

Power and Potentiality: The Reclamation of Hindu Theology for A Contemporary Ethical and Ecological Application

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While Christianity, with its closed canon and epistemological resources limited primarily to scripture, has continued to re-envision its theological ethos to address issues unique to each period, Hinduism, with its relatively open canon, and variety of valid epistemic resources (the pramanas), has been far less dynamic in recent decades, in reclaiming and renewing its theological vision to speak to the concerns of each new era and seek consonance with the new knowledge that the scientific enterprise has yielded. Thus the discourse that takes place at the nexus of science, religion, and ethics (social and environmental) is largely bereft of systematic input from the Hindu worldview.

My goal here is to initiate constructive reflection on the potential for consonance between certain doctrines in Hindu theology and the insights of science. A search for such a consonance is important for it can provide a blueprint for a teleological direction for human action. Using, as my point of departure, the fundamental trans-theistic conceptualization of Ultimate Reality as presented in seminal upanishadic doctrines, I bring into conversation the theistic renderings of these doctrines in the Sakti/Siva (Power/Potentiality) ethos and the possibilities that inhere in such interpretations in terms of science, ethics, and the environment.

Although the Upanisads reflect a diversity of authorship and therefore embody a variety of teachings, the unifying thread of the non-dualistic doctrine of Brahman runs through the texts. This doctrine asserts that there exists a conscious, underlying reality called Brahman that pervades this universe of forms. Brahman is beyond form, attributes, personality and any other limiting characteristic, and exists in all beings in the form of the higher self (atman). To be sure, by the time of the Upanisads, there is a shift in emphasis from the temporal order to that which is eternal. Yet, various upanishadic texts reveal a perspective deeply respectful of the natural world and conscious of a continuum between the human and non-human realms. {The passage from the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (BU 1.4.16) is remarkable for the way in which it expresses a profound interrelationship and identification between all spheres of existence:

In so far as [one] makes offerings and sacrifices, [one] becomes the world of the gods. In so far as he learns (the vedas), he becomes the world of the seers. In so far as he offers libations to the fathers and desires offspring, he becomes the world of the fathers. In so far as he gives shelter and food to men, he becomes the world of men. In so far as he gives grass and water to the animals, he becomes the world of animals. “Now this self, verily, is the

world of all beings. In so far as beasts and birds, even to the ants, find a living in his houses, he becomes their world. Verily, as one wishes non-injury for his own world, so all beings wish non-injury for him who has [this] knowledge. This, indeed, is known and well investigated.” (BU 1.4.16) }

The Chandogya Upanisad 6.8.7 proclaims “That which is the subtle essence [the source of all] this whole world has for its self” [*italics mine*]. The text then goes on to describe a tree as having such a self--as a sentient being, infused with consciousness, capable of pain and joy: “Of this mighty tree, my dear, if someone should strike at the root it would bleed but still live: if someone should strike at the middle, it would bleed but still live. If someone should strike at the top, it would bleed but still live. Being pervaded by its living self, it stands firm, drinking in its own moisture (which nourishes it) and rejoicing.” (Ch U 6.11.1) [*italics mine*]

A theology of identification of the self within, with the divine presence in all things is powerfully articulated in these verses from the Isa Upanisad: “And he who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings, he does not feel any revulsion by reason of such a view.” (IU verse 6) “When, to one who knows, all beings have, verily, become one with his own self, then what delusion and what sorrow can [come] to him who has seen the oneness?” (IU verse 7)

Scholars such as J. Baird Callicott assert that this perception of the oneness of nature in the Brahman doctrine seems to obliterate the individuality of the various elements of the natural world. Yet, a careful reading of the Upanisads indicates otherwise. S. Radhakrishnan’s comments on IU verse 6 posit that “unity is the basis of multiplicity and upholds the multiplicity” and that the Supreme is both Being, and Becoming, the one essence and the manifold phenomena of the universe.

The mutuality between unity and multiplicity is laid out most potently in the elegant metaphysics of Kashmir Saivism. Focusing on the Trika-Kaula lineage to which the most famous Kashmir Saivite theologians, including Abhinavagupta, belonged, we are given to understand that the material world is a reflection of the ultimate reality which is a unity of Para Siva and Para Sakti. This unity is variously termed Samarasya, (same essence); Anuttara (ultimate); and Anasrita Siva (the highest tattva or category of being, which includes Siva and Sakti). This understanding is expounded in a wide variety of Kashmir Saiva texts, including the Pratyabhijna-hridaya which acknowledges the universe to be Para Siva’s manifestation within himself of his own luminous nature.

The process through which the Ultimate is manifested, is Sakti in her multiple modes. Siva remains unchanged by the manifestation of the world because it takes place through the power (Sakti) of his divine autonomy (svatantra). This, indeed, is considered the primary

characteristic of Siva and foundationally constitutive of Sakti, who is the unconditioned, unlimited freedom of Siva (Svatantrya Sakti). From this Svatantrya-Sakti arises all other powers. At the transcendent level, there is an equilibrium where Sakti is absorbed in Siva and is considered his very essence. As Somananda notes in the famous *Siva-Dristi* (3.23), Siva has never been without Sakti, nor is Sakti without Siva, as there is no ultimate distinction between them. Liberation, in Kashmir Saivism emphasizes *jivanmukti*, where the adept experiences his-her identity with the universal subjective self-awareness of Para Siva, and thereby, perceive the world, as Siva does—*Ā* blissful field of all possibilities.

The Ultimate Sakti, Para Sakti, is described in many different ways; one of the more important epithets is *vimarsa* which is a vibratory flashing, a reverberation of energy, characterized by a dynamic self-reflective cosmic awareness. Siva is *prakasa*, a radiant, intelligence which is the luminous Being of Para Siva, through the expansion and immanence of which, Siva becomes the subjective experiencer in all sentient beings. The Kashmir Saivite treatise, the *Netra-tantra*, describes the coming together of the *prakasa* and *vimarsa* in terms of the well-known symbolism of the *bindu* which contains both unity and the potential for multiplicity.

The whole cosmos appears as an external, objective reality when it actually abides as a subjective experience of the infinitude of Anuttara within the field of divine self-aware consciousness or, *Parasamvit Sakti*. Abhinavagupta (*Paratrisika Vivarana*) associates other powers with Sakti as consciousness. These include *khecari-Sakti*, which is a dynamic divine awareness that moves about at the level of unconditioned reality and is the source of the animating forces that function in the sensorial apparatus. On the manifest level, it is the impulsive force behind all perceptions, sensations, and subjective mental states.

Sakti sparks the general creative potential of Siva and allows for its unfolding as the particularities of matter, i.e. sound, form, odor, tactility, flavor (*sabda*, *rupa*, *gandha*, *sparsa*, *rasa*) and so forth. This diversity of specification and individual natures in phenomena is termed *visesa-vimarsa-maya spandana* by Abhinavagupta, (in his *Isvara-pratyabhijna Vimarsini* (IV)). *Maya* is referred to here because of multiplicity (veiling of non-duality). According to the *Spanda-Nirnaya* (the commentary of Ksemaraja on the *Spandakarikas*), Para Siva's power of absolute freedom (*Svatantrya Sakti*) is also called *spanda*, which refers to a pulsating or throbbing. *Spanda* describes the nature of *Svatantrya Sakti* as the kinetic power of the embodied cosmos, a power that represents the impulse towards both manifestation and freedom that pulsates at the heart of being. Thus, *Vimarsa*, *Para Sakti*, *Svatantrya Sakti*, and *Spanda* are fundamentally equivalent in terms of their modes of function and meaning and express the ultimate nature of Sakti.

The devolutions or transformations of Sakti can be identified, then, as the operative modalities of the immanent Divine, through which the phenomenal universe comes into

being. With the first creative impulse, there arises a determination (samkalpa) which is the first vibration of Sakti and disturbs the primal quiescence. Having awakened from a state of pure potentiality to one of active cosmogenesis, the powers innate to Sakti come into being. These are cit-sakti, maya-sakti, prakriti-sakti. Thus Sakti is not only the morphogenic matrix of creation, she is creativity itself--both the process and the result.

Cit-sakti is the devolution of pure, unconditioned consciousness into the consciousness/intelligence that infuses the matter/energy continuum. One of the main questions that has intrigued the physical sciences is the problem of how life actually arises given the Second Law of Thermodynamics; that is, the tendency for all matter to seek equilibrium and therefore to fall into states of high entropy. Models of emerging complexity theory suggest that once a certain state of equilibrium has been reached (i.e. a certain state of high entropy, deep disorder) parts of this material medium tends to form foci of high energy or order, and move towards crystallization of structure. [See for example, F. Heylighen and D. Aerts, *The Evolution of Complexity*. (New York: Kluwer Academic Publications, 1996).] This suggests that the matter/energy continuum is actually imbued with self-will, and the potential for spontaneous biogenesis. This, indeed, is how cit-sakti, or Sakti as consciousness infusing the substance of the universe would tend to work, by abiding in the heart of matter as bio-potentiality. The possibility of conscious life is thus inherent as cit-sakti in the matter/energy continuum.

A third potent transformation of Sakti is the veiling of the divine consciousness underlying all processes and phenomena, or maya-sakti. This veiling of the foundational unity of the cosmos is maya-sakti and is necessary to enable living forms to exist within a cocoon of separate selfhood. Thus, the universe appears in all its glorious multiplicity and does not easily allow for a glimpse into its ultimate nature as a unified, matrix of biogenesis and morphogenesis, imbued with cit-sakti.

Such an understanding of the dialectic between unity and multiplicity, between Siva/Sakti and the phenomenal world, should confer on the world a profound sanctity and significance. Yet, when the Absolute is described as Being-Consciousness-Bliss (sat-cit-ananda), complete in and of itself, where is the reason for a physical cosmos? What motivation can there be for creation when the inner life of the Divine is already the fulfilled center of perfect bliss? One motive that is suggested is divine sportiveness (lila or krida). But even given the doctrine of lila, the question still remains as to what it is that makes the divine play worthwhile; in what way does the cosmic drama enrich the being of God? The answer to this question is the key to understanding not only the theological value of creation, but of the diversity that marks creation. It is the key to an ecological ethic.

In Trika thought, and even more so in explicitly Sakta texts, it is made clear that Sakti is not just the silent witness within (as is Brahman in Advaita Vedanta). She is the very sense

that thrills to a loving touch and shrinks from a burning fire, the psyche that feels fear and courage, the mind that knows sorrow and delight. Called kechhari-sakti, Sakti as the flowing power of the body/mind is continuously processing the impressions that result from the apprehension of, and reaction to, the myriad stimuli that living beings encounter.

This is affirmed also in Sakta theology. As the Sakta text, the *Devi Mahatmya* (5.13-33) proclaims, all knowing, feeling, thinking, and sensing is Sakti in her manifest aspect. Godhead is the repository of all possibilities, but they exist therein in seminal form, not as fulfilled potential. They subsist in the unmanifest Godhead as possibility but not actuality. There must be a manifest cosmos, then, for the actualization of all phenomenal possibilities. Hence, all actualizations have value but their value rests in their capacity to provide experience for the Divine. A priori reasoning would lead to the conclusion that the necessity of actualization evinced through existential experience is the most reasonable foundation for a divine motive for creation. The sensual manifold, then, has value not only a play field for the Divine but as the concrete expression of divine potential.

There are two parameters of experience, depth and breadth. For the divine experience, then, diversity of forms and phenomena provide breadth; complexity of sentient species and systems provide depth. Clearly, more complex entities have the capacity for greater intensity and higher orders of experience. Complexity does not preempt diversity but depends on it for its own flourishing. On our planet, the more complex the life form, the greater its dependence on other species and biosystemic resources of lower complexity.

The broad picture of terrestrial history exhibits an evolutionary direction that, nonetheless, coincides with increased biodiversity. From the viewpoint of theology, the developmental trajectory towards entities that have increasingly higher capacities for experience is an indication of Divine purpose towards the actualization of greater depth and complexity of experience--or, towards the evolution of consciousness. On the other hand, the existence of the vast diversity of species, ecosystems, and terrains is the mark of divine desire for breadth and variety of actualizations. The slow process of the evolution of new life forms indicates that there is an inherent tendency for the development of more elaborate orders of being that can only emerge after the fulfillment of the preceding order. It follows that the destruction of biodiversity leads to the diminution of breadth in divine experience. The active devastation of the natural world by human expansion is, therefore, radically at odds with divine telos. If this is not *adharma*, what indeed is?

Thus far, we have touched on the quantitative value of experience. The qualitative value of experience, I believe, is proportional to the degree of freedom intrinsic to it and the level of existential satisfaction afforded by it. For example, a butterfly in a butterfly tent equipped with the appropriate flora will have a poorer quality of experience than one that flies freely, although the former may have a more secure existence. Greater degrees of

freedom consist in the availability of increased choice. Plainly, the higher the degree of satisfaction and the greater the variety of choice, the greater the experiential value. Greater degrees of satisfaction are predicated on greater complexity because more variables are involved in creating the higher levels of satisfaction. Divine purpose, then, can be conceived as the momentum towards the optimization of the diversity and complexity of experience characterized by deeper existential satisfaction and greater freedom of choice. From the viewpoint of ethical philosophy, then, the providence of greater choice to the greatest number is an ultimate good. Thus, opportunities for education, for the experience of cultural variety, for breadth of choice in one's calling are not merely desirable luxuries, but necessary for teleological fulfillment.

Sakti is not only the power that flows through the cognitive faculties, and physical abilities of sentient forms, but as responsive awareness, she inheres in the heart of matter itself. Thus, it could be said that all experience is felt and absorbed by Sakti through her immanent aspect. It should be a given, then, that the integration into Divine nature of all experience implies that every stage of manifestation has intrinsic value in that it is the locus of an actualization of potential. The myriad levels of phenomena are value positive also because they contain the innate possibility of development into more intricate levels of order, hence towards a greater range and richness of experience. The caveat here is that the wellbeing and survival of the whole is of the greatest significance and should not be jeopardized by the pathogenic behavior of a component part. For example, when the "whole" is the human body, the cancerous cell is not to be preserved as a locus of experience since the healthy human body is a far more significant as a locus of valuable experience. Similarly, the mass murderer who bedevils society or a megalomaniacal dictator who threatens the world order cannot be valued as an important actualization because the "whole" that he threatens is far more important than its pathogenic parts.

The perception that all natural forms and phenomena have some capacity for experience has implications for ecological consciousness since it must be conceded that the things and beings of the natural world have intrinsic and not only instrumental value based on their utility for our species. In terms of humanity, it means that all persons have innate value and the fulfillment of that value can be actualized by their access to higher existential satisfaction and sufficient freedom of choice. This would move towards redeeming the massive injustices of human history where the entire female half of the species as well as countless others have been denied the possibility of fulfillment.

There are ontological implications of the realization of intrinsic value in all sentient beings and the ecosystems that nurture them and give rise to new levels of complexity. If the reason for divine self-expression in creative manifestation is the positive valuation of experience, and experience is the fulfillment of all possibilities inherent in the being of Sakti,

then the telos of human life must reflect the direction of divine desire and not work at cross purposes to it.

The hallmark of the creative process has been divine encouragement of diversity of life and hence for variety of experience on one hand, and the stimulation of higher levels of complexity and thus greater potential depth of existential satisfaction, on the other. The more the capacity for profound experience, the higher the level of consciousness. At the level of inanimate matter, consciousness is limited to awareness/responsiveness.

But the consciousness of more complex beings such as humans is of a different order. How do such levels of consciousness arise? Sri Aurobindo's theology maintains that consciousness evolves through time. [See Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949)] Thus, the journey of consciousness through countless lives and lessons can be apprehended as a movement towards greater capacity for knowledge, awareness, and relational responsiveness; that is, a movement towards greater complexity.

Sri Aurobindo, arguably the greatest Hindu systematic theologian of the modern era, is well known for affirming the value of the manifest world. His unequivocal rejection of Advaita notions of maya, his understanding of cosmological processes as fundamentally binary, creativity as the ongoing interplay of the dyadic Divine all point to the influence of Tantric thought. But the unique contribution of Aurobindo's work lies in its recognition of evolution as an ontological category. Hence, for Aurobindo, the purpose of seeking enlightenment (self-realization) is neither existential enhancement nor liberation from the vicissitudes of samsara; rather, the purpose of life and the quest for enlightenment must be directed to the furtherance of the evolution of consciousness in humanity.

If Sakti moves the matter/energy continuum towards the continual elicitation of of increasingly complex levels of order, it would certainly be logically consistent with the divine directionality to encourage the development of consciousness through depth and breadth of experience. Each new level of complexity emerges from a prior level of order. Novelty can only arise after the full actualization of the preceding stage. Thus, there must be atomic particles, before there can be atoms, and cells before organisms, tribes before nations. Each level builds on that which precedes it. Similarly, the evolution of consciousness can be understood as a process of development. Such evolution presupposes the existence of a transphysical identity with the capacity for the absorption, synthesis, and utilization of experience towards the furtherance of consciousness.

Divine purpose is fulfilled by a dynamic that moves towards an ever-increasing richness of experience; the higher the level of awareness, the deeper and broader the range of experience. Therefore, all forms of life have intrinsic value in that they provide unique foci of experience. Through every locus of sentience, the Divine is present in the subjective

cognition of the experiencer. There is no need for an extranatural imposition of will on the existing order of nature. Change and the emergence of new and higher orders are elicited through the subtle stimulus of innate Divine presence through the immanence of Sakti. Fundamental laws do not need to be side-stepped by a transnatural agent to induce episodes of actualization of a biopotentiality and evolutionary tendency that are already intrinsic to nature: “Consciousness, involved, [but] non-apparent in Matter, first emerges in the disguise of vital vibrations, animate but subconscious; then, in imperfect formulations of a conscient life, it strives towards self-finding through successive forms of that material substance, forms more and more adapted to its own completer expression.” [Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949), p. 609.]

The Divine is immanent within the process itself as subjectivity, as the force of awareness, and the impulse towards novelty. Such a metaphysic elicits a variance in the tenor of the dialectic between religion and science. Alternate categories emerge for the exploration of a Divine presence in the universe, and alternate forms of systematic consonance are derived from the processes of encounter. In this system, the edge of chaos would provide the fulcrum through which the Divine initiative for the emergence of novelty could be exercised.

Aurobindo identifies biological and social history as an unfolding process of ever higher complexity and organization. The evolution of consciousness from insentient matter, to sentient life, and finally to intelligent life and social systems is, for him, an indicator of the intrinsic potential in all matter for the development of increasingly higher faculties and functions. Manifestation (the devolution of the Divine) evinces a clear direction. And, this direction is not entropic. It is, rather, a consistent (if jagged) movement towards increasing levels of self-revelation of the Divine consciousness. It is a flow towards a higher order; not towards higher entropy. He categorically rejects the Brahman/Maya or Being/Non-Being distinctions. Sakti is the key to bridging the pure divine undifferentiated consciousness, and the plural differentiated identities of the phenomenal world. Cit-sakti pervades the cosmos from insentient matter to the human mind, lying in incipient form in all things. It evolves through time towards order and complexity in all the systemic processes of the universe.

Biological, social, and spiritual evolution are part of the same continuum flowing towards a higher order, a fuller manifestation of the Divine nature. Philosophically, Aurobindo’s work foreshadowed much of the thinking concretized by the scientific concentrations that have emerged from various branches of General Systems Theory as well as those from integrative organismic paradigms. For example, James Lovelock, the famous “father of the Gaia hypothesis,” posits that over the course of terrestrial history, Earth has adjusted the composition of the planetary atmosphere to favor a greater overall biomass and speed of evolution. That is, over the course of time, there has been a clear predilection

towards the evolution of higher intelligence and greater adaptive ability. [James Lovelock. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).]

Ilya Prigogine, the nobel laureate physicist, also maintains that the nature of all systems is to flow towards higher rates of evolution. He has consistently argued against the apocalyptic view of 20th century cosmology that the universe is indubitably moving to a destiny of disintegration due to increasing entropy. For Prigogine, at the margins of chaos, new complexity arises and the fundamental tendency of the nature of reality is towards increasingly higher order. Prigogine's work lays bare the implausibility of the conventional scientific view of time. In contrast to the Einsteinian view of time as reversible and past, present, and future as simultaneously existent--though not necessarily accessible to each other--Prigogine offers an alternative based not on theoretical mathematics alone, but on reason and observation. Time is a function of the history of all systems. To ignore the concept of the progression of time is to deny the natural proclivity of all open systems towards freedom and higher order; it is to deny the reality of evolution. [Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers. *Order out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984); Ilya Prigogine. "Time, Structure, and Fluctuations," *Science*, vol. 201 (Sept. 1, 1978), pp. 777-85.]

The principle known as the second law of thermodynamics, which posits that any transformation of energy leads to an increase in entropy, was developed in 1850 by Rudolf Clausius. In 1877, Ludwig Boltzman attempted to derive the principle from atomic theory. Boltzman theorized that all closed systems tend towards a state of equilibrium, towards a state of the highest possible entropy. The movement of all phenomena, therefore, is towards a consistently decreasing order. The implication for cosmology is the assured descent of the universe from order to disorder, from a heterogeneous state of complexity to a homogeneous chaos in equilibrium. Prigogine's research has shown that Boltzman's postulation was predicated on reasonably stable (i.e. controllable) situations with low energy flows in systems that were already fairly close to equilibrium. Thus the principle was applicable in circumstances where a high degree of disorder was already present in a stable system without access to high flows of energy. If the flow of energy were to increase, small fluctuations in the system would access the available energy and become significant enough to destabilize the system.

In the natural world, obviously, the majority of systems are subject to varying inflows of energy and are therefore unstable systems. Such unstable systems are famously unpredictable because minor fluctuations can massively alter the course of the system (inherent freedom). The history of an open system is affected by the fluctuations of its components; the earlier these occur in the evolution of a system, the greater the impact on the trajectory of the whole. The accessing and capturing of energy flows by fluctuations gives rise to a more complex system (higher order). When a system begins to disintegrate into

chaos, new energy-capturing foci begin to emerge. What is unpredictable is which of these new oscillating foci will capture the most energy and begin to incorporate and transcend the previous organization to create a new order. When new levels of instabilities and fluctuations do not emerge, the system decays as available energy flows are depleted. But since most systems in the natural world are open systems and can be easily destabilized by the capture of available energy flows, and since systems that access and utilize energy with the greatest efficiency develop faster, the general tendency is a movement away from equilibrium. [Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers. *Order out of Chaos* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984)]

Both living and non-living systems depend on this cyclic nature of evolution which, for Aurobindo, is eternal: “[A]lthough particular worlds and particular forms may or do dissolve physically and return mentally from the consciousness of manifestation into the non-manifestation; they have an eternal recurrence if not an eternal persistence, an eternal immutability in sum and foundation along with an eternal mutability in aspect and apparition. Nor have we any surety that there ever was or ever will be a period in Time when no form of universe, no play of Being is represented to itself in the eternal Conscious-Being, but [we do have]...an intuitive perception that the world that we know can and does appear from That and return into It perpetually.” [Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949), p. 95.]

In Aurobindo’s philosophy, an understanding of life as imbued with the evolutionary momentum does not release humanity from every effort to move towards a more compassionate and involved state. Indeed, Aurobindo does not view liberation as freedom from all relations but as the freedom to interact in an enlightened manner with all relations. To grow into the “power of love, truth, and right [action]” and have these as the foundation of our being and the “constituting nature of all action” is the meaning of true liberation. [Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949), p. 891.] This process is driven by an evolutionary momentum towards greater awareness and responsiveness: “[Consciousness] achieves at first only a primary mental perception and a vital awareness of self and things, a life perception which in its first forms depends on an internal sensation responsive to the contacts of other life and of Matter. Consciousness labours to manifest as best it can, through the inadequacy of sensation, its own inherent delight in being; but it can only formulate a partial pain and pleasure. [But] in man the energizing Consciousness appears as Mind more clearly aware of itself and things; this is still a partial and limited, not an integral power of itself, but a first conceptive potentiality and promise of integral emergence is visible. That integral emergence is the goal of evolving Nature.” [Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949), p. 610.]

Cit-sakti, the Divine Consciousness inherent in matter seeks its own self revelation through successive development in nature. Life unfolds in stages to achieve higher levels of

responsiveness and manifest greater awareness. All life forms sense their environment and respond to it; the higher the complexity of the life form, the greater the interaction with the environment. In nature, the evolutionary arrow is directed at systems that exhibit greater complexity. Evolution may appear random and unpredictable, “and contingent on numerous uncontrollable factors, which can steer its course in infinite directions, [but] those directions in which complexity increases are preferred.” [Gary E. R. Scharz and Linda G. S. Russek. *The Living Energy Universe*: (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1999), p. 258] In *Frontiers of Complexity*, P. Coveney and R. Highfield describe complexity in terms of self-organizing units that possess the potential to evolve over the course of time. [Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield. *Frontiers of Complexity: The Search for Order in a Chaotic World*. (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1995).] This evolution is predicated on the system’s (or unit’s) ability to process information through a feedback loop which extends self-organization into self-revision. The significance for human interaction is this: greater complexity is also characterized by a greater number of connections/relations. That is deeper interrelationships, higher levels of interdependence. [Gary E. R. Scharz and Linda G. S. Russek. *The Living Energy Universe*: (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1999), p. 258.]

Mathematician John L. Casti has summarized the basic signifiers of increasing complexity. [John L. Casti. *Complexification*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 270-72.] These are 1) greater unpredictability (instability); 2) more numerous interactions and feedback/feedforward loops; 3) irreducibility (the system cannot be fragmented into its constituent parts without its own unraveling) and 4) non-centralization of “decision-making” (that is, diffusion of foci, or multiple centers of directional activity) . The simpler the system, the fewer variables and components, and the lesser the number of outside links and interactions. Increasing complexity is predicated on a greater number of variables, constituent parts, and more numerous feedback loops or, interactive links. Complex systems exhibit a diffusion of focal points; i.e. many “centers.” Whereas simple systems have relatively weak interconnections between their constituents, complexity increases interactions between components of a system. Therefore, while there is a diffusion of foci, there is also a corresponding interdependence between foci. In other words, the more a system evolves, the more complex it becomes; and this complexity increases the range of the impact of actions of components or entities that constitute the system on the overall system.

In human terms, evolutionary complexity impels us into webs of ever greater interaction and interdependence. To act in accordance with this knowledge of ever increasing proximity of interests between individuals, groups, and nations is to act in harmony with the teleological direction of the nature of reality--a reality infused with the immanence of divine intelligence and intentionality. To act against the momentum of

increased cooperation and convergence of interests is to deny the logic of terrestrial evolution and the broad sweep of human history. It is to deny the possibility of a teleological direction in divine creativity.

Ultimately, the evolution of systems is an ongoing process of integration and increase. Thus, essential properties of a system, organism, or order immediately preceding are included in the new growth sequence of greater complexity. When such synthesis does not occur, and the emergent system rejects entire spectrums of epistemology and experience, it can be understood as lacking in sequential coherence, and can be expected to be ultimately less viable and more prone to disintegration. There is one caveat that Ken Wilber has offered in this regard; when examining new paradigms it is important to distinguish between inclusive wholes that incorporate and synthesize, and exclusivist wholes that exclude (while claiming to include) important elements of the previous order. The former are true examples of increased complexity as open-ended, growing systems; the latter are incomplete versions that often create oppressive structures before disintegrating.

Sequential evolution is a process not a goal. The understanding that our complexity as a society and more recently, as a global cultural network, is not the final word in development should give us the humility to accept the wisdom and worldviews of the thus far invisible and voiceless as something of potential value that may enable further growth. This, of course, is precisely why we are here: to integrate the contributions, insights, and knowledge of the Indic Traditions into the next stage of global complexity.

>From a teleological perspective, the divine momentum towards greater complexity and therefore, higher awareness, is a ceaseless movement, an endless flourishing of divine self-expression. For Sri Aurobindo, it that humanity's participation in the teleological flow required reaching for heights that had previously not been attained. From the standpoint of humanity, the divine telos cannot ultimately be fulfilled by extranatural intervention, but through the unfolding symmetry of natural properties and principles. It is this processive nature of reality that, in the final analysis, allows for the evolution of enlightenment itself. In the encounter of enlightened revelation, Sakti, the Divine Mother, engages in self-revealing relationship which bridges the divide between human and divine. If Siva/Sakti is personal as well as pervasive, relational as well as transcendent, and mutuality marks the luminous encounter of the enlightenment experience, then communion with the divine should render us more vulnerable, more open, more resonant to the needs of sentient beings-not more aloof, untouched, and secure in splendid isolation. It should leave us with the knowledge that not only bliss but also suffering has but one flavor, Samarasya.