationship between a work of art and an act of resistance when the men and women who resist have neither the time nor sometimes even the culture necessary to have the slightest connection with art? I do not know. Malraux⁵ developed an admirable philosophical concept. He said something very simple about art. He said it was the only thing that resists death. Think about it... what resists death? You only have to look at a statuette from three thousand years before the Common Era to see that Malraux's statement is a pretty good one. Bach's music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred...”

For Deleuze, Art plays the same role Yoga plays for Sri Aurobindo. Both art and yoga resist the paralysis of the soul under the weight of unconsciousness. Deleuze's call ties well with the one Sri Aurobindo sounded sixty years earlier: "... the **soul**, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it — (is) the **one thing of first and last importance**."⁶ The unification of the Sacred and the Profane is the cornerstone of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother who always maintained that "All Life is Yoga" and who dedicated their lives towards establishing the Life Divine on earth.

While listening to Bach's cantatas and passions, I often wondered how, in scenes describing Christ's sufferings, his music can be so full of an infinitely tender sorrow and, at the same time, of a sublimely divine joy. In fact, some of his movements are so joyous as to qualify as an invitation to dance (for instance, the 'cum spiritu sanctu' of the B-minor mass⁷). Instead of lamenting, Bach celebrates Christ's consummation of his mission in much the same way as Sri Aurobindo does in the following lines from His epic Savitri:

"It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,
Offered by God's martyred body for the world;
He has trod with bleeding brow the Saviour's way.
He who has found his identity with God
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light".⁸

In her last years, the Mother spoke increasingly of vibrations tying the whole universe together. One can only marvel at how a common divine vibration acted across space and time and moved the Avatars of the Supermind Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and "the immortal god of harmony"⁹ Bach, to elevate life and resist death with such irresistible power and mastery — thus helping humanity on its way to the Life Divine.

1) <http://www.sriaurobindo-inarabic.com/en-originals/preparing-winter-journey.pdf>

2) <http://www.sriaurobindo-inarabic.com/en-originals/en-encounter.pdf>

3) Gilles Deleuze: *The Seven Quartets of Becoming*, Debashish Banerji

4) Gilles Deleuze: What is the Creative Act? http://youtu.be/a_hifamdlSs

5) André Malraux: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Malraux

6) Sri Aurobindo, The Coming of the Subjective Age, The Human Cycle

7) Bach, B minor mass: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F7TVM8m95Y>

8) Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Book 6, Canto 2

9) According to Beethoven's homage to Bach.

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