

# MOTHER INDIA

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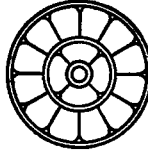
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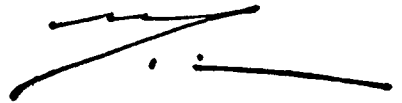


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXXVI

No. 6

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."*

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# LIBERTY, DETERMINISM, KARMA, PRAYER AND ASPIRATION

A TALK OF THE MOTHER TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN  
ON JUNE 3, 1953

*"Freedom and fatality, liberty and determinism are truths that obtain on different levels of consciousness."*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (28 April)*

*What are these different levels of consciousness?*

BUT I have explained it later on. All that follows is the explanation.

I have already spoken to you of the different planes of consciousness. Well, on the material plane, purely material (when separated from the vital plane), it is an absolute mechanism where consequently all things are linked together; and as I was saying the other day, if you want to find the cause of one thing or what is the result of a thing, you will find another and yet another and you will make an entire tour round the universe. And it is like that, everything is absolutely mechanised. Only, in this purely material plane, there can intervene the vital plane, and it already does intervene in the vegetable kingdom. The vital plane has an altogether different determinism, its own particular determinism. But when you introduce the vital determinism into the determinism of the physical, that produces a kind of combination that changes everything. And above the vital plane there is the mental plane. The mental plane also has its own determinism where all things are linked together rigorously.

But that is the movement which could be called "horizontal". If you take a vertical movement, the mind descending into the vital and the vital descending into the physical, you have there three determinisms that intervene and naturally produce something altogether different. And where the mind has intervened the determinism will necessarily be different from the one where it does not intervene; that is, in the higher animal life there is already a mental determinism which intervenes that is altogether different from the determinism of the vegetable plane.

Above these planes there are others—above each plane there are others, following one another right up to the highest plane. The highest plane is the plane of absolute freedom. If in your consciousness you are capable of passing through all these planes, so to say in a vertical line, and reaching the highest plane and, by means of this connection, of bringing down this plane of perfect freedom into the material determinisms, you change everything. And all the intermediaries change everything. Then because of the very changes from level to level, it gives altogether the appearance of complete freedom; for the intervention or descent of one plane into another has unforeseen consequences for the other plane, the lower plane. The higher plane can foresee, but the lower ones cannot. So, as these consequences are unforeseen, that gives altogether

the impression of the unexpected and of freedom. And it is only if you remain consciously and constantly on the highest level, that is, in the Supreme Consciousness, that there you can see that, at the same time, all is absolutely determined but also, because of the complexity of the interlinking of these determinisms, all is absolutely free. It is the plane where there are no more contradictions, where all things *are* and are in harmony without contradicting one another.

*In the lower planes can't one say what will happen at a particular moment?*

That depends. On certain planes there are consciousnesses that form, that make formations and try to send them down to earth and manifest them. These are planes where the great forces are at play, forces struggling with each other to organise things in one way or another. On these planes all the possibilities are there, all the possibilities that present themselves but have not yet come to a decision as to which will come down.... Suppose a plane full of the imaginations of people who want certain things to be realised upon earth—they invent a novel, narrate stories, produce all kinds of phenomena; it amuses them imagining all kinds of circumstances and events; they play with the forces; they are like the authors of a drama and they prepare everything there and see what is going to happen. All these formations are facing each other; and it is those which are the strongest, the most successful or the most persistent or those that have the advantage of a favourable set of circumstances which dominate. They meet and out of the conflict yet another thing results; you lose one thing and take up another, you make a new combination; and then all of a sudden, you find, pluff! it is coming down. Now, if it comes down with a sufficient force, it sets moving the earth atmosphere and things combine; as for instance, when with your fist you thump the saw-dust, you know surely what happens, don't you? You lift your hand, give a formidable blow: all the dust gets organised around your fist. Well, it is like that. These formations come down into matter with that force, and everything organises itself automatically, mechanically as around the striking fist. And there is your wished object about to be realised, sometimes with small deformations because of the resistance, but it will be realised finally, even as the person narrating the story up above wanted it more or less to be realised. If then you are for some reason or other in the secret of the person who has constructed the story and if you follow the way in which he creates his path to reach down to the earth and if you see how a blow with the fist acts on earthly matter, then you are able to tell what is going to happen, because you have seen it in the world above, and as it takes some time to make the whole journey, you see in advance. And the higher you rise, the more you foresee in advance what is going to happen. And if you pass far beyond, go still farther, then everything is possible.

It is an unfolding that follows a highway which is for you unknowable; for all will be unfolded in the universe, but in what order and in what way? There are decisions that are taken up there which escape our ordinary consciousness, and so it is very

difficult to foresee. But there is also, if you enter consciously and if you can be present up there... How shall I explain that to you? All is there, absolute, static, eternal: but all that will be unrolled in the material world, naturally more or less one thing after another; for in the static existence all can be there, but in the becoming all becomes in time, that is, one thing after another. Well, what path will the unrolling follow? Up there is the domain of absolute freedom.... Who tells you that a sufficiently sincere aspiration, a sufficiently intense prayer is not capable of changing the path of the unrolling?

This means that all is possible.

Now, one must have a sufficient aspiration and a prayer that's sufficiently intense. But that has been given to human nature. It is one of the marvellous gifts of grace given to human nature; one does not know how to make use of it.

This comes to saying that in spite of the most absolute determinisms in the horizontal line, if one knows how to cross all these horizontal lines and reach the highest point of consciousness, one is able to make things change, things apparently absolutely determined. So you may call it by any name you like, but it is a kind of combination of an absolute determinism with an absolute freedom. You may pull yourself out of it in any way you like, but it is like that.

I forgot to say in that book (perhaps I did not forget but just felt that it was useless to say it) that all these theories are only theories, that is, mental conceptions which are merely more or less imaged representations of the reality; but it is not the reality at all. When you say "determinisms" and when you say "freedom", you say only words and all that is only a very incomplete, very approximate and weak description of what is in reality within you, around you and everywhere; and to be able to begin to understand what the universe is, you must come out of your mental formulas, otherwise you will never understand anything.

To tell the truth, if you live only a moment, just a tiny moment, of this absolutely sincere aspiration or this sufficiently intense prayer, you know more things than by meditating for hours.

*"The Supreme Consciousness... gives to the individual in the active life of the world his sense of freedom and independence and initiative. These things in him are Her pragmatic tools or devices and it is through this machinery that the movements and issues planned and foreseen elsewhere are realised here."*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (28 April)*

These "things in him", that is in the individual, are: the sense of freedom, independence and initiative. You know what independence is? It is precisely the freedom of choice. Independence means the freedom of choice and initiative means the fact of choosing. First of all, one feels that one is free; and then one feels that no one can prevent him from choosing; and finally one uses his freedom to choose and one decides. These are three stages: the feeling that you are free, the idea that you are

going to use your freedom for choosing and then the choice—these three things I call the pragmatic tools and devices.

I am sorry, my children, all this is said in a form a little too philosophical which I do not now approve of very much. I was obliged to speak a language which appears to me a little too complicated. But what is to be done?—it was like that. I was saying that these three things, the feeling of freedom, the will to choose and the choice made are the devices that Nature uses in us to make us act, otherwise we would not move.

If we did not have this illusion that we are free, this second illusion that we can use our freedom for choosing and the third illusion of choosing well, we would not move. So Nature gives us these three illusions and makes us move, for she requires us to move.

She, with a capital S, I said it was the Supreme Consciousness, but in fact it is Nature and it is the trick of Nature; for the Supreme Consciousness has no tricks, it is Nature that has tricks. The Supreme Consciousness quite simply enters into all things with all her consciousness, because it is *the* consciousness: and with that She tries to make all this inconscience move towards consciousness, simply, without any tricks. She has no need of tricks, She is everywhere and She puts consciousness into the inconscience. When you light a lamp in a dark room, as soon as you turn on the electricity, the room is no longer dark. As soon as you put consciousness in, there is no longer any unconsciousness. So that is what She does. Wherever She sees unconsciousness, She tries to enter. Sometimes the doors are locked, then it takes a little more time, but sometimes the door opens, then She rushes in immediately, the unconsciousness disappears and consciousness comes—without needing any tricks or any intermediaries. She becomes conscious. But material Nature, physical Nature is not like that, she is full of tricks; she makes you move all the time, she pulls the puppet strings; for her you are so many little dolls: she pulls the strings and makes them move. She puts all kinds of illusions in your head so that you may do the things she wants, without even your wanting it. She does not require that you should want it: she pulls the thread and you do it.

That is why we quarrel at times, but that's something we do not say.

*You have said here that we are "tied to the chain of Karma", but then sometimes when the Divine Grace acts, that contradicts...*

Completely, the Divine Grace completely contradicts Karma; you know, It makes it melt away like butter that's put in the sun.

That is what I was saying just now. What you have just told me is another way of speaking. I was putting myself in your place and asking: There you are, if you have an aspiration that's sincere enough or a prayer that's intense enough, you can bring down in you something that will change everything, everything—truly it changes everything. An example may be given that is extremely limited, very small, but which makes you understand things very well: a stone falls quite mechanically; say, a tile



falls; if it gets loose, it will fall, won't it? But if there comes, for example, a vital or mental determinism from someone who passes by and does not want it to fall and puts his hand out, it will fall on his hand, but it will not fall on the ground. So he has changed the destiny of this stone or tile. It is another determinism that has come in, and instead of the stone falling on the head of someone, it falls upon the hand and it will not kill anybody. This is an intervention from another plane, from a conscious will that enters into the more or less unconscious mechanism.

*So the consequences of Karma are not rigorous?*

No, not at all. In all religions there are people who have said that, who have given such absolute rules, but I believe it was in order to substitute themselves for Nature and pull the strings. There is always this kind of instinct that wants to take the place of Nature and pull the strings of people. So they are told: "There is an absolute consequence of all that you do...." It is a concept necessary at a given moment of evolution to prevent people from being in a completely unconscious egoism, in a total unconsciousness of the consequences of what they do. There is no lack of people who are still like that, I believe it is the majority; they follow their impulses and do not even ask themselves whether what they have done is going to have any consequences for them and for others. So it is good that someone tells you straight, with a severe look: "Take care, that has consequences which will last for a very long time!" And then there are others who come and tell you: "You will pay for it in another life." That, however, is one of those fantastic stories.... But it does not matter: this also can be for the good of people. There are other religions which tell you! "Oh! if you commit that sin, you will go to hell for eternity." You can imagine!... So people have such a fright that it stops them a little, it gives them just a moment for reflection before obeying an impulse—and not always; sometimes the reflection comes afterwards, a little late.

It is not absolute. These are still mental constructions, more or less sincere, which cut things into small bits like that, quite neatly cut, and tell you: "Do this or do that. If it is not this, it will be that." Oh! what a nuisance is this kind of life. And so people go mad, they are frightened! "Is it like that or rather this?" And they want it to be neither this nor that, what should they do?—They have only to climb to a higher storey. They must be given the key to open the door. There is a door to the staircase, a key is needed. The key, as I told you just now, is the sufficiently sincere aspiration or the sufficiently intense prayer. I said "or", but I do not think it is "or". There are people who like one better and others the other. But in both there is a magical power, you must know how to make use of it.

There is something very beautiful in both, I shall speak to you about it one day, I shall tell you what there is in aspiration and what in prayer and why both of them are beautiful.... Some dislike prayer; if they entered deep into their heart, they would find it was pride—worse than that, vanity. And then there are those who have no

aspiration, they try and they cannot aspire; it is because they do not have the flame of humility.

Both are needed. There must be a very great humility and a very great will to change one's Karma.

*Voilà, au revoir, my children.*

*(Questions and Answers 1953, pp. 86-93)*

## TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of May 1984)

August 9, 1940

S: Everybody is silent on the Viceroy's declaration. Jinnah, Gandhi, C.R.—nobody says anything. And he is interviewing all the leaders over again. He seems to be bent on expansion of his council, but nobody may accept except the liberals.

N: Why, Savarkar has said he will.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has given qualified assent. He said some of his demands remained unsatisfied...

S: Our Suren has again covered his body all over.

N: In anticipation of a cold!

SRI AUROBINDO: Or expecting an anticipation.

N: Today when he was doing pranam at the photo in the Reception room in that protective attire, a visitor for Darshan was looking at him very intently. Suren ought to be removed from the gate duty. It will otherwise make a bad impression about us.

SRI AUROBINDO: The visitor was perhaps looking with admiration and saying, "This man is so sick and yet has so much devotion!"

S: Suren and Manibhai seem to be friendly. They were talking very cheerfully.

SRI AUROBINDO: Manibhai was talking of his health and Suren of his illness?

P: The British don't seem to want to defend Somaliland. They have no forces there, only some camel corps.

N: What chances have the camel corps against mechanised units?

SRI AUROBINDO: The camel corps also is mechanised, they say, or they mean perhaps the camels are mechanical?

P: If they don't think Somaliland is important, what about Egypt? Italians have one-and-a-half lakh troops in Libya, while the British are only a few.

N: Egypt has no force?

SRI AUROBINDO: It has a trained army. But it is neutral.

P: Will it remain neutral even when it is attacked?

SRI AUROBINDO: (*laughing*): In this world of Leopold,<sup>1</sup> I don't know what it will do.

N: The American ambassador has said that Leopold is a prisoner in his castle.

SRI AUROBINDO: That is to gain people's sympathy.

N: Also he says that Leopold informed the British about his surrender two or three days earlier.

SRI AUROBINDO: How is that? If they had been informed, they would have taken immediate steps to withdraw their troops instead of exposing them to grave peril and there was no mention of that in the papers.

N: And he says further that Leopold was compelled to surrender, seeing so

<sup>1</sup> The king of Belgium.

much destruction and suffering and the risk of complete annihilation of his army.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he was so much moved by the suffering, he could have called the Germans in at the very outset...

N: That idiot about whom Charu Dutt was speaking said also that Nolini has only an assumed depth, he is a *soi-disant* philosopher or something like it and something about Anilbaran too.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is this man, I would like to know; then his depth or height could be judged. It seems he has only depth... And what is his opinion about me? Third-rate too? If my influence has produced third-rate works, my work can't be any higher.

N: Charu Dutt doesn't seem to consider Nishikanta's poetry in *Alakānandā* as first-class.

SRI AUROBINDO: Is he a good judge of poetry?

N: I don't think so.

SRI AUROBINDO: Then his opinion has no value.

N: He didn't, at first reading, understand the poems. After he had read them over and over again, they were clear to him, he said.

SRI AUROBINDO: What kind of mind these people have, I wonder!

N: They are very simple poems, except for one or two.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

N: And people object to Nishikanta's poems because they are all centred on the Mother and yourself, not so much because they are spiritual or lack variety.

SRI AUROBINDO: How do they know about the Mother?

P: The poems can very well be taken as addressed to the Divine Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Besides, all poems are not like that—*Garur Gāḍi*, for instance. He has variety too. Of course they are spiritual and mystic.

### *Evening*

SRI AUROBINDO (to P): Do you know anything about why Baron is being recalled from Chandernagore?

P: No, I only heard that he has committed some political indiscretion.

SRI AUROBINDO: It seems recently he invited Subhas Bose to his house and for that the Viceroy has asked the Governor to transfer him from there.

P: How could Baron do that? And how does he know Bose?

N: Probably through Dilip.

SRI AUROBINDO: These people are wonderful. It will go against the Ashram. He ought to have known Bose's activities and the consequences of his visit.

N: Japan is concentrating her navy towards Indochina.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, not concentrating, that doesn't matter. Japan is heading towards Indochina.

N: Wants to swallow it, perhaps. Being a little hasty.

SRI AUROBINDO: How? On the contrary this is the time when other nations

are engaged somewhere else. The only thing is that the Japanese are much involved in China. Don't know how effective it will be.

August 10, 1940

P: It seems when Dilip was in Calcutta, he took Bose to Baron and introduced him. That is how they know each other.

SRI AUROBINDO: Dilip has no sense of these things at all. He thinks "You are a good man, he is a good man, both should meet each other..." (*laughter*)

P: Hitler's Blitzkrieg has got a rude shock.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, to lose sixty planes in one attack is something. Italy also has got a knock in Libya. She lost about sixteen.

N: The British superiority in air has now been proved. Only if they can equal in number.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, Hitler is superior on land only.

P: Somebody from the Punjab, who has come for Darshan, had a severe haemorrhage from the nose. I had to call Dr. André and he gave an injection and the bleeding stopped.

SRI AUROBINDO: These people ought to pay André.

P: Yes, this man will pay. It seems he has disposed of all his property etc. and come to stay here permanently, but he didn't receive a favourable reply. That may have helped to cause the haemorrhage.

SRI AUROBINDO: How did he make his arrangements without permission? Was he in communication with us?

P: He wrote three or four letters but got no reply. I told him that he should not have acted so hastily.

S: People take the silence as a test.

SRI AUROBINDO: If he took it as a test the result was rather bad, he got bleeding.

S: Moonjee has asked to accept whatever we get from the government and fight for more.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is Tilak's policy—accept even a quarter loaf.

*Evening*

*(The Pétain government has acceded to Japan's demand for naval and military bases in Indochina: first it was said they would resist.)*

SRI AUROBINDO: That means the end of Indochina.

P: Yes.

SRI AUROBINDO: The Pétain government must have overridden Admiral Decoux's order to fight. Why do these French admirals brandish their swords and then put them back? If they resist now, there may be some chance. Otherwise it is the end of Indochina.

P: Yes. Besides, the Chinese also have announced that they will resist

Japan's claim. So they can combine.

N: Japan is following the Russian policy. First base, then government.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, change of government by the Left and then "you".

S: The British have quietly withdrawn their forces from Shanghai.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is more dignified.

N: The Pétain government is putting one hundred people to trial for bringing France into the war! And Mandel is the main figure.

SRI AUROBINDO: Mandel is the only man, clean and honest, who has not made money from politics. Laval and others are afraid of him. He is unpopular because of his straightforwardness.

S: He is a Jew. He refused to join his party to Ribbentrop when the latter proclaimed eternal friendship with France in 1937.

SRI AUROBINDO: The result of eternal friendship is the swallowing up of a part of France.

S: *The Indian Express* says that the Congress ought to accept the Viceroy's offer, otherwise other people will come and take it.

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so. M. N. Roy also has advised unconditional support to the British government. For once he has agreed with me.

N: How? You didn't mean unconditional support!

SRI AUROBINDO: They ought to have done that at the beginning as Gandhi had said. In that case they would have got much more and the British public opinion also would have swung round. Even now if they accept the Viceroy's offer, it will come to the same thing. Otherwise they will have either to start Civil Disobedience or to keep hanging.

N: You said that if the British gave Dominion Status to India, a large part of their Karma would be wiped off.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes.

N: Now they have offered it but if India doesn't accept, what will be the result to British Karma?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know!

P: But where have they offered Dominion Status?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why, it is the same thing. They have said "free and equal partnership in the Commonwealth". That is the same as Dominion Status. They can't say Dominion Status because Jinnah is opposed to it and the Congress too. Where it falls short is on the question of the minorities—if the minorities don't accept, it can't be given. There is also the question of the expansion of the council, but that could be turned into a National Government later. And the other point against the offer is where they speak of their obligation to other people. I suppose they mean the native states.

N: Gandhi is against abolition of the states.

SRI AUROBINDO: But Jawaharlal and all the Socialists are not. So the only thing that really stands in the way is disagreement among Indians themselves.

P: Yes, and we always put the blame on the English; we don't see our own faults. If we don't come to any measure of agreement, what can they do?

SRI AUROBINDO: Quite so.

P: People say the British are causing and continuing the disagreement.

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense. As if there were no differences in India before. If people think that after the British withdrawal, they will be united, they will find it an illusion.

*(To be continued)*

NIRODBARAN

# THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

*(Continued from the issue of May 1984)*

## The Mother's Message

This is the  
interesting story of  
how a being became  
the Divine Life.



(35)

Laljibhai saw the Mother for the first time in December 1953 with his family. He was to leave for Africa because we owned "Miwani Sugar Mills Kenya Ltd.," there and because he had important commitments to public bodies and social works in that country. The Mother asked him to stay in the Ashram a little longer than he



had intended. Mrs Laljibhai—Muktaben—told him to obey the Mother's wish. The Mother wanted him to be taken by Dyuman to see the fields which belonged to the Ashram, so that he might give his ideas regarding their development.

In 1955 Laljibhai intended to buy the Savanna Textile Mill in Pondicherry. But the Mother wished him to build a Sugar Factory. He was puzzled and put before her the numerous problems involved in building it.

The Mother said:

“Have faith in the Divine, and everything will be all right. This will be my Yoga in the material world....”

It was obvious that her will was to materialise the Sugar Factory. Laljibhai's answer to the Mother was: “I readily agree to establish a Sugar Factory in Pondicherry, without giving any thought to economic or commercial considerations.”

The following year, on 24th November, the licence was obtained from the Government of India. The Mother sent a telegram to Laljibhai who was then in Africa:

“Sugar Factory licence received. It is the Divine's Victory. Now come and make your arrangements. Blessings.”

The day on which the licence was obtained was an auspicious one—an anniversary of the Day of Victory thirty years earlier.

To be more precise, I may quote from Vol. 26, p 136 what Sri Aurobindo has written:

“24th November 1926 was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

“Krishna is not the supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards the Ananda.”

On 11th January 1957 the Company was registered in Pondicherry.

Laljibhai was here to see the final arrangement of the Sugar Mills. His two sons had already joined the Ashram school. One of my brothers—Vasantbhai—was also here. They were staying in Huta-House downstairs. I was yet in Golconde. For my apartment upstairs was still under renovation. I used to meet my relatives. But I felt that though I had good will and feeling for them, I should not get involved in the family affairs and any social obligation, because I thought that once I would get entangled in this web it would be difficult to get out. Since I had abandoned the ordinary world for the sake of the Divine I never wished to plunge once again into the same rut of life. I wrote a letter to the Mother:

"My dearest Mother,

In your letter dated 6th May 1956 you wrote: 'You are born for the Divine and you will find the Divine.'

Kindly make me absolutely detached from everybody and everything. Please free me from all bondages.

Mother, I wish to do something worth-while in my life—I aspire to see the marvels of the higher worlds. I am eager to learn the spiritual and occult truths—I want to make the most of this life. But above all I am longing to unite with the Divine.

Do grant my prayer. Love.

Your child  
Huta"

Her answer came on a card illustrating bunches of deep orange flowers—*Pachystachys Coccinea*—Aspiration for the Supramental Guidance in the Subconscious: "Intense need for order, light and knowledge in the subconscious penumbra":

"To my dear little child Huta,  
Your prayer is heard and granted.  
With all my love and sweetness."

During my attempt to achieve total detachment I suffered immeasurably from ill-will, misunderstanding, misjudgment, difference of opinion, as well as allegations and criticisms.

But now I realise that all I went through was good for me, because it led to my becoming independent, gaining inner and outer strength. Hence I am grateful to the people who made me suffer so much.

I heard a very touching and inspiring story about Saint Kabir who was so engrossed in praising the Divine that he forgot his own existence and the flow of time. A man came telling him that a relative of his had died. Kabir answered that it was God's wish and once again started singing the glory of the Supreme. A few days later the same man came with the information that Kabir's neighbour had passed away. On hearing the news, Kabir grieved a great deal. This attitude astounded the messenger, because Kabir had not felt anything when his relative had died but when his neighbour had died he was miserable. On being asked the reason, he told the informant that without his neighbour he was completely lost: "Oh! who will abuse and accuse me? Who will expose my defects and faults? Who will show me the short cut to the Divine?"

In my heart of hearts I was totally aware of the Mother's unfailing actions which were beyond human comprehension.

On 14th May all the preparations were made in one of the rooms downstairs in Huta-House to welcome the Mother. She declared open the office of "New Horizon Sugar Mills Private Limited", at about 4 p.m. She entered the room with a broad smile and took her seat in the special chair which had been made for her. After a brief concentration she distributed sweets to the people present.

Laljibhai now has his office in the very room where she sat. Since I was present there, I remember vividly how the Mother looked deeply into Laljibhai's eyes for a few seconds in order to pour her Force, Grace and Love. She spoke these words:

"A happy beginning  
A good continuation  
and no end—an endless progression."

Then she wrote down on a piece of paper what she had said.

In the evening she and I had a long meditation in her room at the Playground. My silent prayer to her was to make me strong outwardly. For together with inner strength the outer strength was essential to face the crooked world.

The succeeding morning a card came from the Mother showing a red Hibiscus—Aesthetic Power—"Beauty is a great power." On the card she had written:

"To my dear little child Huta, with all my love, sweetness and strength."

Four days elapsed. I did practically nothing except that I went to the Mother's Private Stores to do some cleaning.

On the morning of the 20th the Mother sent me a Chinese carved stone which I painted the next day. She saw the result at 10.45 a.m. in her apartment in the Ashram. She said:

"It is nice. Now you are painting boldly and that is quite apparent."

Laljibhai sent word to the Mother that in the budget which had come out that very week the Government had introduced heavy taxes and so he could not say whether his family members would agree to establish the Sugar Factory in Pondicherry.

In answer, the Mother asked him to wait. But that very day, 21st May, she gave him an interview. Strangely enough, throughout the interview, she did not utter a single word or argue about the Sugar Factory and its complications. On the contrary, she talked for more than an hour about spirituality, the Supramental descent, the Gods and Goddesses, the temples and the religions. She also spoke about hideous difficulties. Her words were:

"There will be boundless difficulties for me, for you, for the Ashram, for India

and for the whole world. There will be such a crisis that people will even lose faith in the Divine. But out of this mess and chaos the New World will emerge. That will be the Victory of the Divine.

"In the present circumstances what difference does it make whether you undergo sufferings and difficulties here in Pondicherry or in Africa?"

Hearing all this, Laljibhai said to her: "Mother, I prefer to suffer and to face whatever comes, near you—under your protection, guidance and Grace. The Sugar Factory will be built according to your wish in spite of everything. I pray for your Victory...."

The Mother was extremely happy and took Laljibhai's hands into hers and said joyously:

"Bien, très bien..."

Then Laljibhai left for Africa to make all the requisite arrangements to establish a Sugar Factory in Pondicherry by the Mother's Grace.

Sri Aurobindo has written in Vol. 26, p. 168 a letter very similar in purport to what the Mother said to Laljibhai:

"I know that this is a time of trouble for you and everybody. It is so for the whole world. Confusion, trouble, disorder and upset everywhere is the general state of things. The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil and the worse are prominent everywhere. The one thing is to hold on and hold out till the hour of light has come."

He has also written in the same volume, pp. 169-170:

"The extreme acuteness of your difficulties is due to the Yoga having come down against the bedrock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading towards that victory. The difficulties themselves are general in the Ashram as well as in the outside world. Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and baffling of the hope for the future are common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure, to the exclusion of higher things, and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the

darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking, after a time the darkness will fade and begin to disappear and the Light will come."

\*

I received from the Mother the carved tusk of an elephant. I painted it on a deep brown background. She was glad to see it.

Then she made me understand all about the human figure—eyes, head, nose and lips—by means of her sketches.

On 25th morning a bouquet of white roses came from the Mother accompanied by a lovely card depicting a boat, rocks and sea. These words were written on it:

"To my dear little child Huta,  
*Let the Divine Peace be with you*  
With my sweet love."

Yes, it was true that the past many days I had been restless, because now painting and drawing bored me to death. Besides, I was not keeping well.

Encouraging letters of the Mother never stopped. She wrote:

"To my dear little child Huta,  
My love is always with you—Have faith in it and you will be cured."

Yet another card was sent by her, which showed a majestic lion standing on a boulder. She had written on it:

"This is the symbol of a quiet strength.  
"With all my love and sweetness."

Sri Aurobindo has written about the lion:

"Vital force, strength, courage and power."

Gradually I recovered my poise.

On 29th the Mother sent a tea-pot along with a note saying:

"*Glass tea-pot* to be done on a dark red (granite) background."

Very well! I painted the set several times and to my discomfiture it always turned out to be like modern painting: I was really disappointed, because I knew the Mother

did not like modern art—I did not like it either!

I received from the Mother a card displaying deep pink flowers. Underneath were her words:

*“Cyclamen:*

*With love.”*

In the evening I met the Mother, as always, in her room at the Playground. She said with a smile:

“Did you like the card I sent you this morning? You see, the flowers—cyclamen—grow high up in the Alps. The wind which blows from there carries their scent for miles around.”

Then she gave me various flowers and a kiss on my forehead. We moved towards the French Translation Class.

The succeeding morning the Mother sent me a card indicating birds, with this line:

“The Divine Compassion is limitless.”

It was Friday and the last day of the month of May. I had a long meditation with the Mother in the evening. Her loving care, her sweet love never ceased.

*(To be continued)*

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## THE POETIC EXPERIENCE\*

If poetry is to glow with true beauty it must rise from living experience. This is not to rule out the Ariels of song: imagination may weave rainbows upon a delicate air, but the rainbows must be a genuine revelation and no coloured falsity. In other words, poetry is not confined to facts of mere earth: it can float in more tenuous regions, but it must create an impression that these regions, however incredible to the normal mind, do exist behind or beyond the familiar and tangible lovelinesses. The sole criterion, therefore, is: Does poetry come with an authentic power or no? Keats's magic casements may be only the eyes of daydream, they may exist only in his brown-study and in no recognisable room; yet his art is such as to create a feeling of their reality. Our minds are charmed into what Coleridge called a suspension of disbelief. The imagery and the music go home with an inevitable sense of truth. Somewhere, we seem to tell ourselves, these wonderful apertures are to be found; the rhythmic language in which they are described is like a current generated by the poet in touch with their strangeness to produce a television in our own soul. The experience is proved by this convincing spell thrown on us. We must not ask if an emotion or an object poetised is part of common life; we must only inquire whether it lives in its own way with a convincing beauty and appears real, even though its reality be remote from our ordinary perspectives.

Nor is it necessary for a poet to pass completely through the inner experiences recorded by him of subtle realities. A mystic surge may convey to us a thrill of God's presence or a superb spiritual phenomenon like

The lonely waters of eternal ease

with such a strong mood-atmosphere that we pass into that very state of rapture; and yet there would be no reason to believe that to the poet the substance of his writing was equally intimate. When a Vedic Viswamitra rolls some gorgeous hymn to the Truth-Sun wherein the Self of self has its being, we are aware that he is voicing an experience, but that is because we have the independent knowledge that Viswamitra was a rishi. If we did not have this knowledge we would not be justified in arguing from the sense of reality implicit in the poem to an experience on the poet's part. All that can be said is that the poet who could bring so assuring a vibration of mystical ecstasy had an extraordinary imagination open to spheres of reality which transcend the reach of not only the average man but also the average poet of the first rank—say, Homer or Shakespeare. For, in poetry the main factor is imagination: we should never forget this central truth if we are to gauge rightly the nature of inspired utterance. Emotion makes poetry throb: it is the animating flame behind all idea and figure, but this emotion is not necessarily what is felt in the accustomed human way. It is a thrill, a warmth, an entousiasmos of the imagination. And what the

\* With acknowledgement to *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual*, 1976.

imagination, as a rule, does is to take suggestive hints given by actual experience, outer or inner, and then transform them into a power of measured beauty by reflecting or transmitting the response from some centre of consciousness beyond the normal human nature: that is to say, the imagination is a medium.

Some poets are close to their own experience-stuff; still, they too reshape it in order to embody as perfect a glow or gusto of beauty as possible: depths are plumbed, associations explored, velleities stressed rendering the new substance different from the old. In art the demand is for the beautiful, and if changing the stuff of experience brings out a heat and a light which deepen and accentuate beauty, the poet will not and should not hesitate to do so. His purpose, his ideal, is obviously not to photograph the mere outer life; it is not even to be faithful to his own inner life; he is essentially a revealer of shines and shadows from a supernormal plane. All poetry is a marriage of known symbols with unknown modes of being. When the Elizabethan poet writes that tall trees, struck by the first gleam of day,

Dandled the morning's childhood in their arms,

a supernormal perception goes quickening the sight of familiar objects; he has unveiled, without relinquishing his hold on these objects, a vision not of the earth-life as we daily contact it. And the supernormal vision increases as the poet becomes a channel of yet rarer subtleties, the culmination being the sheer mystical afflatus. The point, however, is that his sole concern is to be an instrument for perfect aesthetic creation, without stickling after so-called probability or needing to live out inwardly the full substance of the poetic word.

What, then, of sincerity in art? It is necessary to admit and emphasise that a poet who goes against his nature's aesthetic idealistic trend by living quite in disharmony with it is liable to diminish the frequency no less than the strength of his inspiration. The afflatus will hesitate to visit him and instead of producing masterpieces in abundance he will bring forth sovereign speech as a rare rush of light amidst shimmering vacuities. Poetry is a grave occupation, and though we may not convert it into an ostentatious ceremonial it does not bear being trifled with. The crown of utterance, it calls for a high seriousness in the instrument chosen by the gods. The old conception of the Muse is psychologically correct: the poet does appeal to something higher than his quotidian consciousness, he strains and poises himself and rarefies his mood in order to catch the inevitable phrase, the authentic rhythm, the real-sense of inspiration. Sarojini Naidu, after a brief spell of delicate music, grew dumb because she was not jealous enough of the gift bestowed on her: the drum and trumpet of politics deafened her to those flute-voices of her young delight which had given us poem after tremulous poem shot with tones of flame and faery. A poet has to recognise his vocation, his destiny, and not fritter away the precious soul-stuff which takes images from beyond the ephemeral surface life. However, we must not impute insincerity to him even if he wastes his energy, provided the work he occasionally offers us pulses with



the secret heart-throb of creative imagination. For then it is a cry from the lips of the gods, and the significant form that makes its beauty is the luminous ever-living body of the Muse. Fundamentally, the Muse and not the man is responsible also for the creative work of a life spent in tune with the aesthete and the idealist in one's nature.

If a mystic poet, for instance, were to claim that his work invariably mirrored his inner experiences, he would be an insincere fraud. But his poems themselves are neither insincere nor fraudulent: if they are inspired, the "I" of each poem is not the human ego but some entity which has an experience on a superhuman plane and sends down its self-expression through a human medium, coloured in a certain measure by the medium's personality yet not vitiated by it. The vitiation takes place only when there is a capricious fanciful play or a dry intellectual interference. So long as there is a moved precision in language, an assured lift of rhythm, a masterful harmony in the whole, a poem is a genuine echo to some subtle reality behind the poet's imagination. It remains a revelation of the real, though its author may have experienced nothing—nothing except the joy of the creative labour, which gives him mostly a mere sympathetic thrill. If people do not understand this paradox and attribute the described experience in its complete form to the man who serves as an instrument, it is after all their own fault. The reaction they undergo on discovering that the man did not have the entire experience is to believe that the poem is a tissue of falsehoods and that poetry is worthless since it does not depict truth. My contention is that both idolatry and iconoclasm are extreme errors.

The test here of sincerity, truth, authenticity, value is, first and last, Inspiration—Inspiration working through any part of man's nature. The outward-going body-conscious mind of Homer describes Apollo's descent from Olympus with an intense atmosphere of the god's subtle physicality of power; Shakespeare passes a sudden voice from spiritual heights through the life-force's peculiar thrill and colour and we get

the prophetic soul  
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come;

Sri Aurobindo intuits in a self-transfiguring lift of the pure mental consciousness the supreme Spirit's

Force one with unimaginable rest.

In all these expressions the inspiration is absolutely unmarred. Sri Aurobindo has experienced the very state he poetises, while Homer never knew Apollo's deific puissance nor Shakespeare the world-soul's profound reverie; yet their language when filled with a mystic intuition has not suffered the least weakness in imparting a real-sense. For each has conveyed with an aesthetic finality in the terms of his own habitual colour a superhuman magnitude: the perfect inspired beauty which bears

evidence of truth behind the veil has been equally present. And this is all that matters.

No doubt, the examples I have mentioned are in a certain category of style which is exceptional—a style in which even poets of the pre-eminent order do not always write. They write in the main with a simple lucidity, a vivid vigour, a shining richness or, at their rarest, a spelled exaltation; no more than a few snatches we have in them of all these styles, distinct or mixed, reaching not only their own perfections but at the same time a special quality for which we have no name. And it is possible to argue that, given an identical measure of poetic capacity, one who has himself gone through high spiritual experiences is likely to produce a larger amount of work irradiating their influence than the man whose imagination only has been inspired, and to get more often their full depth and movement by means of this unusual mode of style. Still, it must be remembered that to write in another mode does not cast a shadow of insincerity or untruth over a poem. A poem may not reflect or echo the very stuff of Spirit but it can have a mystical genuineness of its own: the Spirit now is not felt in a language instinct with its essential vibration, it is felt with a true receptivity through a different poetic manner. And, in art, any style can attain the extreme pitch of sincerity, of inevitableness, which marks out the masterpiece. Take these lines from Yeats where he says that he has seen

In all poor foolish things that live a day  
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way.

Yeats is a listener to occult footfalls, a singer haunted by unearthly presences, but not, like Sri Aurobindo, a yogi who has climbed the ultimate summits; and his words and rhythm in the couplet above do not voice the Spirit's substance with the direct grandeur of Sri Aurobindo's. Nor can they fill us with the same quantity, so to speak, of spiritual meaning as would an utterance by Sri Aurobindo couched in a similar style-key:

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,  
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!  
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:  
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss.

Nevertheless, who will call Yeats's lines inferior poetry? Who can miss in them the inspiration and the beauty that give some kind of authentic touch with a superhuman reality? It is a different kind of touch from what Sri Aurobindo manifests; yet to question its sincerity and truth would be tantamount to saying that to feel a body naked with the hand or through a transparent fabric proves actuality whereas a contact through a silk robe does not. When the inspired perfection is there, it is as much an error to level the charge of falsity at a mystical phrase for being in a

particular style with a particular content as for being written by a man like Shakespeare to whom mysticism was quite a *terra incognita*.

Suppose even the Spirit-experience of a high plane gets completely changed in the transmission; then too the result is no falsity but a new interpretative vision, the symbol of one level fused with a significance of another. An illustration is Cleopatra's rhapsodical words to Antony:

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor  
But was a race of heaven.

Though a tremendous love-thrill between two human beings has usurped here for its own glorification a mystical light, one cannot declare that, because Cleopatra was not a mystic, Shakespeare has made her play a hypocrite's role by using spiritual language for an apotheosis of sexual rapture. Mystic or no, the upshot is a ring of utter genuineness, a poetic splendour absolute in its intense yet restrained sincerity of emotion. The real-sense is perfect—since art deals with realities on various planes and is not ostensibly preoccupied with conveying the Spirit by sight, sound or significance. Any mood-thrill imparted through any species of style by any poetic temperament bears the stamp of authenticity if that one *sine qua non* is found—the unanalysable but ever unmistakable force from subtle worlds we know as Inspiration, the living experience whose sole sign of truth lies in whatever figure reveals itself of a beauty that is intrinsic and not meretricious.

26-11-1935

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

## SHOULD INDIANS WRITE IN ENGLISH?\*

A THOUGHT-provoking anecdote is told of Mahatma Gandhi and Count Leo Tolstoy. The *Cham* of Russian Literature once wrote a letter to the Father of our Nation. But Gandhiji was unable to make any head or tail of it for it was written in Russian. Gandhiji wrote back and that must have only increased Tolstoy's blood pressure. How could Tolstoy read Gujarati? The English language, though Bernard Shaw, the dare-devil, has called it "the bastard language" would have bridged the minds of the Russian and the Gujarati. English is certainly a convenient language for international communication.

We puff out our chest and say, "Our country speaks in 14 languages and converses in a plethora of dialects." But how many of us, Indians, understand each other? Why go to the whole of India? Restricting ourselves to Tamilnadu, does a rickshaw puller from Madras understand a fisherman from Kanyakumari? Yet the language they speak is Tamil. And, worse than all, when a Pondicherrian goes to Vellore or Nagercoil and wants to thank someone, he does so in a sentence made of three languages: "*Romba* thanks, *Monsieur*" and thereby baffles everyone. Yet the Pondicherrian claims that he speaks in Tamil. When such is the situation in just one state, imagine the plight of a Sardarji or a Madrassi travelling around India with no other language than his mother-tongue to his credit.

Since we do not have a common Indian language and under the prevailing circumstances can never even think of having one, English still remains and will continue to be a desirable link between the varied language-groups in our country. Take into consideration the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. People speaking nearly two dozen languages from several States of India and outside them reside there. Imagine how they would blink and stare at each other, if they knew no English.

Even during the Freedom Struggle, the slogans were only 'Quit India', 'Down with the British' and so on, but never 'Down with the English Language', for the leaders knew pretty well that it was this alien language, now one of the natural languages of India, that brought the different language-speakers under one roof. Thanks are owed to the 'Nation of Shopkeepers' without whose shops, our country would have remained a veritable Tower of Babel.

Coming to Indian Literature, how many Keralites know about our Jaykathan or Bharathidasan? But they know R. K. Narayan. How many Bengalis have read Thagazhi Sivasankaran Pillai or Kumaran Asan? But they read Mulk Raj Anand. How many Tamils have heard of Bezbaruwa or Dandinath Kalita? But we Tamils have certainly heard of Rabindranath Tagore. In Calcutta, they say sarcastically, "If you throw a stone, it will hit a poet." Yet how many of us here have known or even heard of poets other than Tagore and Sri Aurobindo? All the authors mentioned above come under one banner—Indian Writers. But authors who write in their regional

\* Paper read in the Seminar conducted by the Department of English, at the Tagore Government Arts College, Pondicherry, on March 20, 1984.

languages reach only a limited readership while those who write in English are blessed with the boon of communicating not only to the whole of India but to the whole Commonwealth and to all America, depending upon the publisher's calibre.

As a Freelance I have interviewed a handful of Indian writers in English whom I was lucky enough to meet during the darshan days of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at different times. Be he a poet or fiction-writer or literary historian or critic, my second question usually was: "Why do you write in English when it is not your mother tongue?" To my first question "Why do you write?" the writers gave different answers. But when they answered my second question, there were no two opinions. Words differed, of course, but they all said, "To reach a wider audience." A poetess told me that she faithfully followed the words of T. S. Eliot: "Write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible."

Regarding the Indian writer in English, Dr. K. P. S. Menon's old Magistrate, who was an Englishman, once remarked: "An Indian writer in English appears like a man playing a piano not with his fingers but with sticks." The Irish Poet W. B. Yeats, whose mother-tongue was not English, pooh-poohed Indo-Anglian poetry as "Mathew Arnold in a sari." It is true to a certain extent that "the subtle inwardness one feels towards one's mother tongue is likely to be missing when an Indian attempts to express himself in English". But mastery will come along with the practice of using the English language. If a Pole like Joseph Conrad or a Russian like Vladimir Nabokov or a Chinese like Lin Yutang could write in noteworthy English, why not we Indians? The colour of the skin may be different. The physical features too can differ. And even the life-style and manners may vary. But every mature skull holds enough brain.

Many Indian parents like to hear their children call them 'Daddy' and 'Mummy'. Tiny tots are well-versed in their English nursery rhymes before they learn the alphabet in their mother-tongue. In every-day life we use English side by side with the communal tongue. Sometimes it so happens that we are able to understand certain words in our mother-tongue, Tamil, only through English. *Mundakoovi* is better understood by 'Trunk Call'. Waiters in hotels will only take you for a lunatic if you order *kottai vadi neer* instead of 'coffee'. A cashier in the bank will be happy if you use the word 'cheque' instead of the Tamil equivalent *Kaasolai*. Even in remote parts of villages, the natives use at least two hundred English words in their day-to-day conversations; sometimes they use a compound word made of English and Tamil to mean the same thing. Examples would be: 'Nadu centre', 'Gate Kathavu' and 'School Pallhkoodam'. Above all, all educated Indians (though 'educated' is a very strong word, we can't afford to waste it on all and sundry) break into English nearly every third minute of the day. What I mean is that ever since the English traders came the English mind and spirit have rooted themselves in the Indian consciousness. They are a part of this country's soul-soil.

We use the English language today because of a sheer historical accident. English has been domiciled here for nearly 250 years and is now a compulsory element in all

our education. If the Indian mind masters the English language, why should it not write in that tongue? In the works of an Indian writer there is bound to be Indian-ness of thought. But what does it matter as long as it is not ungrammatical or unidiomatic or handled with incompetent technique?

Whatever is human should not be alien to us. If we can use English with some confidence why should we not speak in English? If we feel that we are at home in English why should we not write in English? By writing in English, we at the same time enrich India and enrich English literature.

P. RAJA

## THE DATE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S "SAPTA-CHATUSTHAYA"

### A CORRECTION

THE introductory note to "The Quartet of Peace", published on page 150 of the March issue of *Mother India*, contains certainly one, probably two, and possibly three dating errors. The first is obviously just a slip. It is an established fact that Sri Aurobindo left Chandernagore on 31 March—not May—1910. The other questionable matters—the date Sri Aurobindo "received" the mantras making up "Sapta-chatusthaya", and the date of his writing them down—cannot be settled with as much certainty. Sri Aurobindo does not seem to have ever said when the mantras came to him. At any rate no document or reported oral statement survives that could establish the time this important event in Sri Aurobindo's sadhana occurred. The manuscript in which the mantras and Sri Aurobindo's comments on them are written is not dated. The note in *Mother India* gives the accepted notions—that the mantras were received "in Alipore Jail in 1908-09" and written down "between his release from Jail in May 1909 and his departure from Chandernagore" on 31 March 1910. Although the lack of evidence makes it impossible to positively refute these dates, sufficient material exists to show that they are in need of modification.

The source of the accepted ideas is Arun Chandra Dutt, late head of the Prabartak Samgha, Chandernagore, who first published most of the manuscript of "Sapta-chatusthaya" in the book *Light to Superlight*. Dutt's introductory note to this 1972 text of "Sapta-chatusthaya" has been considered authoritative since then. The note that precedes the complete text, published in 1973 in the supplementary volume (Volume 27) to the Centenary Library, is based on Dutt's note.

Since 1973 a considerable amount of research has been done on "Sapta-chatusthaya". One result has been the fixing of a new date for the manuscript, and also for the "reception" of the mantras themselves.

Most of the manuscript was donated by Arun Chandra Dutt to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives in 1973. One of its sections, which Dutt thought was "missing through the carelessness of one of my fellow associates", had been received by the Archives a little before Dutt's donation. This happy coincidence made it possible for experienced persons to examine the entire manuscript for the first time. A study of the handwriting, paper, etc. convinced them that the text was written in Pondicherry around 1913. This conclusion is supported and given precision by a note found among Sri Aurobindo's papers that he wrote out the seven "chatusthayas" on 20 November 1913. There is every reason to believe that this note refers to the manuscript examined by the Archives.

The question of the date of Sri Aurobindo's reception of the mantras is far more complex. The matter is dealt with at length in a research report prepared by members

of the Archives. A long extract from this report, slightly modified for reproduction here, is reproduced below:

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted and released from Alipore jail in May 1909. Still absorbed in sadhana, he re-entered the political field, and soon found himself again the object of unfriendly British attention. Early in 1910, following an inner *ādeśa* or command, he became an exile in French India—first in the enclave of Chandernagore, near Calcutta, and then in the southern coastal town of Pondicherry. The eleven months spent in Bengal before this hegira were very active spiritually.

Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry on 4 April 1910 marks a major watershed in his practice of yoga. Ten years later he wrote in a letter:

What I started with, what Lele gave me, what I did in jail—all that was a searching for the path, a circling around looking here and there, touching, taking up, handling, testing this and that of all the old partial yogas, getting a more or less complete experience of one and then going off in pursuit of another. Afterwards, when I came to Pondicherry, this unsteady condition ceased. The indwelling Guru of the world indicated my path to me completely, its full theory, the ten limbs of the body of the yoga.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo went on in the same letter to identify "the central clue of my yogic path" as the ascension to supermind—to *vijñāna*, as it is called in Sanskrit. This movement had begun at Alipore; but it is clear from several references that it was on his coming to Pondicherry that the sadhana of the vijnana truly commenced. It was also, as Sri Aurobindo related in a talk of 1923, after his coming to Pondicherry that "a certain programme"<sup>2</sup> was laid down that he thereafter followed. He did not say in the talk what this programme was, but two other documents make it almost certain that it was the system of seven times four elements of yoga called "Sapta-chatusthaya" (*sapta-catustaya* seven tetrads), of which several explanations survive.<sup>3</sup> The first is a talk of 1926. When asked whether he had received a certain formula in Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo replied (according to the record of a disciple):

That was when I came to Pond[icherr]y when a programme of what I would do was given to me and it came to me independently and I took it down.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, "A Letter of Sri Aurobindo to His Brother", *Archives and Research*, Vol. 4, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Talk of 15 August 1923. Transcript in A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1982), p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> Besides the manuscript in Sri Aurobindo's hand reproduced in the *Supplement*, there are several "scribal copies" of "Sapta-chatusthaya" written by sadhaks during the twenties. These are based either on oral remarks by Sri Aurobindo or on a now-lost manuscript.

<sup>4</sup> Manuscript transcript of talk of 10 July 1926 by A. B. Purani. The passage quoted was not included when Purani published an excerpt from the talk in *Evening Talks*, Second Series (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1974, pp. 184-85), apparently because it does not relate to "Psychology", the subject under which the excerpt was published.



The formula in question (*śaktyām bhagavati ca śraddhā*) is one of the elements of the third "chatusthaya". The second supporting document is a letter of 1916. In it Sri Aurobindo speaks of a certain "map of my advance"—apparently the same thing as the "programme" mentioned in the talk of 1923—which he "long had... sketched out before me".<sup>1</sup> The description of the stages of this advance that follows in the letter tallies exactly with the seven "chatusthayas".

None of Sri Aurobindo's explanations of "Sapta-chatusthaya" are dated. Even if they were, or even if the dates that can be assigned to them could be accepted without question, we would still not know when the Sanskrit formulas of which the system is composed first came to him. Since it is important to determine, so far as possible, when this occurred, the matter will be examined here in some detail.

The talks of 1923 and 1926 and the letters of 1916 and 1920 referred to above, taken together, point to the period after Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry in April 1910 as the time when Sapta-chatusthaya came to him.<sup>2</sup> This gives the *terminus a quo*. The *terminus ad quem* is established by certain notes written by Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, which show that the "chatusthayas" were known before January 1912. This narrows the period down to the twenty-one months between April 1910 and December 1911 inclusive.

This dating goes against that of Arun Chandra Dutt of the Prabartak Samgha, Chandernagore, who writes in his introduction to his version of "Sapta-chatusthaya" that he

had heard from Mahaguru Shree Aurobindo that during his silent tapasya in Alipore Prison, a series of mantras was revealed in his spiritual experience.... They were recorded by him as we believe—just after he came out of jail [in 1909]—and this record of several pages of his own hand-writing—an invaluable document, is still in our possession....

This original document along with some other original writings of Shree Aurobindo—essays, epistles, historical impressions and poems—also in his own hand-writing had been received by our revered Gurudeva Shreemat Motilal Roy in February 1910, when Sri Aurobindo came to Chandernagore.... The originals were—so far as I am aware—sent in a bundle by Shree Samgha-Gurudeva to Pondicherry after Shree Aurobindo's retreat to that place.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972), p. 426.

<sup>2</sup> The letter of 1920 may be the cause of some confusion in this connection, since it speaks of "ten limbs of the body of the yoga", not seven, as one might expect. "Ten" here seems to be used in a general sense of fullness inclusive of all parts; it is meant to indicate completeness and not to specify a certain number. In April 1923 a disciple of Sri Aurobindo asked him whether the "order" of sadhana he alluded to that evening was "the same as the parts of yoga that you wrote about to Barin" in the letter of 1920. Sri Aurobindo replied: "No. That [order] is another. That was for my own yoga. It was not ten but rather seven points with a cluster of four in each." (Manuscript transcript by A. B. Purani of a talk of 21 April 1923.)

<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Light to Superlight* (Calcutta: Prabartak Publishers 1972), p. 207.

Although, as mentioned above, it is not now possible to establish positively when the mantras of "Sapta-chatusthaya" were "revealed" to Sri Aurobindo, it must be said that Dutt's recollection, fifty years after the fact,<sup>1</sup> of Sri Aurobindo's telling him that they had come to him in Alipore jail is not confirmed by any evidence. On the other hand the letters and the talks cited above cast serious doubt on Dutt's report. One of the talks, that of 1926, seems to directly contradict the possibility of an Alipore origin. A more positive rebuttal may be given to the rest of Dutt's statement. The manuscript he refers to, although undated, may be assigned with little hesitation to November 1913.<sup>2</sup> It thus cannot have been received by Motilal Roy in 1910. The "essays, epistles", etc. Dutt speaks of do seem to have been given then to Motilal, and later sent to Pondicherry.<sup>3</sup> But the "Sapta-chatusthaya" manuscript was almost certainly written in Pondicherry and later (after 1913)<sup>4</sup> sent to Chandernagore, where it remained until 1973.

Perhaps Dutt's impression that the "Sapta-chatusthaya" manuscript existed in early 1910 caused him to assume that Sri Aurobindo had received the mantras just before then, *i.e.*, in Alipore jail in 1908 or 1909. This assumption over the years may have been given the dignity of a memory of something actually spoken by Sri Aurobindo. At any rate the combined suggestion of the talks and letters quoted above, the lack of mention of "*Sapta-chatusthaya*" before January 1912, and the lack of any assertion by Sri Aurobindo that the formulas had come to him in jail, make it impossible for this writer to accept Dutt's dating. He feels that the formulas were received in Pondicherry in 1910 (after April) or 1911.

#### SRI AUROBINDO ARCHIVES

<sup>1</sup> Dutt met Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1921 and again in 1922 and 1923. See Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1978), pp. 181, 182, 187.

<sup>2</sup> See the third paragraph of the present article.

<sup>3</sup> It is significant that the "epistles, essays", etc.—now also in the possession of the Sri Aurobindo Archives—are written in a different, earlier handwriting, and on a different kind of paper from that of the "Sapta-chatusthaya" manuscript. It is also significant that while the former pieces were, as Dutt says, "sent in a bundle" to Pondicherry, the latter manuscript was not. This was apparently not because Sri Aurobindo "never called for it", as Dutt supposes, but because it did not exist when the other pieces were sent.

<sup>4</sup> A notation on a handwritten copy of this manuscript says that the original was given to a certain man of Chandernagore "probably in the year 1919 or so".

## WORDS, THE SILENT SPACE AND A SMILE

THE words we utter  
are often negligible,  
we might stammer or stutter,  
evade or even quibble.

If the antennae are intact  
we read the silent space;  
it is not the naked fact  
that gives expression to a gaze.

We see more through the inner eye,  
its images have deeper sense.  
We easily detect a lie  
neatly disguised by falsehood's fence.

Or sometimes words are made-up ruth;  
objectively, they are a fake,  
but if they serve a subtle ruth  
they are not told for falsehood's sake.

One look can often replace  
an elaborate conversation  
and the single smile of a face  
enchant a whole nation.

Finally spreading out over the earth  
it prepares the new Light's birth.

URSULA

## BRIGHT EYES

My brain darkly in its obstructed grooves  
Runs endless circuits of mismanaged fire,  
The automatic scheming of vortex mind  
Causes magic wonderments to retire.

The light that in my childhood days  
Paused not a moment on future's stair,  
Today has faded in memory's vault  
And withdrawn to its far timeless air.

In mind's stillness a yearning stirs  
And a soft supernal gleam's surmise  
Like an eternal flower's unfading scent  
Unmixed rises before my sleeping eyes.

The smile that imprints its sweetness grave  
On the all-pervading cosmic gloom  
Has a force that its tenuous grace belies  
And is a ray of wisdom's bloom.

I would that I held this ray in hand  
And trod the world-ways unerringly,  
But imperfect heart and mind's desire  
Prolong this human agony.

I grope. Endless the changes and the turns.  
Where will this agelong blindness end?  
O the predestined unlit paths that flow  
In one leap to transcend!

Nowhere these wandering words can lead,  
What solace can aching heart derive?  
The yoke of centuries I strongly bear  
And in circles strive and strive.

But demon voices come and go,  
Crescendo and disappear;  
Slowly a vast and warming glow  
Like a constant comrade draws ever near.

Sometimes I see in that light a face,  
Its eyes are fathomless Wisdom's well,  
And words that stray from its perfect lips  
A haunting dateless saga tell.

Often I feel on my heart a touch,  
A sudden charm with rose-like spells,  
And childlike lilting laughter hear  
Like a thousand happy temple bells.

ARVIND HABBU

## WERE I ONLY AN I...

WERE I only an I,  
How insignificant I would be—  
An insect buzzing on the face of earth,  
An instant wafting out of eternity.

Were I only a body,  
How cramped would I be  
In this prison of matter  
With no access to worlds subtler or higher.

Were I only a heart  
I would be most chaotic and desperate,  
Now clutching hope, now needing pain,  
At each step seeking rest,  
In imagined arms of solace  
Or lost in rainbows of desire.

Were I only a mind,  
Most dryly logical I would be  
With no light of intuition,  
Nor expanses of imagination,  
Making life a silent fire.

Even an eternity would not suffice  
to fulfil the ego of this I,  
were I only an I.

But I am All manifest in all  
now trying to find and gather  
the All in the I.

SHYAM KUMARI

## SRI AUROBINDO'S TREATMENT OF HISTORY WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA'S PAST

THE subjective treatment of history, whether right or wrong, is a trend which cannot be denied. From the days of Herodotus to Toynbee the history of historical writing points to the subjectivity of its treatment. In an extreme way it is even suggested that history is what historians want it to be. While the prime Greek thinkers thought history to be an enquiry into the past, Christian thinkers like St. Augustine considered it to be man's transaction with God. St. Augustine, by making the City of God the ultimate of history, even projected history as the future. In modern times both Hegel and Marx made history teleological, though the *raison d'être* for one was spirit and for the other was matter. Both thought history to be moving towards a future though they differed as to what the future is. Ranke denied that history has a goal and wanted facts to speak for themselves, in other words he wanted historians to be purely objective. Collingwood spoke of four aspects of history, namely, investigation or enquiry, humanism, rationalism and self-revealing Nature. These may be reduced to the objective, method, and purpose of history. Spengler wanted culture to be used as the unit of history, but thought that the history of culture was only linear and saw no need for periodisation, for he thought one culture rises and then falls giving way to another; yet he did not see any clear link among all these processes. Toynbee had a very similar concept but thought that Western Civilization is the only culture which has survived the crisis that the two great wars presented. In a way he fancied that the present world is being westernised. E. H. Carr on the other hand thinks history to be a continuous interaction or an unending dialogue of the present with the past.

Coupled with these theories and philosophies of history by western thinkers is the fact that historical writings in the west are centuries old. In India, the writing of history (in the western and modern sense of the term) is of recent origin. In the initial years history-writing was dominated by the European Indologists and the English Civil Servants. The Indian attempts at history-writing in the beginning of this century necessarily involved a defence of Indian culture and they were also influenced by the forces of nationalism. In the post-independence days the different political 'isms' have their full sway, in a way a more balanced view is emerging presently and the days of imperialistic and nationalistic or communal interpretation of India's past is becoming a thing of the past. But in all these attempts of the Indian historians and others there still remains a dominant subjective element. And there has been hardly any noticeable trend in philosophising Indian History. Various periodisations have been adopted but without any clear-cut explanation. Among these modern thinkers Sri Aurobindo to an extent was a system-builder. Though he did not write a full-scale history of India, he reflected extensively on it, wrote commentaries on great Indian works like the Veda, the Gita, the Upanishads, translated them (some partially), defended Indian Culture, wrote pieces of literary criticism on Sanskrit works and

above all periodised the history of India. He did make an attempt at evolving a philosophy of history in his work *The Human Cycle*. Simultaneously he was serialising *The Ideal of Human Unity* and continuing *The Life Divine*. While *The Human Cycle* was an exposition of the social evolution of mankind, *The Ideal of Human Unity* was an assessment of his own time and *The Life Divine* contained his ideas on future mankind. Besides, in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Essays on the Gita* and the commentaries on the Upanishads we find his reflective mind at free play on the past of India. Here an effort is being made to bring out his periodisation of Indian history.

Sri Aurobindo did not develop a system explicitly but a system can be deduced from his writings. He considerably participated in his age. His lifetime (1872-1950) witnessed a momentous Renaissance and the Freedom-Struggle in India; he played an active role in both. On the world-scale he witnessed both of the two catastrophic wars, saw western civilization at its crisis, science and technology making new strides, the communist revolution in Russia and the collective totalitarianism of Germany and Italy shaking the world to its very foundation. It was also the age of Nietzsche, Whitehead, Wells, Russell, Fermi, Sartre, Dewey, Eliot, Freud, Jung, Picasso and others. Sri Aurobindo was cognisant of them all. Yet the difficulty with him was that he was a dangerous combination, a philosopher who was also a poet and a mystic. A philosopher should be preferably a rationalistic thinker who would convincingly explain being, non-being and becoming; existence, movement and life; time, process and reality. But when the philosopher is also a poet he resorts to imagination when reason fails, he finds language and logic to be inadequate means of expression. And, in addition if he is a mystic, he explains things through spiritual and occult experiences which are not subject to tests of validity. Sri Aurobindo has to be judged against this mental background and under these peculiar conditions.

Further, every philosopher has a certain basic or fundamental framework which gets reflected in all the aspects of his writings—like theory of knowledge, concept of mind, notion of God, idea of time, outlook on man and so on and so forth. Sri Aurobindo was no exception. So let us spell out his basic position. It is difficult to reduce Sri Aurobindo to a flat principle, a set pattern or to a single conclusion. This is not to deny coherence. He shared the age of the evolutionists in philosophical writings with Whitehead, Bergson, Teilhard and others. His theory was essentially a spiritual theory of evolution. For him the creation of the world was an act of *Sachchidananda*, (being, consciousness-force and bliss) and differs widely from the materialistic, vitalistic and mentalistic theories of evolution. The self-projected process by Sachchidananda of an involution precedes the evolutionary process. Evolution has for Sri Aurobindo the triple character of widening, heightening and integration. It is a complex double process, a process of ascent of the lower principles to the higher and a process of descent of the higher principles into the lower. The principle of transformation is essential to his evolutionary synthesis. It is in other words an emergent system. For the Supreme it is a play, *līlā*, within its own being and for



the world its purpose is to complete the divinisation of the entire universe. The completion of the process is through the triple transformation—the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental. Evolution is from inconscience to ignorance and from ignorance to knowledge. This is in short the general philosophical position of Sri Aurobindo.

With the above background in mind let us explain Sri Aurobindo's treatment of Indian History. He found that history and sociology, having concentrated their attention on external data and developments, have neglected the mental, emotional and ideative being that man is. He found Lamprecht's subjective periodisation of German history worth pursuing in *The Human Cycle*. For Lamprecht the psychological stages of human history were symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist and subjective. Lamprecht arrived at his conclusions by asking, "How did things become?"—with the genetic method as the result. The key for him was culture. Ranke had asked: "How did things happen?", leading history to be objective and narrative. For Lamprecht the symbolic age was marked by fancy and imagination and there the individual was completely merged in the family and clan and had no separate identity. The typical age was the middle ages when types developed. The conventional stage marked the growth of territorial and political rulers and urban centres. The fourth stage of individualism was heralded by the Renaissance, the Reformation and rationalistic philosophy. The fifth stage or the subjective age was the age of Rousseau and the Romantic Revolt against reason. The present age (*i.e.*, his own time) is one of *Reizbarkeit* (nervous tension) with no dominant ideal and marked by enterprise, speculation and a general anxiety. The Lamprechtian conclusion was that for every age there is a psychological force which guides and impels all phases of human activity. Sri Aurobindo found the theory lacking in an ultimate teleology and wanting in explanation as to why a particular age is substituted by another. Sri Aurobindo realised the limitations of such periodisation. He wrote: "The psychology of man and his societies is too complex, too synthetical of many-sided and intermixed tendencies to satisfy any such rigorous and formal analysis."<sup>1</sup> Yet Lamprecht's stages were quite suggestive for Sri Aurobindo and he followed them up with improvements.

He found that the earliest human experiences were symbolic. He considers the Vedic times to be the symbolic age of India's history. "If we look at the beginning of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic."<sup>2</sup> But symbolic of what? He explains: "The symbol then is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities—the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the moments and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life and that shape and govern or at least intervene in its movements."<sup>3</sup> The Vedas for him were not to be dismissed as sets of rituals of an animistic culture. Those who wrote such fine pieces of poetry were not likely to be awed by nature. He gives

primacy to the spiritual and religious ideas in this age but does not rule out others. He writes: "The first, the symbolic stage of this evolution is predominantly religious and spiritual, the other elements, psychological, ethical, economic, physical are there but subordinated to the spiritual and religious ideas."<sup>4</sup> Further for him man and woman were the symbols of Purusha and Prakriti, the *Chaturvarna*—the *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* represented the Divine as knowledge, power, production and service.

The typical age was predominantly psychological and ethical, even the spiritual and religious ideas were subordinated in this age. The religion became more other-worldly. This stage marked the evolution of social ideas which shaped the types. The four orders, which were symbolic of different aspects of the Divine, became more traditional than symbolic and more set than what they were previously. Naturally the typical age gave way to the conventional stage where "the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or ideal, become more important than the ideal, the body or even the clothes more important than the person."<sup>5</sup> Once the types get fixed, the spirit departs and then the format begins to decay. Sri Aurobindo points to an example: "When the economic basis also breaks down, then the unclean and diseased decrepitude of the old system has begun; it has become a name, a shell, a sham and must either be dissolved in the crucible of an individualist period of society or else fatally affect with weakness and falsehood the system of life that clings to it. That in visible fact is the last and present state of caste system in India."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, "The tendency of the conventional age of society is to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities, to cast a stamp of finality on what seems to it the finished life of man."<sup>7</sup> Though Sri Aurobindo points out medieval Europe as the best example of the conventional age, when below the surface of poetry, nobility, spirituality, a great deal of folly, ignorance, iniquity, cruelty, oppression, suffering and even revolt simmered, a parallel from Indian history can also be drawn. Sri Aurobindo indicates how in India the essential spiritual texts like the Vedas and the Upanishads fell subsequently into the hands of scholars or pundits whose commentaries became more important than the original texts. He shows how the spirit from many ancient socio-economic, political and religious institutions has departed yet the form continues to be a mere convention. Speaking of a parallel from India's past he writes: "We see this recession in the growing darkness and weakness of India in her last millennium; the constant effort of the most powerful spiritual personalities kept the soul of the people alive but failed to resuscitate the ancient free force and truth and vigour or permanently revivify a conventionalised and stagnating society."<sup>8</sup>

The conventional age gave way to an age of individualism and reason in Europe when the Age of Protestantism was ushered in. This was essentially a revolt against the petrified typical figure. Sri Aurobindo analysing its features writes: "And it is necessarily individualistic, because all the old general standards have become bankrupt

and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being."<sup>9</sup> Though this age began as a revolt against the conventional age yet it opened a Pandora's box. It made an apparent triumph of the physical sciences, shattered the sanctified tyrannies, popularised perceptions of natural right and justice, atheism and secularism were its goal, it replaced the priests with scientific, administrative and economic experts, it asserted the individual and class interests. Though Europe passed through such an upheaval, Sri Aurobindo did not find a complete parallel in India. Pointing this out he writes: "It is in Europe that the age of individualism has taken birth and exercised its full sway; the East has entered into it only by contact and influence, not from an original impulse."<sup>10</sup> Further, according to Sri Aurobindo, the East has not been able to respond to it fully. He writes: "The East has found itself helpless in the hour of its awakening, a giant empty of strength, inert masses of men who had forgotten how to deal freely with facts and forces because they had learned only how to live in a world of stereotyped thought and customary action."<sup>11</sup> Thus for him India has not participated fully in the age of individualism and reason.

In his own lifetime he saw the individual age crumbling down and the coming of a new subjective age for mankind. It meant for him a total, "revolutionary reconstruction of religion, philosophy, science, art and society" as "the last inevitable outcome."<sup>12</sup> The coming subjective age is to be marked by a rediscovery of the soul of the nation, a realisation of a deeper knowledge, self-consciousness is to replace the self-critical man, intuitionism is to replace rationalism, self-realisation is to be its goal. However, in his own lifetime Sri Aurobindo found Europe in the grip of a false subjectivism, he found the world confusing its ego with its true soul. This was the root cause for the holocaust of world wars and all the ills that he was witnessing in the last years of his life. He writes: "But the whole root of the German error lies in its mistaking life and the body for the self."<sup>13</sup> "Thus she arrived at a bastard creed, an objective subjectivism which is miles apart from the true goal of a subjective age. To show the error it is necessary to see where lies the true individuality of man and of the nation."<sup>14</sup> It lies not in the ego, but in a self which is one in difference and relates the good of each, on a footing of equality and not strife and domination, to the good of the rest of the world. He found in his own lifetime India to be at the threshold of a possible true subjective age. The rediscovery of the soul of India through her nationalism, the general questioning attitude of the intelligentsia, the assertion of the regional identifications were all a visible sign for the coming age.

In conclusion a few observations may be made. Sri Aurobindo, though he adopted Lamprecht's periodisation for the treatment of history, did not consider it to be totally valid in every sense. He writes: "The true law of our development and the entire object of our social existence can only become clear to us when we

have discovered not only, like modern Science, what man has been in his past physical and vital evolution, but his future mental and spiritual destiny and his place in the cycles of Nature.'"<sup>15</sup> This he deals with in *The Life Divine* and other works and it is not intended here to go into his views on the future of mankind or of India. In keeping with the limitations as spelt out in the introductory part no attempt has been made to defend or to criticise the validity of Sri Aurobindo's periodisation. Besides, it has not been possible to analyse the whole of Sri Aurobindo's reflections on world history and Indian history. What may be emphasised from the above discussion is that Sri Aurobindo provides us with enough clues and a new guideline to rebuild the history of India, taking man as an ideative and psychological being. He calls for a more rational periodisation of Indian history. In other words even though Sri Aurobindo did not write a history of India yet such a venture is worth pursuing along his guidelines. It is hard to deny that Sri Aurobindo opens a new horizon to the treatment of history in general and to that of India's in particular.

SUSMITA PRASAD PANI

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All quotations from Sri Aurobindo are from *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 15.

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## A LOVER'S TALE

My Guru taught me to please the Lord by pleasing men.

"Do your work as an offering to Him... offer Him your beauty, your skill, your charm when you dedicate your dance to Him. In this way you will pass over the ocean of ignorance and illusion and He will lead you to the Truth."

He schooled us very strictly, hours and hours of practice every day when we were little girls, and when we were old enough we began to dance in public... sometimes at the Court, sometimes in the Temple; and the men would watch us, and give presents. My mother had been a dancer before me, and she taught me to be careful and prudent... to save the rich gifts I was given, and not to sell myself too cheaply. And when there was enough, she bought me a fine house with a garden where I could give private performances and my admirers could visit me. That is how we live, we dancers; that is our *dharma*... and that is what my Guru over and over told us:

"By fulfilling your own *dharma* you will cross over the ocean of life."

And for most of the men who came to us, it was their *dharma* to enjoy: to make money and to spend it... to patronise musicians and artists and fine craftsmen, and so to increase the wealth and beauty of the world. But that young Brahmin—Bilwa Mangal... he was out of place in our world. I noticed him the very first evening that he came to my house. Such a fine face! A poet's eyes... so large and warm-shining. Such a pity... I heard he lost his sight. But that was later, much later. When he came to me, he was just twenty or so, and his father was not one year dead. They had brought him up as the perfect Brahmin: eating all the right foods and none of the wrong ones, learning the scriptures, performing the rituals, always mild and polite... his parents must have been very pious and devoted—and tremendously wealthy, too. They had huge estates and herds of cows, over there across the river in that little white village you can see on the opposite bank. And then both the parents died, and he had all the money, and nothing special to do with it. Probably, without knowing it he was a bit bored with that orderly life... he had such an ardent, passionate nature! So somehow he got into 'bad company'... They weren't *so* bad after all, those young fellows, just a little wild and thoughtless, as young men are—who have nothing much to think about but enjoyment. But of course his parents would have checked him if they had been there. But they were gone and he was his own master... and his friends brought him to my place one evening—and made sure he gave a fine present on behalf of all of them!

He was bowled over! He had never seen anything like it in his life... lights and heady perfumes, silks and carpets, the music... probably they'd been drinking before they came, though they weren't drunk—they would never have been allowed inside the door if they had been. Anyway, after that he couldn't see enough of me ... and he was *very* generous—with all that money he hadn't had to earn! And he was so young, and poetic-looking, and so different from all the others... you

know, I felt somehow *responsible*—that I should look after him a bit, and teach him to take care of himself. For no one else was going to do it, that was clear! They were only out to take advantage of him! They would have ruined him in no time, and then left him to look after himself without a backward glance. I know how it is, if one is too simple and good-natured in this world! So I made him drop them all, gradually, without his realising, probably, how it happened. And he really adored me! I'd only to hint... and he would do it. I could have ruined him myself, easily... and many a girl would have done it, too; but, as I told you... I felt responsible. When someone hangs on to you like that and worships the ground you tread on and will do whatever you say.... It used to frighten me sometimes—I felt it wasn't right. Of course, I know: when a young man falls in love for the first time... and he had a lover's heart: so generous, so passionate, so.... And that had all been suppressed in his decent Brahmin home, so when it broke out.... And I *was* beautiful in those days. Did I ever show you that painting Vatsya made? But still it didn't seem right that one human being should worship another like that. It made me feel uneasy. I used to make fun of him to joke him out of it... and when I was alone I used to worry about him. He wasn't following his *dharma*... a Brahmin is supposed to seek knowledge, to love the Lord, not to pour out all his energies in pleasure-seeking. I used to tell him so sometimes, but it didn't make any impression. It couldn't enter his head, he was so intoxicated with all this new life he was enjoying for the first time.

But when the time came for him to perform his father's *śrāddha*, I insisted. It would have been very, very wrong and irresponsible of him to neglect it. Of course he protested... how could he live for a whole day without seeing me, etc. etc. But I told him that he would surely survive, and that it was the very least he could do for his father who had done so much for him, and left him all that wealth to do what he liked with. And of course he saw that... and he'd been very fond of his parents, after all. It was his nature, to be affectionate and grateful. So he arranged everything, and the night before, he stayed in his father's house... which he hadn't done for months... so as to be ready early in the morning when all the Brahmins came to go through the ceremonies.

Poor fellow! I suppose it was just a torture to him, and he was only waiting for it all to be over so he could get back on this side of the river! You can imagine... all those decorous Brahmins in their malas and white dhotis, and the chanting, chanting, and then all the namaskars and polite remarks... from four o'clock in the morning to sunset no doubt, and he all the while like a soulless thing, with his consciousness far away, and the day getting hotter and hotter and more oppressive, for a thunderstorm was brewing.... Anyway, at last they were all gone, and he rushed to bathe and change and put on silks and perfume to come to me... but before he could step out of the house, the storm broke!

It was one of those summer storms when with one great flash and crash the whole sky opens and it is as if Ganga herself were coming to earth again—and no Lord Shiva

to break the fall! When I saw how it was coming down, I told the servants to shutter the windows and bolt the doors, and we all went to bed early... nothing else to be done on such a night! But about midnight I woke to a tremendous crash... thunder, lightning, wind and rain all broke in through my window at once, and in the middle of it all, Bilwa Mangal, as if he had brought the storm in with him!

Water was pouring off him onto the floor as if the river-god himself were standing there. What a sight! I had to laugh at him, when I got over my shock.

"What a condition you're in!" I said to him; "Is that the way to come and visit a lady? Bursting through the window like a storm yourself... how on earth did you get here? You must be out of your senses!" And I really think he was... out of mind and body, no longer a man, just an urge, a passion, a storm... But my laughter shocked him back to himself a bit, and he looked down at the puddle he was making on the floor, and laughed too.

"Yes, Chintamani, I'm sorry... I must have been out of my senses; but now I have found them again, here with you—you are always so sane and right! Oh, how I have been longing and longing to get here! I thought I would fly out of my body with impatience before the day was over—all those dreary old men! Thank God it is over..." And he tried to embrace me. But he was not only soaking wet, but muddy and stinking—I wouldn't let him touch me.

"Are you crazy? Where have you been, and how did you get here? You surely didn't fly here like a god—I can see that. And how on earth could you get up here? Show me how you came up... I don't want any thieves coming up the way you have come."

He gave another little laugh, becoming more and more himself.

"There won't be any thieves about tonight, Chintamani... No thief in the world cares for gold as much as I care for you—and if you don't want people climbing up, you shouldn't leave ropes hanging..."

"Ropes hanging? I'm sure there's no rope.... Show me, where is it?"

Do you know what was hanging down? You can't believe... a huge rat-snake had got itself caught somehow in the gutter, and its long body hung down almost to the ground-floor windows. He had hauled himself up with that, and never even noticed! It really shook me... of course, it couldn't do anything to him, it was stuck fast, poor creature; maybe it was already dead... but that he didn't notice, that he could just take it for an ordinary rope that someone had carelessly left lying around...! And it was such a strange, eerie thing, to find it hanging there like that, like something out of a bad dream. It must have shaken him too. I think I screamed, I know my knees felt weak and wobbly. Just to calm myself, I think, I went on asking him questions.

"But how could you get across the river? I'm sure no one in his right mind would bring you across tonight for love or money. Or have you sunk a boat and drowned a poor ferryman in your madness? You are stinking like a fish!"

"No, no, Chintamani," he said, pulling himself together again, "I haven't

drowned anyone—not even myself! Not quite... when I was half-way across I thought I was done for and that I'd never see you again—it was so dark and cold, and such a spate! You know I'm not used to swimming—it was almost too much for me. But there was all sorts of debris being carried down by the current, and I caught hold of a log or a plank or something... and do you know, I got swept down right to your garden—can you imagine? Right to the very spot! I hauled that plank up onto the grass. Do you know the river is washing over the top step? That means it's risen at least six steps just tonight... come and look—the rain has almost stopped."

It was true... the downpour had slackened to a gentle drizzle and the wind had dropped, though lightning still flashed and thunder rumbled continuously in the distance. I was still trembling, and he was in such a strange condition—I thought a walk in the garden would calm us both down, then he could take a bath and sleep, and tomorrow would be another day... Ay me! So I forced my hand to steady itself enough to light a lantern, and we went down the dark stairs and out into the dripping garden, grown suddenly quiet, down to the water-steps. He was right: the river was rushing past with tremendous speed and lapping up against the lawn. All the steps were under water.

"Where's my plank?" he said. "I'll show you what sort of boat brought me to you, Chintamani—it must be about here somewhere...."

There it was all right... have I told you this story before? Do you know what it was? That was the weirdest moment of that whole weird night... it was a half-burned corpse, still strapped on the bier; I suppose when the river rose it must have washed out the cremation-pyre and carried the poor corpse away downstream. And that insane fellow, in the darkness, out of his mind, with that he swam across the river to me! No wonder he was stinking! And he a Brahmin too!

Looking back now, I can see his pale face again and I know that when he saw it and realised what he'd done he really almost lost his wits for ever... his eyes went blank, he started shaking all over... of course he must have been exhausted too, and it was all so confusing and unbearable. But at the time, I was too shocked and disgusted and angry and frightened to notice what sort of a state he was in... or perhaps I did notice, dimly, and it only made me angrier.... I felt so furious with him for doing everything so wrong, so out of proportion—love should be gay and light-hearted and graceful, no one should make it such a drama of life and death and sanity, like that. I started shouting at him.

"So this is the boat that you come to me on? How dare you, how can you? What kind of a Brahmin are you?... What about your *dharma*? You have forgotten all sense and reason and proportion, even risked your life without a thought—and for what? To come to *me*? What am I? Just another human being like yourself who will one day look like this corpse here too. That is no goal for a Brahmin like you... if instead you had been striving to find the Truth, tonight instead of crossing this swollen river you would have crossed over the whole ocean



of illusion and reached the arms of the Lord. Go away... I never want to see you again; you are bringing us both into sin."

I don't know where those words came to me from... I can hear myself saying them now, as if it were an actor in a play... but I'm so glad they did—it was the grace of the Lord; he saved us both.

Do you know what Bilwa Mangal did? He stared and stared at me, but I could see the blank, confused look fading out of his face, and a new light slowly dawning there. And then, very respectfully, he folded his hands and made 'namaskar'. And then he bowed down and did pranam to me, taking the dust (the mud, actually!) of my feet. And after a moment, still kneeling, he looked up at me in the lantern-light and his face was quite different... all the tension had gone out of it, it was clear and calm and very beautiful, and little tears were running from his eyes. With his hands folded together he said, very quietly, "Mother, I thank you, I thank you. You are right—till this moment my whole life has been wasted, for I have lived without longing for the Lord. That old, useless life is dead, and with your words you have given me a new life, now I have no other goal but Him. I thank you, my Guru and my Mother."

More and more tears flowed from his beautiful eyes, and I'm sure I was weeping too... it was a wonderful moment: something holy, as if the Lord Himself were there, with a hand of blessing on each of our heads. I'll never forget it....

Dawn was just coming up over the river, the sky was perfectly clear, and the first birds started singing. Bilwa Mangal walked out through the garden gate, and I felt as if I too had been reborn. I never saw him again, but I heard he became a great saint. I believe it... that was his true *dharma*.

## II

I heard that he went wandering... he must have given all his lands and cows to some temple—or perhaps he just walked away and forgot about them, he was capable of that. But anyway he lived like a wandering sadhu, accepting food from those who offered it, and caring only for his quest for the Lord. But then one day—it's what I heard—he came to a village in the morning when the women were drawing water; and one of them was specially beautiful, and he got captivated again. They say he followed her down the street, and sat on the doorstep after she had entered her house .. probably he didn't think of speaking to her, he just wanted to see her again; that was his way, to just get carried away, without a thought.

So there he was, still sitting, when the goodman came home. And Bilwa never looked like a ruffian—you could see he was a gentleman and would never do anything coarse or mean. And you know how pious and hospitable the country-people are. So the man asked him:

"Sir, can I be of service to you?"

And Bilwa, with all his unworldly simplicity, answered him frankly.

"I saw a very lovely lady enter this house. I was waiting only in the hope of seeing her once more before I go on my way."

His speech and bearing was so gentlemanly, they say, that the householder thought there could be no harm, even though the lady was his wife, if such a cultured Brahmin should look at her once; and after all he was a guest.... So he said,

"Be pleased to wait a few moments, sir. I will ask my wife to serve you food." And he went into the house to call her.

But those friendly, courteous words thrust into Bilwa's heart like a knife, and he turned away crying out,

"O impure eyes! First you enslaved me to a dancing-girl; now you would make me dishonour a married lady! Never again shall you mislead me!" And before anyone realised what he was doing, he had taken two long thorns from a Bel tree growing near, and thrust them deep into his eyes! Oh, it makes me shudder to think of it... his beautiful eyes... his whole soul shone out through them—I told you, didn't I? And the householder came out and found him with the blood running down his cheeks—you can imagine what a shock it was for him. But they say that Bilwa was weeping not with pain but with happiness, and that he went away dancing and singing "Krishna, Krishna!", for he had gained the inner sight. So they say.

And it seems he went on wandering, far from here, not giving a thought to his bodily needs, caring nothing for heat or cold or hunger or thirst, thinking only of the Lord; and I know, no one better, how self-forgetful he could be... I told you...

And at last, I heard, he came to a far forest, and was resting under a tree, when a young boy spoke to him.

"Baba, Baba, you must be hungry... Look, I have brought you something."

There must have been something magical about that child's voice. Bilwa felt the little hands and face, trying to see with his fingers as blind men do, and asking questions....

"What is your name, little one? Where do you live? What are you doing here in the forest? What is that in your hand? Oh you have brought me *roti*—how kind of you!" You know he always spoke so politely and gently... and the little one answered him,

"Oh Baba, my village is not far away... as for my name, call me what you like—I answer to whatever they call me. I look after the cows and bring them here into the forest to graze. But come, Baba, eat the *roti*. I'll bring you one every day. You will eat it if I bring it, won't you?" And they say when he tasted it, the *roti* was more delicious than anything he had ever eaten in his life. But still he did not guess—have you guessed already? You have?

Anyway, the boy would come every day and bring him a *roti*, and then go. And poor Bilwa... the days passed, and he found he was living more and more for those few moments when the little lad came each day. He was remembering the

sweet voice, and the touch of those little fingers, and imagining in his mind what the child must look like, and wishing, perhaps, that he could see him, and waiting and longing... until suddenly one day he realised with a cold shock how it was, and buried his face in his hands with a groan.

"First a courtesan then a married lady—now a child is filling my thoughts! Will I never learn to resist the allurements of this world of illusion?"

Into his bitter reverie, the child's voice broke like sweet music.

"What deep thoughts are in your mind, Baba?"

"I was thinking that I must go away from here, my child; I must not trouble you any longer. I will go to Brindavan, where my Lord lived as a boy."

"Won't you eat the *roti* I have brought you, before you go?"

"*Roti*? No, my child; now I will take food only when I reach Brindavan."

"Then," said the boy, "Baba, if you must go...let me take you to Brindavan. I know the way, it is not far." Bilwa was surprised, and touched.

"Really?" he said. "Do you really know the way? And it is not far? Then, if you will lead me... after all, I am blind... it will be very kind. Where is my stick? Come—you take one end, I will take the other, and like that you shall lead me to Brindavan."

Can you imagine? So they walked...the child in front and Bilwa following—and still he had not guessed. But after only a little while, the boy stopped and said,

"Here, Baba, here we are in Brindavan. Shall I take my leave now?"

Some note of mischief in his voice must have struck Bilwa Mangal, for he suddenly gripped the boy by his shoulder... and in that moment his eyes were opened and he saw his Lord, who had been caring for him and guiding him all the time!

"Oh, how," he cried, "how can I let you go, now I have found you at last, after searching and yearning for so long!"

Tears of bliss were flowing from his eyes, and they say that Krishna too wept as he embraced his lover. They say that in that embrace lover and Beloved melted together and became One, inseparable for ever.

Now I am weeping too, my child... I am so grateful that I knew him, and that it was given to me to say the right words at the right time. Perhaps I too, one day, shall feel the embrace of the Beloved....

SHRADDHAVAN

## WILL-POWER

“HABIT is a cable, we weave a thread of it every day; and at last we cannot break it,” said Horace Mann. This is true for a weak-willed man. The weak-willed man is governed by his habits, impulses and instincts. A man of integrity with sufficient will-power can not only control habits like smoking, drinking, etc. but also break them.

When the mind becomes active in its totality we call it will. Without this will we cannot translate our ideas or emotions into action or a dynamic state. Consequently, even though we may have lofty ideas and ideals and exalted emotions, they are not effective in our daily lives. Hence the will is of considerable importance to every individual. If the mind is integrated we can achieve many things in life. The man of weak will and a split mind should strengthen will-power and cultivate integrity of mind.

In the case of those who have suffered a nervous breakdown, the mind is disorganised and it takes a long time to get organised and integrated. First, they should try to perform the daily routine functions well. The case of a child is also similar. He cannot fix his mind on one thing well. The attention shifts from one thing to another from time to time. One should try to take up one thing at a time, *e.g.*, reading. Do not leave the book till you complete at least a chapter or till the time fixed for reading is over. One may be tempted to look outside the window and see the procession passing by, but this temptation must be resisted.

Another important side of a man's nature is that he takes up a subject for study or hobby for development, say, drawing and painting. After a time he feels that he will not succeed in it and leaves it. One should think well before taking up a subject. After choosing that subject one should not leave it halfway. One should master it. All our attention and energies have to be directed towards the development of that subject or hobby. This will unify our emotions and actions.

To strengthen our action let us have the faith that the thing we have taken up will be done completely by our effort. The Divine will help us if we are weak and unsuccessful in the beginning.

Swami Vivekananda said:

“The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves.... But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of Oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all.”

If a student fears that he will fail in an examination the possibility of his failure is increased. If a pedestrian is afraid of crossing the road, the possibility of an accident is increased. One should not be nervous in such cases, but face the situation

with courage. In order to develop the will to the full, one must have calmness of mind and conviction.

Certain postures called 'Asana' and breathing exercises called 'Pranayam' are helpful in achieving our goal. But these must be studied and practised under the guidance of a teacher.

The mind of man is largely controlled by his senses and ego. According to the modern science of psychology, man is driven mainly by the constructive urge (libido) and the destructive (mortideo). As the Gita puts it, 'buddhi' or the intelligence should govern the senses and our actions. Even if we are tempted by a call of the 'Preyas', the pleasant in life, we should stick to the 'Shreyas', the better and nobler things in life. It is easier to go to a movie and pass three hours than to sit quietly and invite good thoughts from all sides, even for an hour. Sri Aurobindo writes in his marvellous book *The Synthesis of Yoga*: "The proper action of the psychic prana is pure possession and enjoyment, bhoga. To enjoy thought, will, action, dynamic impulse, result of action, emotion, sense, sensation, to enjoy too by their means objects, persons, life, the world, is the activity for which this prana gives us a psycho-physical basis. A really perfect enjoyment of existence can only come when what we enjoy is not the world in itself, but God in the World, when it is not things, but the Ananda of the spirit in things that forms the real, essential object of our enjoying and things only as form and symbol of the spirit, waves of the ocean of Ananda. But this Ananda can only come at all when we can get at and reflect in our members the hidden spiritual being, and its fullness can only be had when we climb to the supramental ranges. Meanwhile there is a just and permissible, a quite legitimate human enjoyment of these things which is, to speak in the language of Indian psychology, predominantly, sattwic in its nature. It is an enlightened enjoyment principally by the perceptive, aesthetic and emotive mind, secondarily only by the sensational nervous and physical being, but all subject to the clear government of the buddhi, to a right reason, a right will, a right reception of the life impacts, a right order, a right feeling of the truth, law, ideal sense, beauty, use of things. The mind gets the pure taste of enjoyment of them, rasa, and rejects whatever is perturbed, troubled and perverse."

Sri Aurobindo writes in one of his letters:<sup>1</sup>

"All developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or another or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *sāmrājya*."

M. P. Pandit of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram writes:<sup>2</sup> "Of course there is a will in the mind that is so characteristic of the developed man, the mental being. It is behind the efforts to acquire knowledge and culture, to organise its experience and communicate its gains to the environment. Man becomes more civilised, cultured and ready for the next higher step in evolution as this mental will is able to impose

itself on the other, lower wills and harmonise them with itself.

"But even this will in the mind is a delegate of the will of the soul, the central purusha. When the mind ripens and awakes to the need to make way for the will of the soul, the divine element in the being, the line of crossing over from the mental to the spiritual order of life has arrived."

Meditation and concentration help us in acquiring a good will-power. Various methods of meditation and concentration are prescribed by different masters. One may choose one or two methods according to one's liking. 'Agha chakra', the centre between the eyebrows, and the 'Hrit Padma', the heart centre, are good for directing all the thoughts and emotions to one place. 'The Agha Chakra' is mainly the centre of thoughts, will and vision. The heart centre is the centre of harmony, love and good will.

The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, was asked by a disciple:<sup>3</sup> "Mother, how can one strengthen one's will?" She replied: "Oh, as one strengthens muscles, by a methodical exercise. You take one little thing, something you want to do or don't want to do. Begin with a small thing, not something very essential to the being, but a small detail. And then, if, for instance, it is something you are in the habit of doing, you insist on it with the same regularity, you see, either not to do it or to do it—you insist on it and compel yourself to do it as you compel yourself to lift a weight—it's the same thing. You make the same kind of effort, but it is more of an inner effort. And after having taken little things like this—things relatively easy, you know—after taking these and succeeding with them, you can unite with a greater force and try a more complicated experiment. And gradually, if you do this regularly, you will end up by acquiring an independent and very strong will."

Let me cite my own example, even though I do not claim a very great will-power. There was an impulse to write a romantic letter. But the next moment a higher intuition intervened and suggested, "Why not write an article on 'Will-Power'? After completing the article on Will-power you may let loose your mind." Well, here I am on the verge of completing the article. Let me see what my next activity is going to be.

Before I complete my piece let me quote Swami Akhilananda: "We must have an ideal to follow, a unified ideal. When we have that ideal or higher value of life, if the mental states can operate under it, then the mental forces are integrated and conflicts gradually dissolve. The will becomes active in its totality. Take, for instance, the national heroes. They have one ideal, and under it they organize their entire lives.

"The Hindu psychologists and some of the Western psychologists advise us to take the universal ideal, or ideal of God, as the constructive factor in developing the will. When God is taken as the unifying factor, the integrating element, or the ideal of life, all emotions, thought processes and mental states are unified; the integrated will then operates only for the good and happiness of all and not for the destruction or conflict of anyone. Personal ambitions and interests are subordinated and harmonized for the good and happiness of all."

HARSHAD H. MEHTA

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# **IGNORANCE: ITS ORIGIN, ITS LOGICAL- PHILOSOPHICAL NECESSITY AND ITS PURPOSE**

## **A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF THE NIRVISHESHA ADWAITA OF SHANKARA AND THE INTEGRAL ADWAITA OF SRI AUROBINDO**

*(Continued from the issue of March 1984)*

HERE Sri Aurobindo identifies seven kinds of Ignorance: the original, the cosmic, the egoistic, the temporal, the psychological, the constitutional and the practical. We are ignorant of the source, the Absolute, of all being and becoming and this is the original ignorance; the cosmic ignorance consists in our being ignorant of our immobile, immutable, spaceless, timeless and impersonal Self and in taking the cosmic becoming in Time and Space as the whole truth of our existence. This immutable Self is Shankara's Nirguna Brahman. The egoistic ignorance consists in our being ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence and consciousness, our unity with all the beings and considering ourselves as phenomenal creatures of limited mentality, vitality and corporeality. The temporal ignorance is due to our helpless identification with the present body, *dehātma buddhi*, forgetful of our past lives, of our eternal becoming in time. Even in this body we are ignorant of our super-conscious, sub-conscious and subliminal spheres of consciousness and existence and this is the fifth, the psychological ignorance. The psychologist probably knows something of the mind. The constitutional ignorance consists in regarding mind, life or body or any two of them or all the three as the essential truth of our being. On account of these six kinds of Ignorance, we live in disharmony with our environment and suffer pain, evil, error, and are unable to adapt ourselves to the environment. This is the seventh, practical Ignorance. To have integral knowledge, all these seven ignorances must be overcome or transformed. Here we have the pathology of Ignorance. The anatomy and pathology of ignorance are laid bare, as perhaps no psychologist or psychiatrist does anywhere else. Not only is the remedy of this malady of ignorance suggested by Sri Aurobindo during the course of his philosophy but he and the Mother have laid the foundation for that remedy.

The process, by which this ignorance is effected, is by exclusive concentration on a movement and on the form resulting from the movement. This is done by Tapas, heat or energy of consciousness. This cannot take place in a featureless Brahman. So there must be finitisation, and finitisation means name and form, which Ignorance alone can effect. Hear Sri Aurobindo on this theme: "Ignorance must be part of a movement, a development of its consciousness knowingly adopted, but to which it is not forcibly subjected, but which it uses for its cosmic purpose."<sup>1</sup> Ignorance is regarded by Sri Aurobindo "not as a blunder and fall, but a purposeful de-

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, pp 331-2.



scent, not a curse, but a divine opportunity".<sup>1</sup> The plunge into ignorance is called Involution and the return is called Evolution. It is not necessary in this article to go farther. It may, however, be noted that no philosopher has envisaged an involution as a prior condition for evolution.

The question may arise how there can be a movement and a development in the inactive Brahman. This means that the Timeless-eternity in which all is held potentially must manifest out of its potentiality foreseen truths into Time-eternity. In Time-eternity there is constant movement. Movement of what? Of form. But where? In space. This means Space and Time. Sri Aurobindo explains: "The development and progress of the world according to an original truth of its own being implies a succession of Time, a relation in Space and a regulated interaction of related things in Space to which the succession of Time gives the name of Causality.... Time and Space are that one conscious Being viewing itself in extension, subjectively as Time and objectively as Space."<sup>2</sup> This raises the problem of relation of Time to the Timeless Spirit. "What is in unmanifestation in the Timeless Eternal is manifested in Time-eternity".<sup>3</sup> So "Time-expression must be in some way pre-existent in the Transcendence and drawn from the Timeless Reality."<sup>4</sup>

Eternity is the common term between Time and the Timeless Spirit and the two are the same eternity or the same eternal in a two-fold mode of being : immobile status and motion in status.

Status and movement in status can be manifested only in space and time. Space and time are our names for the self-extension of that single Reality; in the one, Spirit looks at itself in status, and in the other in dynamic movement. Space is self-extended status of Brahman and Time self-extended movement to manifest some truths that are potentially pre-existent in its timeless status. This is the cosmos. Timelessness can be spaceless but Time-movement can be in space only. Mind measures Time by event, and Space by matter. "Our mental view of these two categories is determined by the idea of measure which is inherent in the action of the analytical dividing movement of mind. Time is for the Mind a mobile extension measured out by the succession of the past, present and future in which Mind places itself at a certain standpoint whence it looks before and after. Space is a stable extension measured out by the divisibility of substance; at a certain point in the divisible extension Mind places itself and regards the disposition of substance around it."<sup>5</sup> It is also possible to disregard the movement of event and the disposition of substance, and regard the pure movement of conscious-Force which constitutes Space and Time. So Space and Time are functions of Consciousness-Force. A higher consciousness may view the succession of Time as an eternal present and to the same

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 160-1

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 161.

consciousness Space might offer itself as a subjective and indivisible extension,—no less subjective than Time. “Space would be Brahman extended for the holding together of forms and objects; Time would be Brahman self-extended for the deployment of the movement of self-power carrying forms and objects; the two would then be a dual aspect of the one and the same self-extension of the cosmic Eternal.”<sup>1</sup> It is in this fabric that the truths foreseen are deployed and worked out. More elaboration would be a jumble of words and jingle of sounds and even this may be so, without at least some psychological basis of understanding. This is the movement of consciousness, a development willed for a purpose.

Shankara does not talk of Space and Time. To him manifestation is Mithya and so space and time, name and form are exuberances of speech, superimposition on Nirguna Brahman. Manifestation has no relation to Brahman, and cannot have it, for it affects the unity of Brahman. Without multiplicity, there cannot be a world and there cannot be multiplicity without first the basis of Ignorance, although ultimately it may be transformed into knowledge after name and form are established, which may be integrated with the universal and the transcendent at the apex of this present evolution. The contention of Shankara that, if ignorance is regarded as real, it will affect the Advaitic position, has no substance from the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo agrees with Shankara that Ignorance does not put a real limitation on the Absolute. This non-effect, according to Shankara, is because Ignorance is ontologically unreal. But Sri Aurobindo holds that the Absolute remains unaffected not because Ignorance is ultimately unreal, but because it is a modality of its manifestation at a certain level of manifestation, not opposed to it, for all is Brahman. Another reason that Shankara advances is that Ignorance, being Avidya Shakti, inconscient or material energy, is opposed to pure consciousness of Brahman and hence puts a limitation on Brahman resulting in a certain dualism, if it is regarded as ultimately real. But Sri Aurobindo calls Chit or Consciousness Chit-Shakti, where shakti is inseparable from Brahman, just as light and the sun are one. So Consciousness is not mere consciousness but Consciousness-Force and Force is inherent in Consciousness or Brahman. It assumes the mask of unconsciousness and materiality at a certain stage of manifestation. If so, Shankara's objection is that it affects the immutability of Brahman, when there occur changes in the creative force that is one with Brahman. The Gita in a way resolves, though it does not solve, this difficulty.

Chapter-7 Shloka 4 says: *bhūmirāponalo vāyuh kham mano buddhireva ca, ahaṁkāra itīyam ma bhinnā prakṛtiṣṭadhā*—“Earth, water, fire, air, ether (the five elements or conditions of material being), mind, reason, egoism, this is my eight-fold divided nature.” This is the phenomenal nature. In order to found the Integral Knowledge, the Gita makes a distinction between phenomenal and spiritual nature. The Prakṛiti described now is the Sankhyan nature. “Here is the first new metaphysical idea of the Gita which helps it to start from the notions of the Sankhyan philosophy and yet

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 80.

exceed them and give to their terms, which it keeps and extends, a Vedantic significance.”<sup>1</sup> The Gita does not stop there. Shloka 5 says, *apareyamitastvanyām prakṛtiṁ viddhi me param jīvaabhūtām mahābāho yayedam dhāryate jagat*: “There is a supreme nature of the divine, which is the real source of cosmic existence and its fundamental creative force and effective energy and of which the other lower and ignorant nature is only a derivation and a dark shadow” (Sri Aurobindo’s translation). This supreme nature is the real source of cosmic existence. This *parā prakṛti* is the timeless conscious power of the Self-existent Being. The spiritual basis for this time-existence is the Jiva. “We must be careful not to make this mistake of thinking that this supreme nature is identical with the Jiva manifested in Time in the sense that there is nothing else or that it is only nature of becoming and not at all nature of being; it is something more; for otherwise the only truth of it in the cosmos would be nature of multiplicity and there would be no nature of unity in the world. This is not what the Gita says: it does not say that the supreme prakṛiti is in its essence the Jiva, *jīvātmikam*, but that it has become the Jiva, *jīvaabhūtām*, and it is implied in that expression that behind its manifestation as the Jiva here, it is originally something else and higher, it is the nature of the one supreme Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

Shankara takes the five elements mentioned in Shloka 4 for the subtle rudimental elements (*Tanmātras*): “Manas stands for its cause, egoism or Ahankara and Buddhi for the Mahat principle, which is the cause of Ahankara and Ahankara for the Avyakta, the Unmanifested, conjoined with Avidya or nescience. Just as food which is mixed with poison is itself called poison, so the Avyakta, the First Cause, conjoined with *vāsanā* or latent unconscious impression of *ahaṅkāra*, is itself called here *ahaṅkāra* inasmuch as Egoism is the impelling cause of all” (Sri Alladi Mahadeva Sastry’s translation of Shankara Bhashya on the Gita, published by Samta Books 1981, Madras, p. 209—a translation that has stood the test of time since its first publication in 1897). How true is Sri Aurobindo’s statement already referred to above! It bears repetition on account of its solid gold of truth for eyes that can see and ears that can hear. “We eliminate along with them (ego and dualities) our existence in the cosmic movement. Thus we return to the essentially evil and illusory nature of human existence and the vanity of all effort after perfection in the life of the world.”<sup>3</sup> It is unnecessary to say how strained the meaning is, wriggled by Shankara out of plain words to suit the Advaitic philosophy. Shankara, thy Name is the magic of logic that makes the Indian cuckoo look like a crow! But with Shloka 5 that logic is not of use any longer. He admits the one is inferior and “the superior prakṛiti as pure, it is My very self, the *kṣetrajña*, that by which life is sustained, that which enters within the whole universe and sustains it.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore the *parā prakṛti* is in essence Jiva, according to Shankara. I leave it here for seekers to get hold of the statement of the Seer-Mahayogi and see

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

through the argument of the Logician-Adwaitin, although even grammatically the statement of Sri Aurobindo is correct. The greatness of the Gita is in its integration by the conception of the other prakriti that sustains the cosmos. It is this lower derived prakriti that throws off its mask and blossoms into the other or *parā prakṛti*. Here comes Sri Aurobindo's greatness as a Mahayogi; he goes beyond the Gita by his spiritual experience and adds evolution by which the *aparā prakṛti* will blossom into the other nature, Divine Nature. It is this fundamental unity that reconciles all the so-called oppositions between the individual, cosmic, and transcendent aspects of existence. There is also the Supermind to crown all in a unifying pinnacle connecting all with the Absolute. Shankara got rid of the creation, had to rid himself of the creative principle, because it was material energy at the transcendental level, for preserving the unity and unchangeableness of the Absolute. Sri Aurobindo has unified and integrated all. Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, "Avidya is not inevitable, though quite natural. We cannot strive against the inevitable. We cannot know what we cannot know. It is possible for us to check the course of Avidya and it shows that we are greater than our habits."<sup>1</sup> So it is not necessary to get rid of Avidya or Maya at the transcendental level, for Avidya is not inevitable, nay, it is natural, which means it is a modality of the Absolute's manifestation at a certain stage of development.

However Nirvishesha Adwaita questions how there can be force or creative force in Sachchidananda. There is no force at all in the triune Brahman, Sat, Chit and Ananda. This, with great respect to the Vedantin, is a great mistake in the systematised, traditional Vedanta. On account of this, Vedanta could not knit the creative force into Sachchidananda nor could it see force as a function of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo shows how force is inherent in existence-consciousness-bliss. "The answer most approved by the ancient Indian mind was that Force is inherent in existence. Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti, are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion; but when it is at rest, it exists none the less and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered."<sup>2</sup> We see the perfect rationale behind this statement when we see that even Shankara had to admit the power of Maya, Avidya Shakti, of course phenomenally. In science we have Newton's laws of motion. Every material object by the fact of its existence exerts a force proportional to its mass and according to the Theory of Relativity even motion has mass and the mass of a material body increases with the velocity, for velocity adds mass to the initial mass of the material body. And thus Force is energy. "This is once more the Indian conception of Chit, which as energy creates the world. Essentially we arrive at that unity which materialistic science perceives from the other end when it asserts that Mind cannot be another force than Matter, but must be merely development and outcome of material energy."<sup>3</sup> Again, "Absolute Consciousness is in its nature absolute power; the nature of Chit is Shakti: Force or Shakti concen-

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

trated and energised for cognition or for action in realising power, effective or creative, the power of conscious being dwelling upon itself and bringing out, as it were, by the heat of its incubation the seed and development of all that is within it or, to use a language convenient to our minds, of all its truth and potentialities, has created this universe."<sup>1</sup>

There is another reason too for saying that force is inherent in existence and this force is energy, power or Shakti. Omniscience means a complete knowledge of the total phenomena. Self-consciousness also means consciousness, total consciousness of Itself, although Shankara would not admit self-consciousness except through the agency of Maya in Nirguna Brahman. Pure consciousness is a fact of spiritual experience; but self-consciousness is the very nature of Brahman. Self-consciousness is self-knowledge. "For knowledge is power and mastery."<sup>2</sup> This is the reason why in Sachchidananda force is not mentioned, as force is inherent in existence. When it is said, Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam, Brahma, there is no aspect of bliss, because "ananta" meaning infinity connotes bliss. In the same way force is not mentioned in the Vedantic concept of Sachchidananda. The result is that traditional Vedanta forgot the implicitness of force in Sachchidananda, and all our Vedantic systems considered force, creative force, as alien to Sachchidananda and the difficulty arose in integrating creative force with Sachchidananda.

Dr. S. K. Maitra in his brochure, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, 1965, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, at p. 19 says about philosophers of a certain type: "Their mistake lay in thinking that the creative principle was something different from the ultimate reality. The result of this was either (as in the case of Vedanta) that the world came to be regarded as unreal, or (as in the case of Plato) that the unity of the system was destroyed and the ultimate principle, the creator and the world fell asunder."

So the Advaitin's objection is more than answered.

(To be continued)

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 335-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 68.

# EUROPE 1974

## A TRAVELOGUE

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OUR European friend was one of those rare occidentals who were interested in things even outside Europe. Since it was mountains that surrounded us, mountains remained the topic of our conversation for a long time. "How did this fellow get his name stuck up there on the highest peak in the world?" he asked referring to Sir George Everest. I said, "The Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society in London lauded him as one of the most scholarly persons in that era so far as Trigonometry was concerned. He was no ordinary fellow." "And I can add that he did a great work for India," said our friend and continued, "He did not conquer the peak, no doubt about that, but didn't he go even half way up?" "Are you asking me, 'Did Everest ever see Everest?'" "Well, something like that," he said sulkily. We all laughed.

I told him the story. As soon as the British settled down comfortably in India they opened a department called "The Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India" with its headquarters at Dehra Doon. Some *Kuch Kawaj* was going on when Sir George Everest was appointed as its Surveyor General. It was he who laid the foundation for a complete map of India. He trained men first, then sent them out with fourteen-inch theodolites and plane-tables north, south, east, west to survey India. They went zig-zag from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas and from Assam to the Hindu Kush. The basis was sketched by the Surveyor General himself: a meridional and longitudinal framework that would be the guiding line for all, and for this he would always be remembered. No man has done so much for the Geography of Asia than Sir George Everest. Everest measured the great meridional arch from the Himalayas to the Cape, which forms the foundation on which was calculated the mathematical spheroid which most closely follows nature's bent. This helped to measure the mountains accurately without actually setting foot on them. Surveying the mountains was far more demanding than the plains. One can easily understand this. There were in those days no oxygen-facility, no wireless contacts possible, no aerial survey, no light-weight ration. Added to this was the altitude curvature and refraction difficulties. A lesser man than Everest would have succumbed to the formidable obstacles. There are some telling lines by the poet William Blake:

Great things are done when men and mountains meet.  
This is not done by jostling in the street.

In the hoary past the Sherpas (a race of Tibetan and Mongolian origin) called Mt. Everest Chelnolungma and looked up to it as their mother goddess. Blessed by her and protected by her, they had lived contented for millenniums in a corner of the

earth most demanding and most remote. Now the Surveyor General's men started surveying the mountain. At first the peaks were only numbered. Everest was number fifteen. When Everest retired Sir Andrew Scott Waugh took charge and the work started under Everest was completed. Peak 15 was still hidden by the more prominent Kanchenjunga. Peak 15 was observed from seven stations. At places it appeared 28,000, at places even higher. The story is told in a very dramatic manner. In 1852 a Bengali officer by the name of Radhanath Sikhdar rushed into Sir Andrew's office exclaiming, "Sir, I have discovered the highest mountain in the world." Waugh wrote to the President of the Royal Geographical Society desiring to name the mountain Everest in honour of the man who had made the discovery possible. In 1856 Everest was accurately placed on the map of the world as the highest peak in the world.

Here I must mention another name, Nain Sing, who won a gold medal from the RGS. Surveying the mountains posed another great obstacle. Mostly Buddhist, the people there detested foreigners. So Nain Sing took a whole band of surveyors all dressed like Buddhist Monks. They were called Pundits by the Department. Their sextants and compasses were concealed in their robes. They carried rosaries and prayer-wheels to conceal their activities. They, it seemed, went round Everest, the peak hidden by lesser peaks. They did remarkable work, some did not return for years but finally brought invaluable information.

"Who were the Europeans or foreigners that first saw the Himalayas?" was the next query. Perhaps it was Ptolemy's men for there is a map in the name of Ptolemy. It appears that Alexander's men too may have seen something of the Mountain. Before them, Herodotus had a map showing the area populated with unicorns and gold-digging ants the size of foxes. Marco Polo describes the huge Pamir Sheep. The Arabs called the Pamir area Bam-i-Dunya (Roof of the World). The trade-route from China to Bukhara ran through the Pamir. Perhaps on the way the caravan stopped at Yarkhand the Eldorado of Asia, the richest and the most glamorous and exciting city of Eastern Turkestan. Food is so plentiful there that, they say, at one meal a rich Yarkhandi would have on his table mutton, chicken, veal, eggs, grapes, pears, apples, pomegranates, raisins, almonds, melons, apricots, tea, sugar, sweet-meats, cream milk, bread cakes and vegetables of every conceivable type. The adage goes that one who had eaten in the Yarkhandi Dasturkhan (restaurant) would not care for any food in the world.

Earlier I have mentioned only the Hindu Kush and Karakoram because they concerned us. But there are yet two other arms of the Great Pamir. Kun Lun runs towards China dividing Tibetan territory from Sinkiang the Chinese province. And there is Tian Shan that separates Sinkiang from Eastern Turkestan. Both are very high and dangerous. The whole area fires our imagination to the utmost. It is the area where three Empires meet. But where exactly do they meet? Behind all travels and discoveries in the area one idea remains dominant: that is to draw the boundary-line between the three empires. Oxus should be the boundary, many thought. So

travellers went out purposely to find the source of the Oxus. Wood was one who travelled beyond the Great Pamir and found a wondrous lake Sir-i-Kol. He thought that was the source of the river and called it Lake Victoria. But eventually it was found that many small rivulets join together to form the river Oxus and all these rivulets have names given by the local people; so none can be called Oxus. If the southernmost river is taken as the boundary, then Bukhara, Samarkand and Badash-khan should be ours but we know very well that these are already under what may be called the sphere of influence of the great bear. Wood gives us a vivid picture of the glory he had seen near Sir-i-kol: "From the ice flowed an enormous river washing out huge blocks of ice making a sound like distant cannon."

"Why is Nanga Parbat called by that name meaning 'Naked Mountain', since none of the other peaks are draped in Seville Row suits?" This was my friend's third question. Nanga Parbat can be called the termination of the Himalayas proper. After Nanga Parbat flows the river Indus. Generally to see Nanga Parbat one has to climb the mountains on the west side of the Indus. From a valley floor of, say, two thousand feet the peak rises twenty-six thousand feet straight. It is an awesome view, they say. Rather frightening, some have recorded. This straight rise without ceremony or décor earned it the name Nanga Parbat.

Did you know that Leonardo da Vinci was a bit of a mountain-climber? What peaks of culture he conquered we all know, but this is a bit of news, isn't it? It seems he climbed D'Olen Olen in the Monte Rosa range and he went up to 10,000 ft. and reported seeing a large mass of ice formed by layers of hail which impressed him very much.

*(To be continued)*

CHAUNDONA S. BANERJI