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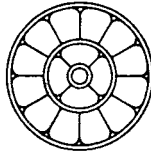
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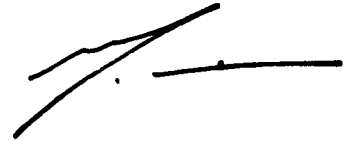
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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“I AM WITH YOU”

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

“I am with you.” What does it mean exactly?

When we pray or struggle with a problem within ourselves, are we really heard, always, in spite of our clumsiness and imperfection, in spite even of our bad will and our error? And who hears? You who are with us?

And is it you in your supreme consciousness, an impersonal divine force, the force of Yoga, or you, Mother in a body, with your physical consciousness? A personal presence that really knows each thought and each act and not some anonymous force? Can you tell us how, in what way you are present with us?

Sri Aurobindo and you, it is said, form one and the same consciousness, but is there a personal presence of Sri Aurobindo and your personal presence, two things distinct, each playing its own particular role?

I AM with you because I am you or you are me.

I am with you, that signifies a world of things, because I am with you on all levels, on all planes, from the supreme consciousness down to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It saturates the atmosphere almost materially, in the subtle physical, and extends to the Lake, ten kilometres from here. Farther, my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, then on the mental plane and the other higher planes, everywhere. When I came here for the first time, I felt the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo, felt it materially at a distance of ten miles, ten nautical miles, not kilometres. It was very sudden, very concrete, an atmosphere pure, luminous, light, light that lifts you up.

It is now long since Sri Aurobindo has put up everywhere in the Ashram this reminder that you all know: “Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you, because she is, indeed, always present ”

This is not a mere phrase, not simply words, it is a fact. I am with you in a very concrete manner and they who have a subtle vision can see me.

In a general way my Force is there constantly at work, constantly shifting the psychological elements of your being to put them in new relations and defining to yourself the different facets of your nature so that you may see what should be changed, developed, rejected.

But that apart, there is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself,—and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so

that I may send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful. These communications reach me evidently at any moment, and you must have seen me more than once stop suddenly in the middle of a sentence or work; it is because something comes to me, a communication and I concentrate.

With those whom I have accepted as disciples, to whom I have said Yes, there is more than a tie, there is an emanation of me. This emanation warns me whenever it is necessary and tells me what is happening. Indeed I receive intimations constantly, but not all are recorded in my active memory, I would be flooded; the physical consciousness acts like a filter. Things are recorded on a subtle plane, they are there in a latent state, something like a piece of music that is recorded without being played, and when I need to know with my physical consciousness, I make contact with this subtle physical plane and the disc begins to turn. Then I see how things are, their development in time, the actual result.

And if for some reason you write to me asking for my help and I answer "I am with you", it means that the communication with you becomes active, you come into my active consciousness for a time, for the time necessary

And this tie between you and me is never cut. There are people who have long ago left the Ashram, in a state of revolt, and yet I keep myself informed of them, I attend to them. You are never abandoned.

In truth, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life.

Now remember one thing. Sri Aurobindo and myself are one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this force or this presence, which is the same, passes through your individual consciousness, it puts on a form, an appearance which differs according to your temperament, your aspiration, your need, the particular turn of your being. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, if I may say so; it makes a choice and fixes one possibility out of the infinity of divine possibilities. In reality, the Divine gives to each individual exactly what he expects of Him. If you believe that the Divine is far away and cruel, He will be far away and cruel, because it will be necessary for your ultimate good that you feel the wrath of God; He will be Kali for the worshippers of Kali and Beatitude for the Bhakta. And He will be the All-knowledge of the seeker of Knowledge, the transcendent Impersonal of the illusionist; He will be atheist with the atheist and the love of the lover. He will be brotherly and close, a friend always faithful, always ready to succour, for those who feel Him as the inner guide of each movement, at every moment. And if you believe that He can wipe away everything, He will wipe away all your faults, all your errors, tirelessly, and at every moment you can feel His infinite Grace. The Divine is indeed what you expect of Him in your deepest aspiration.

And when you enter into this consciousness where you see all things in a single look, the infinite multitude of relations between the Divine and men, you

see how wonderful all that is, in all details. You can look at the history of mankind and see how much the Divine has evolved according to what men have understood, desired, hoped, dreamed and how He was materialist with the materialist and how He grows every day and becomes nearer, more luminous according as human consciousness widens itself. Each one is free to choose. The perfection of this endless variety of relations of man with God throughout the history of the world is an ineffable marvel. And all that together is only one second of the total manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is with you according to your aspiration. Naturally that does not mean that He bends to the caprices of your outer nature,—I speak here of the truth of your being. And yet, sometimes he does fashion himself according to your outer aspirations, and if, like the devotees, you live alternately in separation and union, ecstasy and despair, the Divine also will separate from you and unite with you, according as you believe. The attitude is thus very important, even the outer attitude. People do not know how important is faith, how faith is miracle, creator of miracles. If you expect at every moment to be lifted up and pulled towards the Divine, He will come to lift you and He will be there, quite close, closer, ever closer.

“TO BE NEAR ME”

In order to be always near me really and effectively you must become more and more sincere, open and frank towards me. Cast away all dissimulation and decide to do nothing that you could not tell me immediately.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Centenary Edition, Vol. 13, pp 75-78.)

TOWARDS UNION

WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO

OUR nature, our consciousness is that of beings ignorant of each other, separated from each other, rooted in a divided ego, who must strive to establish some kind of relation between their embodied ignorances; for the urge to union and forces making for union are there in Nature. Individual and group harmonies of a comparative and qualified completeness are created, a social cohesion is accomplished; but in the mass the relations formed are constantly marred by imperfect sympathy, imperfect understanding, gross misunderstandings, strife, discord, unhappiness. It cannot be otherwise so long as there is no true union of consciousness founded upon a nature of self-knowledge, inner mutual knowledge, inner realisation of unity, concord of our inner forces of being and inner forces of life. In our social building we labour to establish some approach to unity, mutuality, harmony, because without these things there can be no perfect social living; but what we build is a constructed unity, an association of interests and egos enforced by law and custom and imposing an artificial constructed order in which the interests of some prevail over the interests of others and only a half accepted half enforced, half natural half artificial accommodation keeps the social whole in being. Between community and community there is a still worse accommodation with a constant recurrence of the strife of collective ego with collective ego. This is the best that we can do and all our persistent readjustments of the social order can bring us nothing better than an imperfect structure of life.

It is only if our nature develops beyond itself, if it becomes a nature of self-knowledge, mutual understanding, unity, a nature of true being and true life that the result can be a perfection of ourselves and our existence, a life of true being, a life of unity, mutuality, harmony, a life of true happiness, a harmonious and beautiful life. If our nature is fixed in what it is, what it has already become, then no perfection, no real and enduring happiness is possible in earthly life; we must seek it not at all and do the best we can with our imperfections, or we must seek it elsewhere, in a supraterrrestrial hereafter, or we must go beyond all such seeking and transcend life by an extinction of nature and ego in some Absolute from which this strange and unsatisfactory being of ours has come into existence. But if in us there is a spiritual being which is emerging and our present state is only an imperfection or half-emergence, if the Inconscient is a starting-point containing in itself the potency of a Superconscience and Supernature which has to evolve, a veil of apparent Nature in which that greater consciousness is concealed and from which it has to unfold itself, if an evolution of being is the law, then what we are seeking for is not only possible but part of the eventual necessity of things. It is our spiritual destiny to manifest and become that

Supernature,—for it is the nature of our true self, our still occult, because unevolved, whole being. A nature of unity will then bring inevitably its life-result of unity, mutuality, harmony. An inner life awakened to a full consciousness and to a full power of consciousness will bear its inevitable fruit in all who have it, self-knowledge, a perfected existence, the joy of a satisfied being, the happiness of a fulfilled nature

(The Life Divine, pp. 1034-1036.)

LAST WORDS OF THE GREAT

THE earliest bit we know of speech by an illustrious figure just before the Great Silence, is to be found in Plato's *Dialogues*. Socrates is lying on the stone-bed of a common jail. Because of his free and fearless inquiry into the bases of being and life and action he has been accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and condemned to die by drinking a cup of hemlock. His disciples are now gathered round him. He has just concluded an illuminating discourse on the soul's immortality. He has argued that a wise man never looks on death as an enemy, for death liberates the mighty soul in us that the load of a limited body has oppressed and darkened and enfeebled. Then he drinks the fatal potion. Slowly the chill creeps up: first the legs go numb, then the waist, and the heart is flickering out. But in the space of a split-second Socrates has turned to Krito and spoken the last of the thousands of wonderful words that Plato has embalmed for us and that constitute the sublimest philosophy Europe has seen

What are these final significant words? They are a pious triviality in appearance, yet they are most profound—the essence of a philosopher's personality and message. "Krito," said the beloved satyr-face which was like a god's in intellectual light to the *literati* of Athens, "I owe a cock to Aesculapius; discharge the debt and by no means omit it." What shall we make of this? The key to the riddle is in the name Aesculapius. Aesculapius is the Greek God of healing and medicine. And Socrates feels grateful to him and wants to offer a cock at his altar as a sign of thankfulness because Fate has been good and obliging enough to put Socrates, without any contriving of his own, in the way of that master-medicine, that panacea for all the ills of existence—the poisonous hemlock! Truly, a laughing lordly luminous gesture in the face of "liquidation" (to use a term our modern totalitarians have made notorious)—a gesture expressive of Socrates's heroic optimistic nature and consistent with his doctrine of the soul's superiority to the body's desires and delights.

It is a far cry—across gulfs both of time and of psychology—from Socrates to Lord Chesterfield. Socrates is a summit-figure, Lord Chesterfield is very much of the lowlands. And they died in entirely different circumstances. Lord Chesterfield was not forced to quit the world by any decree except of old age and he was not adored by any disciples as a living torch of the eternal verities. But there is a certain tie of courage and composure between the last words of this eighteenth-century society-man and that voyager through strange seas of thought in the fifth century before Christ. His lordship was gasping for breath as he lay dying—the eyes were getting glazed—when an acquaintance came into the room. The dying man saw him and just a moment before consciousness got switched off he said to an attendant: "Give Dayrolles a chair." That was all. We may dismiss the utterance as insignificant, as hardly weighty or poignant. But we would be making a mistake. Here too is a whole philosophy summed up, though of quite a

dissimilar class to the Socratic wisdom of happy idealism. What is chiefly to be noted here is the civility of the courage displayed. In this the words are an epitome, a quintessence of the whole eighteenth century, the Age of Reason, on its side of social manners.

There must be above all things an aplomb and a polish in every activity: that was the master-dictate of social education in that century. The Virtues were respected—but more prominent than the Virtues stood the Graces. We must walk and talk gracefully, we must sit and rise gracefully—we must never lose our self-possession, we must never cut an awkward and uncivil figure in people's eyes, no matter what agonies we may be suffering, what inconveniences we may be enduring. Admitted that behind this all-pervading gracefulness there was no motive of serving other people at one's own sacrifice, no high altruistic impulse; admitted that there was a certain superficiality about the whole business, a desire merely to please and be popular. But though the ends were most trivial the means were sometimes splendid. Lord Chesterfield who wrote those famous letters to his son about the art of being graceful in everything was not treated kindly by time. He had lost his office, he was fast losing his teeth and, what was the unkindest blow to a lover of society, he was losing his hearing. But does he complain? Never a groan escapes from those suave lips. And then this suavity reaches a climax on that day when the supreme servant of the Graces, who was so faultless in comporting himself and in disposing his body whether in motion or at rest, lies helplessly stretched out with a minute between himself and most ungraceful corruption. The mind is still far from helpless and knows its manners. What are one's personal pain and dejection at the inevitable hour, if a visitor is polite and comes in to watch one's getting the finishing stroke? One must not seem inconsiderate or be boorish enough to grumble about oneself, but always act the perfect host. Lord Chesterfield's life may be hanging by a thread, yet Dayrolles must be given a chair!

As much a temperamental contrast in their own way as ancient Athens to the eighteenth century were the early years of the nineteenth. The Romantic Movement in poetry was sweeping over England. The best minds did not care much for manners or restraint. They were now for colourful personality and burning spontaneity—the bright beautiful *élan* of Nature. One of the most romantic of the Romantics was the young poet John Keats. Byron made a parade of his aristocratic contempt of laws and scattered over half Europe sparks from his persecuted red-hot heart. Shelley threw an iridescent innocence of man-made conventions in the face of his family and friends and built in bitter exile shimmering visions of light and liberty. They both were romantic not merely in the sense of feeling a vast and vibrant wonder in the world but also in the sense of having an uncommon and fiery love-life. In one sense, however, Keats's love-life beats theirs in the romantic element, for it is compact with tragedy. Byron found refuge in many fair and fond arms. Shelley had that gem of a woman for his

wife—Mary Godwin—and she made up for his misalliance with Harriet Westbrook. Poor Keats fell in love with Fanny Brawne who was not his type, and she by her light-headedness caused him extreme misery. Yet Keats who loved this beautiful woman in vain did not blaspheme against the beauty that was such a heartbreak for him. To him beauty was ever to be worshipped, whether it hurt or gave happiness. For beauty is a divine spirit and only by feeling its divineness everywhere can we grow both in life and art. Keats never faltered in his keen response to that spirit. Tragedy was his not alone in his love-life: the very stuff of living grew tragic by the grim disease that was eating up his lungs. Shelley and Byron suffered a good deal and died young, but neither was gnawed away physically as Keats the consumptive and neither died at so early an age with so much promise unfulfilled. If ever a poet had reason to despair and deem existence unbeautiful, it was Keats. Had he died with a curse on his lips we could easily have forgiven him. Far from turning black with hate, he was to the end, for all the mental and bodily agony through which he passed, the romantic poet *par excellence*. The world's wonder was still an intoxication in his brain—and even the idea of death came to his fading consciousness in the sweetest form the world's beauty can take: flowers! Not the crumbling of the limbs nor the worm's depredation on the flesh haunted him; even as the slashes of misfortune on his young life were forgotten, they too were lost in the vision that prompted those exquisite last words: "I feel the flowers growing over me."

Not exquisite but august were the last words of the poet who out of all the singers of that period stood in length of years at the other pole to Keats and who was the most fulfilled and complete man of the age. Goethe died at eighty-three in absolute possession of his powers and those powers were manifold. He had been poet, dramatist, novelist, critic, autobiographer, philosophic thinker, scientific researcher and as each one of these he had been "top-notch". We may remember the lines Sri Aurobindo wrote as a student at King's College, Cambridge, about this versatile genius who stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries:

A perfect face amid barbarian faces,
A perfect voice of sweet and serious rhyme,
Traveller with calm, inimitable paces,
Critic with judgment absolute to all time,
A complete strength when men were maimed and weak,
German obscured the spirit of a Greek.

Nor had Goethe lacked in large concrete experience: life he had known at first hand in various fields and with intensity as well as co-ordination. "The whole, the harmonious whole" had been ever his cry. His is what Edmund Gosse designates "the broad light" which tends to a cultural comprehensiveness and

globality, most appositely are we asked by Gosse to “sun ourselves” in the genius of Goethe. For a sense of the universal sun is at the centre of that genius. Nor is the quality of being universal the only one that Goethe’s solar sense conveys. Just as the sun contains various colours fused together in a single glory, so too the whole for which Goethe aspires fuses together all the values and ideals—Beauty, Goodness, Truth—in a sort of super-value, super-ideal, which transcends them and which may be named the “All-Enfolder” and the “All-Upholder”, the Divine Being. Thus there is a mystic strain in Goethe’s sun, though he was no practising mystic but an intellectual with a fine wide mental notion of the Supreme Substance and Presence that both upholds and enfolds the universe. The penchant as of some Magian or Rishi of the East is associated in Goethe with yet another sun-quality. The sun searches with its radiance all kinds of vistas and yet remains aloof and unaffected: in the Goethean culture a keen curiosity for knowledge of every kind, a Faustian gusto to probe into every species of experience, is combined with a calm poise and detached balance, an Olympian tranquillity—a tranquillity in which lies the secret of an accurate inward ordering of the diverse knowledge and experience gained. Poet that Goethe was, his aspiration for a sunlike culture translated itself outwardly into an intense urge, openly expressed by him at times, to worship the orb of fire which wheels over us day after day. Considering all these factors, the way he died was the most naturally symbolic possible of both his trend and the instinctive harmony that was in his life. Half an hour before his death he requested his daughter-in-law to open the shutters and let the sunshine enter the room. He was sitting in his arm-chair, serene and unbroken. Then the end came. He turned his face to the window, said “Light! More Light!” and said no more.

Perhaps I too should say nothing more after so impressively meaningful an accident of final speech. But a little “more light” on the psychology of last words will not be amiss if I follow the Goethean ideal of all-roundness by adding to the utterances of great men one at least of a great woman. Bold in tone and with a fine touch of philosophic irony is Harriet Martineau’s “I see no reason why the existence of Harriet Martineau should be perpetuated.” It is almost as if Bernard Shaw were speaking with his stress on the Life Force that is working out the problem of creating the superman by using every individual as an experiment on the path to that goal, an experiment not to be belittled but also not to be given an exaggerated importance, an experiment to be accepted as a mere stepping-stone soon to be passed over for Nature’s pressing onward to perfection. Shaw has often thrust himself into the limelight because he does not believe in false modesty and because he feels charged with a mission to make his contemporaries wiser and happier. At the back of his “push” there is no feverish egoism of a tiny clod trying to magnify itself. Shaw believes in living for the larger reality of the race, the larger godhead of the Life Force. And characteristically he has often flaunted his utter disdain for personal safety and survival: under the London

blitz, for instance, he never left his bed for a bomb-shelter. He has always stressed the desirability of living, instead of the maximum of seven or eight decades, a couple of hundred years in order to have time enough for learning wisdom, yet he has never wanted Bernard Shaw to go on and on nor has he ever shirked being thrown, as he would say, on the scrap-heap. It is a pity Harriet Martineau has stolen what he would have most liked to utter on the day which all of us who have appreciated his wit and clear-headedness had hoped would be long deferred. In any case, we cannot help admiring Harriet Martineau's spirit. An effective supporter of the poor and the down-trodden during the nineteenth century by her noble and penetrating pen, she was unperturbed by the Arch-Terror and kept true to her ideal of setting her own self at a discount. Coming from a sex which is supposed to be swayed by the nerves rather than the will, her steady farewell speech is all the more arresting in its lightly carried, almost gaily stoical, solemnity. Not alone of Shaw is she the compeer: she could also have coolly and sweetly drunk the cup of Socrates.

K. D. SETHNA

REVITALISING INDIAN CULTURE: THE TASK AHEAD

IN a previous article we have said that the need of the hour for India today is not a nostalgic dreaming of our past greatness but to think, dream and work for building a new and greater India of the future. But the future cannot be created in a vacuum. It has to be built out of the essence of the past. The power to shape the future has to be drawn from the roots of our national vitality and the spiritual and psychological resources of a nation.

As we have said already, in the ultimate analysis the long-term viability and progress or the “sustainable development” of a nation depend not so much on its material, ecological or technological resources but primarily on its spiritual and psychological resources. And the greatest of the spiritual and psychological resources of a nation are its people. And in the Indian view Man is primarily a spiritual and mental being, or in other words a soul and a mind, and only instrumentally a vital and physical being or a life and a body. In a similar way the essential and enduring part of a collective being like a nation is not its economics, politics or ecology which form its outer body but its Culture which is the expression of its Mind and Soul. So the other important source of the spiritual and psychological resources of a nation is its cultural heritage.

But what exactly are the essential cultural resources of a nation? They are, basically, the original insights and the unique temperament and genius of its mind and soul. So it is not the outer forms of music, art, literature or architecture etc. but the inner spirit, vision, insight and the spiritual, mental and moral attitude, ideal, temperament and the distinctive genius behind these forms that are the enduring and essential cultural resources of a nation. It is this inner spirit behind the outer forms of culture which every nation has to preserve from its past heritage and make it a foundation for its future evolution and progress. This does not mean that the outer forms of culture have no value or significance. But a mere decorative preservation of the outer forms, without making any attempt to cultivate in the consciousness of the people a living understanding of the inner spirit of culture, does not have any creative value for the higher cultural life of the nation—whatever may be its economic utility as “tourist attraction” or its entertainment value in catering to the superficial tastes of the masses. Even in tourism, if it has to become an instrument of culture and not, as it is now, an instrument of commerce to fill the nation’s coffers with foreign exchange, the primary aim has to be to awaken the tourist to the inner spirit of culture and make him aware of the fact that the outer form has value only as an expression of the spirit. So just as the outer material and economic progress and well-being of a nation depends on a scientific preservation and harnessing of the material and biological resources of its ecological heritage, the inner evolution and progress of a nation depends on the enlightened preservation and harnessing of the spiritual and psychological resources of its human and cultural heritage. Our earlier

article has already indicated the immense potential of culture for motivating people. A national discipline and system of motivation based on the unique cultural genius and temperament of a nation can lead to a natural and spontaneous release of the deeper creative energy of its people. Here comes the importance of the study of Indian Culture not only for India but for humanity as a whole.

There are two aspects or elements of Indian culture which we have to study carefully and understand thoroughly in order to harness fully its creative potential: first is the element of universality in its essential insights which gives it a global validity and second is the element of uniqueness of its essential temperament and genius which distinguishes it from other cultures and is therefore of special importance to India. The founders of Indian culture were not ordinary men or mere intellectual thinkers but spiritual seers, Rishis, who lived in constant communion with a universal and eternal consciousness beyond Mind and saw and knew from it the deepest truth of Man, Life and Nature. They tried to build human society on the foundations of some universal spiritual and psychological principles which govern human life in the individual and the collectivity. The values and ideals of Indian culture are based on and evolved from these deeper spiritual discoveries of our Rishis.

But the orthodox exponent of Indian culture asks us to accept this fact on the basis of a blind belief in the greatness of our ancient Rishis and wants to revive the old ideals and values as they were without any remoulding and modification. Such a static and inert approach to Indian culture can never be progressive and creative. If the insights of our ancient Rishis are to be made living and creative for the present, they have to become our own insights. We have to rediscover them again through spiritual experience, vision, intuition or reasoning and make them our own. And again if these insights have to become living and creative for shaping the future we have to re-examine their applicability to the modern and emerging society.

The insights of our ancient Rishis may have a universal and eternal relevance but the way and the form in which they were applied or expressed in ancient Indian society have only a limited and temporary validity. The master-builders of Indian culture may have seen the truth of things in its essence and wholeness but the evolutionary condition or consciousness of the society in which they lived may not have been ready or prepared to receive, express and manifest the entire truth they had seen. That the Vedic sages were well-aware of this fact is clear from their description of humanity as an one-year old infant. They might have revealed only that much of truth which the infant humanity of their times was able to assimilate and express. So there could be a considerable dilution of the original insights of the Rishis when these insights took a final form in society—a partial step-down from the spiritual truth seen to the truth revealed or sought to be realised in society, then a further dilution in the mental ideal

through which it was expressed in thought and again a still further degeneration in the process of practical compromises which the ideal had to make in order to acquire a vital or material form in society. So one of the first tasks in revitalising Indian Culture is to recover the original spiritual and psychological insights behind its past ideals and forms and re-examine their relevance and applicability to the present society. The other task is to examine how best these insights can be re-applied to the progress and evolution of modern society by giving them new and greater forms of self-expression suited to the present evolutionary conditions of humanity.

The other aspect of Indian culture is its uniqueness, its special temperament and genius which distinguishes it from other cultures. The main features of this uniqueness are an inborn spirituality and passion for the Infinite, and a scientific and pragmatic turn of mind in the field of religion and psychology—or, in other words, in the field of spiritual and psychological self-exploration and self-development, its tendency to create from within outwards, its primary stress on inner progress, its repeated emphasis on renunciation and sacrifice as the means for this inner progress, and finally the great respect it shows to the spiritual renunciate Sannyasi. There are many others but these are the major and prominent features of the unique and special temperament and genius of Indian culture. We have to understand deeply and clearly these different aspects of our national temperament and genius, make them the basis of our motivational strategies and try to manifest them in every part of our national life

Another important factor which has to be kept in mind is that culture, like any other human organism, is also capable of evolution and progress. The cultural vision of a nation can undergo expansion and enlargement, constantly enriched by new insights from the succeeding generations of seers, prophets and thinkers from within itself or from a cross-cultural fertilising from other cultures. This fact applies not only to art, science, philosophy and literature but also to religion and spirituality. Spiritual experience and spiritual thought are also capable of progressive evolution in the form of new discoveries and revelations in the realm of the Spirit and new forms of creative self-expression and synthesis in spiritual thought. So the spiritual intuitions, revelations and discoveries of our modern seers like Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Swami Vivekananda are also as much a part of our priceless cultural heritage as the revelations of our past seers. This is something which the orthodox exponent of Indian culture still refuses to accept. He is ready to accept a new spiritual teaching if it does not cross the boundaries of the ancient teaching. He is also ready to accept innovations within these boundaries. But when the new revelations go beyond the ancient revelations and enter into unexplored vistas of the Spirit, he becomes suspicious and protests and complains. But is it wise to set such limits to the possibilities of the spiritual quest which is a quest for the Infinite? As Sri Aurobindo points out in one of his letters:

“Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth may be an infinite process... not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the nutshell all over again, each tremblingly fearful not to give the lie to the ‘past’ seers and sages.”¹

Swami Vivekananda also said something similar in one of his lectures:

“Is God’s book closed? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? The Bible, the Vedas, the Quran and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all the prophets of the past, great ones of the present and to all that are to come in the future.”²

The above inspiring words of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda reveal the right attitude in dealing with the past and future of Indian Culture. Spirituality is the essence of our national genius. It is the “distinctive competence” of our nation and the source of our national vitality. If the vitality of Western culture lies in its creative and progressive endeavour in secular sciences and the application of science to social progress, the vitality of Indian culture and civilisation lies in its creative and progressive endeavour in spiritual science, thought and practice. The future of Indian civilisation and culture depends on maintaining this creative and progressive attitude to our unique national genius and harnessing its potential for the progress and development of our own nation and humanity as a whole

This is the first part of the future work and mission of Indian Culture: To recover our past cultural heritage and national genius. But there is another and more important task ahead to fulfil the destined mission of Indian Culture. This other part of the work is to discover the secret of collective spiritual transformation. If the greatest contribution of ancient Indian Culture to humanity is the discovery of the ideal and practice of individual spiritual liberation, Moksha, the future mission of Indian Culture is to discover and work out the ideal and practice of collective spiritual perfection. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“This must be her mission and service to humanity,—as she discovered the inner spiritual life for the individual, so now to discover for the race its integral collective expression and found for mankind its new spiritual and communal order.”³

M. S. SRINIVASAN

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL), Vol 26, p 135
- 2 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol 2, p 374
- 3 SABCL, Vol 16, p 330

THERE ARE THOSE

THERE are those who claim to have
 a different God from mine.
 More than One Creator? More than
 One Divine?
 There are those who shun and
 ostracize and maim
 Because they have a different ritual
 and say a different name.
 There are those who make a claim
 To have a special line to the Divine
 and they defame
 And denigrate another's way of
 giving, of self's proffering;
 They say theirs is the only way of offering.

And what of those who say they
 do not believe in a Creating One?
 Do they believe in a flower, a stone?
 The sun?
 Call of bird at midnight heard through
 a silence calm and deep
 When all nature is asleep?
 Tenderness of a loving kiss?
 In this—in all of this
 Is subtle remembrance of That,
 from which all came.
 It doesn't matter what you call or
 uncall HIM; He doesn't need a name.

*How can you see a tree
 And not see me?*

To believe or not to believe you are free,
Not to believe is also in ME.
EVERYTHING IS IN ME!
Nothing can be outside of ME.

There are those who say they know
 what I will do.
They claim to have a special overview,
When I am not always sure how I
 will move, of what will be!
I, too, await the final mystery!
My nature, joy, is to expand.
Is it too much for you to understand?
Do not try to divide me like a cake
For each one to take
A piece and call it all.
And the biggest portion does not always fall
To the most deserving, the one in greatest need
But often to the one with greatest power and greed!

Well, even the little monkey Rhesus
Cuts me into digestible pieces;
Give up that primitive, primate role.
See Me as one and take the whole!

You are wandering in the foothills
 of my giant mountain range.
Climb me higher and higher—see how
 the vistas change.
When you reach my highest pinnacle
Look down. Everything merges under my sun,
Look up and all is 'OM'— my light—and all is ONE!

ELIZABETH STILLER

SRI AUROBINDO'S SYSTEM AND THE DOCTRINE OF AVATĀR

IN the contemporary Indian philosophical scene, the ideas of no other thinker are so seriously worked upon, interpreted and critically considered as those of Sri Aurobindo. One of the creative exponents of the Hindu Philosophical tradition, Sri Aurobindo is known for the renaissance in Hinduism. His presentation of the orthodox Hindu doctrines is refreshingly original.

At the outset the concept of *avatār* does not appear to be that important in his system but a deep understanding of his system discloses to us that it has a definite place and function and is integral to his system. It is the *avatār* who helps man in his progress towards spiritual perfection. Man has to strive to reach back to his original state of *sat-cit-ānanda*, from where he has descended. The *avatār* helps in hastening this process of home-coming of the spirit.

Sri Aurobindo is the adherent of a tradition which accepted the notion of a Reality that manifests itself in diverse forms. He was greatly influenced by the Gītā in developing his account of the *avatār*. While he accepts the Gītā's spirit of the concept of *avatār*, his account goes beyond the Gītā's conception. While commenting on the view of the Gītā that the need for the *avatār* is to be viewed in the context of establishing *dharma*, Sri Aurobindo observes that it is to be felt more in the context of man's effort to attain spiritual perfection than for restoring *dharma*, which could easily be accomplished with the help of holy men—those who have raised themselves above the average level of consciousness and can work with great force to help others in achieving such a state, like *vibhūts*, prophets etc.

To understand Sri Aurobindo's stand on the doctrine of the *avatār*, it is necessary to enquire into the structure of his philosophical system. Sri Aurobindo accepts the Upanishadic account of the ultimate reality as "*sat-cit-ānanda*". The structure of his system revolves round the two seminal concepts, viz., the 'descent' and the 'ascent' or 'involution' and 'evolution' of the spirit respectively.

The Ultimate-spirit which is pure existence (*sat*) undergoes involution through the consciousness-force, which he calls *cit-śakti* (mother-power) in sheer sport or delight of creation. From its state of pure-being it manifests itself as Supermind, which stands for the dynamic creative will whence further involution takes place. When Supermind involves itself into the lower categories, it enters the domain of ignorance; the rest of the creation takes place through ignorance. When it is said that the Supermind enters into the domain of ignorance, it should not, however, be supposed that the Supermind becomes oblivious of its true nature, it is only one of the stages of *sat-cit-ānanda* in the lowering process. It renders itself deliberately the other, i.e. from the One it becomes the many, from its state of infinitude it becomes the finite and from the state of Being it

lapses into the state of becoming.

This deliberate descent of the Spirit is termed differently at different stages of descent as 'Supermind', 'mind', 'life' and 'matter', with 'psyche' behind the last three. These stages are distinguished as 'lower' and 'higher' on the basis of 'self-consciousness' or 'awareness' on the part of the spirit. The greater the 'awareness' or 'self-consciousness', or the liberation of consciousness from the burden or obstacle of matter, the higher is the stage in the scheme of evolution. For instance, at the stage of 'matter', 'consciousness' (spirit) is so much conditioned or burdened by matter that the spark of 'consciousness' is almost eclipsed under the weight of coal called 'matter' or inertia that it remains almost inconscient. Thus when spirit has rendered itself wholly other and cannot go beyond the state of matter, which is inconscient and inert, it reverses and starts evolving through the stages of its descent. From the state of matter, there appears a state of life, from life the mental plane emerges, with the psyche at its back; from mind there is a leap to Supermind in spiritual progress crossing the levels of Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, culminating in Overmind, the highest level of the mental plane. Finally when it crosses Overmind, the nature realises its unity with Supermind in the higher hemisphere of evolutes and ultimately acquires the nature of *sat-cit-ānanda*, the consummation of spiritual elevation, wherein it becomes a Gnostic being.

Thus it is the same spirit which at one stage is termed *sat-cit-ānanda* and at the other 'matter': the one in knowledge, the other in ignorance. Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that it is because the spirit has descended that it has a natural urge to join the original state through an evolutionary process. It is bound to evolve by progress.

Now the question is: How does the concept of *avatār* figure in Sri Aurobindo's system? Is there any necessity for it at all? As it has been expressed quite distinctly that because of descent, ascent will surely take place in the natural course of its duration, what purpose can an *avatār* serve in such a set-up? These questions need to be answered.

Sri Aurobindo has presented his views on *avatār* chiefly in his book *Essays on the Gita*. Although they do occur in other works such as *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Lights on Yoga*, *Letters on Yoga*, it is in his *Essays on the Gita* that we meet with a detailed discussion of the doctrine of *avatār*. Sri Aurobindo calls *brahman*, the descending and ascending spirit, an eternal-*avatār*. (Eternal-avatar is the same as *sat-cit-ānanda* in the involuntary and evolutionary processes.) It is the underlying Reality of all the existences—animate and inanimate.

The purpose of an *avatār* according to Sri Aurobindo, as shown already, is to redeem man from bondage, and it is not possible to help man in this direction in the lower stages of his existence. Clearly, an *avatār* cannot be of any avail, if man is groping in the lower levels of consciousness such as the levels of life and matter. It is only when man has reached the level of mind that an *avatār* would be of positive help to elevate him towards the spiritual perfection. Though man at

the level of the mental plane is engulfed in ignorance and yet possesses the capacity of making a leap to the higher levels of consciousness, he still needs to be made aware of the high potentialities of his inner being, of which he has become oblivious due to ignorance. That awareness is graciously granted to ignorant man by the *avatār*, so that he can receive the light and follow it in steady steps which will hasten his process of spiritual perfection. An *avatār* has a very important role in making man's mind receptive for the light of supramental consciousness to dawn on him. Then there is the individual's responsibility to reach the state of *sat-cit-ānanda* and the earlier the better. An *avatār* lends a firm support, by making man aware of the secret Godhead ever present in the recesses of his heart, so that the hidden eternal-*avātār* (*brahman* or *sat-cit-ānanda*) may make its distinct appearance and be awake to the Supramental Consciousness when it descends. Man needs the touch of an *avatār* to awaken him spiritually, taking him to higher and higher planes of consciousness culminating in the Gnosis, where he acquires the state of *sat-cit-ānanda*. The same view is expressed by Swami Vivekananda, when he writes, "There is a special class of world teachers, over and above the ordinary spiritual masters, known as *avatārs*. If they command, even the lowest of the low becomes a *mahātmā*. They are the teachers of the teachers. They are the highest divine manifestations in human form. We can achieve God-realisation only through them, we cannot but worship them, in fact, we are bound to worship such *avatārs*." (Vivekananda, *Essentials of Hinduism*, p. 51).

Broadly we can distinguish two stages in Sri Aurobindo's conception of man's journey towards spiritual perfection—first, the lower transformation which includes the vital and the mental, and second, the spiritual or soul-transformation.

Man at the physical level attaches the utmost importance to objective things and to his external life. He has little or no sensibility for his subjective experience and existence. All his desires, feelings and actions centre round the comforts and maintenance of his bodily existence. All his efforts are to ensure the safety and integrity of his body. He looks after the well-being and comforts of his physical existence. But a natural urge in him to rise high pushes physical nature upwards and there emerges the man of vital nature and mind. Unlike the physical mind, the vital mind is not concerned only with preservation of body but utilizes the body for the satisfaction of its higher ambitions and ideals. The mental life here is directed to serve the purpose of desires and passions. The vital mind or nature is kinetic and thus serves as a great force in the working of evolutionary nature. Above this vital existence, there is a mental or intellectual plane. It is a plane of pure thought and intelligence to which the things of mental world are not fictions of imagination but a most important reality. To some extent at this level man tries to transform his nature, by controlling and harmonising the laws of nature and giving them suitable values. Thus this mental plane is the summit of human mind short of spirituality. This psychological transformation succeeds in getting a

fully developed intellectual man. Outwardly, such a man appears to have a well-integrated personality, but this integration is only on the surface. He is not aware of the subconscious, the subliminal, the spiritual and the supramental planes of his being. He does not enjoy perfect control over the physical, physiological and vital parts of his being. He succeeds only to a certain extent and his mind, life and body suffer from inner conflicts and contradictions. It is this distressing fact which compels and induces man to aspire for a higher destiny and exceed his present status of physical, outward or mundane existence

The second evolution or transformation is the evolution of consciousness or soul-transformation. Such a transformation is the real aim of nature or of the spirit hidden in nature. It is the evolution of matter into spirit, of inconscience into consciousness and of ignorance into knowledge. This rediscovery by nature of its lost self or consciousness is possible only through an individual being who gives real and higher values to the universe. Thus it is only by means of evolution that the spirit hidden in nature is able to transform its inconscience into consciousness and it is by means of birth as a human being that he can make the conscious effort in this direction of developing his consciousness and attaining union with the cosmos and the supreme reality. This awareness of the self or soul-transformation moves in the direction of realization of the Psychic Purusha or the true inner being, leaving behind the coils of ignorance, egoism and evil by rising towards knowledge, power and love. It is in this context that the need for an *avatār* is found indispensable by Sri Aurobindo. Man needs the help of an *avatār* to awaken in him the dormant power which can take him spiritually to higher and higher planes of consciousness culminating in the state of a Gnostic being. These two kinds of transformation are not successive but simultaneous. The process left to itself is long and dreary but the *avatār* hastens the process of man's evolution by spiritualising him and ultimately divinising the whole cosmos

To put it in Sri Aurobindo's own words: The spiritual progress of most human beings demands an extraneous support, an object of faith outside us. It needs an external image of God, or it needs a human representative, incarnation, prophet or guru; or it demands both and receives them. For according to the need of the human soul the Divine manifests itself as deity, as human-divine or in a simple humanity using that thick disguise, which so successfully conceals the Godhead, for a means of transformation of his guidance

The doctrine of *avatār* also follows from Sri Aurobindo's conception of Ultimate Reality as an Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent Being. A Reality endowed with Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence is free to manifest in any form, at any place and at any time. It is true that an *avatār* is neither an evolute nor an evolvent, but yet Sri Aurobindo's Ultimate Reality is not exhausted in the process of creation—involution and evolution. It points towards the Spirit, who is all-powerful and acts at His own will and pleasure. Thus the *avatār* finds a definite place in Sri Aurobindo's philosophical system

VEENA ARORA

MEDITATIONS ON THE HUMAN JOURNEY

(Talk at the Savitri Solar Dome, Crestone, Colorado on August 15, 1995)

by C. V. Devan Nair

IN moments of silence, when the mind ceases from all thought and word, and one is motionless within, a stark realization can suddenly strike like a flash of lightning in a cloudless sky. We know NOTHING—nothing at all of who and what we really are, why we are here on earth, what the origin and purpose of it all might be—NOTHING. The modern mind, as we know it, is no more than a queer conglomeration of incongruous things. Sri Aurobindo put it succinctly: Mind is a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and the vaster infallible superconscious action of the Godhead.

We know how to make bombs, of course. There are enough of them in global stockpiles to blow up the entire planet. And we have analysed and utilised the properties and processes of Nature. But, wrote Sri Aurobindo, "It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila."

A multitude of fears, anxieties, pains and grisly maladies plague our lives. And there is the general morbidity about death, the deaths of those around us and, eventually, our own deaths. Let's hear the Mother on this:

"We must get out of this mire, this stupidity, this unconsciousness, this disgusting defeatism that crushes us because we allow ourselves to be crushed.

"And we fear. We fear for its life (*Mother touches the skin of her hands*), for this thing as if it were precious, because we want to stay conscious. But let's unite with the Supreme Consciousness, and we'll stay conscious forever! That's IT, that's exactly it.

"I could put it this way: we unite our consciousness with what is perishable, and we're afraid to perish! Well, I say: let's unite our consciousness with the Eternal Consciousness and we will enjoy eternal consciousness.

"How stupid can one be! ..

"But we are such fools that we can't bring ourselves to abdicate our silly little personality to . let the Marvel unfold "

The Mother also told the disciple: "Death as it is understood, on the inner level, means the loss of consciousness . But it's not possible. If you have consciousness it cannot be lost.. . All the deaths in the world cannot take it away from you, and that's why I smile... And it's only unconsciousness that's destroyed (meaning that there's an appearance of destruction), but not consciousness. So then, all the drama—all the tragedy, all the horror, all the dread, all of it—is vital fabrication."

Mostly, we live in our vital fabrications. But sometimes we do obtain glimmers of vast, hidden dimensions. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo has these lines on life:

Only a glimmer sometimes splits mind's sky
Justifying the ambiguous providence
That makes of Night a path to unknown dawns
Or a dark clue to some diviner state...
Ascending slowly with unconscious steps,
A foundling of the gods she wanders here
Like a child-soul left near the gates of Hell
Fumbling through fog in search of Paradise.

That ambiguous providence touched me once. Some twenty years ago, I was walking in the quiet and peaceful Sarnath Deer Park in North India, where the great Buddha had once walked and preached. No, I did not experience the Buddha's timeless Nirvana. Far from it. But I did experience, in that immensely silent landscape, an intuitive inner leap of sudden recognition. Timeless Eternity was not a fiction of the mind. It was, no doubt about it, a concrete, experienceable Reality.

Those sensitive to the pregnant silences of vast landscapes and seascapes might understand That Timelessness seems to contain all of the past, the present and the future, and infinitely more besides. And one might grasp what Vivekananda meant when, in an inspired moment, he astounded an American audience with the stunning assertion: "Christ and Buddhas are but waves on the Infinite Ocean which I AM." For he had known in powerful experience that there was nothing whatsoever on earth or in heaven which was not a wave on those Timeless maternal breasts. All waves rise and sink in that Ocean. He was forever one with It. So are we.

As I was writing this piece, one of those tiny miracles occurred which we tend to dismiss as fortuitous. I no longer do, for they have happened a bit too often when I write about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I got stuck after the preceding paragraphs, and did not know how to continue. So I sat back and randomly picked up a little booklet from a pile of unattended books and files on my desk. It turned out to be a SABDA newsletter which had arrived several weeks before and I had put aside. Almost immediately, I found exactly the right thing to fit in here. It was a poem by Thémis, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Her early poems had the privilege of being heard by Sri Aurobindo himself. He found in them a silent power, and pronounced them remarkable. This one is titled *Assurance*

When all your life has gone to pieces,
Smashed on the stillness of your soul,

I'll shine within the interstices
And come and make you new and whole.

Be brave, fling all your being's treasure
Within the fires I have lit;
My love has neither stop nor measure,
So prove your love too infinite.

Well, He shone again within the interstices of my own fractured being. Once again I heard the call of the divine flute-player of Brindavan, whom Sri Aurobindo described as "the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful". Generations of Bhakti yogis and yoginis had yearned to dissolve themselves in that ocean of unspeakable ecstasy, and have left us their tremendously moving testimonies in the most wonderful music and poetry in the languages of India.

Sri Aurobindo undoubtedly knew that ecstasy. For we read in a sonnet, simply titled *Krishna*:

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
Into this universe terrible and sweet,
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
Life shudders with a strange felicity;
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

For this one moment lived the ages past;
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

Nonetheless, there's a significant turn in Sri Aurobindo's aspiration for our earth which distinguishes him from those who have previously trodden the path of Bhakti Yoga. He did not seek personal dissolution in that ocean of ecstasy. He asked instead, at the end of another sonnet:

But when shall Krishna's dance through Nature move,
His mask of sweetness, laughter, rapture, love?

Historians have inflated notions about the present, not to speak about themselves. They believe that the past is dead, and all they need do is dissect what remains of the corpse. But the past is NOT dead. It lives on in each one of us. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here. The future is also in each one of us. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here either. Remember those poignant lines in *Savitri*:

We are chased by a self we cannot now recall
And moved by a Spirit we must still become..
We keep the ache of breasts that breathe no more..

The Rishis of Upanishads spoke of *trikala drishti*, a plane of consciousness where time past, time present and time future exist in a state of simultaneity. Willy-nilly, each one of them includes the other two. The ape did not know that it concealed both the worm and Einstein in its genes. And most of us do not know that we conceal in our make-up worm, wolf and shark, the shrew-mouse and the ape, devil and God. We recall some revealing lines in *Savitri*:

In the beginning is prepared the close.
This strange irrational product of the mire,
This compromise between the beast and God,
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world
I know there shall inform the inconscient cells,
At one with Nature and at height with heaven,
A spirit vast as the containing sky
And swept with ecstasy from invisible founts,
A god come down and greater by the fall.

Those of us who have dared that stark look into our naked selves with an unflinching honesty—which is the very first step demanded of seekers in the immense journey into the vast and powerful realms of the Spirit—know of times when the beast in us has predominated, and less frequently perhaps the god. This see-saw game between beast and god in us must end, and the divine be firmly established in our inner shrines, from there to radiate outwards for personal and world transformation. “The kingdom of God within,” said Sri Aurobindo, “is the sole possible foundation of the kingdom of God without.” Our starting-point begins in inner spaces, not in outer ones. Not prudent, though, to lose contact with outer space. We need to visit the supermarket to secure our supply of milk, cornflakes and bananas for tomorrow's breakfast.

Let's now take a brief look at the world today, as it really is. We find everywhere telltale signs of the end of a cycle, ‘the twilight of an age’, as Sri Aurobindo put it. Above all, we witness a general descent into the vital, most widely into the lower vital regions of being. In short, the mental-vital human

being has largely chosen to serve Mammon, and we see a soulless consumerism as the dominant ruling idea in nations and governments. Several among the most high-powered scientific minds of the world are engaged in providing more and more technological wizardries for the satisfaction of the vital appetites of mankind. Let Sri Aurobindo describe what is happening:

“[Modern Science] has encouraged more or less indirectly both by its attitude to life and its discoveries another kind of barbarism,—for it can be called by no other name,—that of the industrial, the commercial, the economic age which is now progressing to its culmination and its close. This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life.. . Just as the physical barbarian makes the excellence of the body and the development of physical force, health and prowess his standard and aim, so the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard and aim. His ideal man is not the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or religious, but the successful man. To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his existence. The accumulation of wealth and more wealth, the adding of possessions to possessions, opulence, show, pleasure, a cumbrous inartistic luxury, a plethora of conveniences, life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarised or coldly formalised, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business, this is commercialism. To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of advertisement. His idea of civilization is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions. He values education for its utility in fitting a man for success in a competitive or, it may be, a socialised industrial existence, science for the useful inventions and knowledge, the comforts, conveniences, machinery of production with which it arms him, its power for organisation, regulation, stimulus to production. The opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organizer of industry are the supermen of the commercial age and the true, if often occult rulers of its society.”

Those words of Sri Aurobindo would be an apt description of modern nations, their parliaments, congresses and senates, as of business corporations the world over. Well did an Indian supreme court judge recently describe public life in his own country as one of *crime, corruption and connivance*. It is a pervasive condition, permeating all strata of society, everywhere. Meanwhile, much of the press and electronic media, especially in America, act as purveyors of an idiot culture of sensation, sex and scandal perpetuating itself in a thought-free vacuum.

In passing, we might observe another ominous development. The education policies of a growing number of nations are increasingly being geared to meet the voracious appetites engendered by economic barbarism. Our schools and universities are largely meant for turning out robots and specialists in robotics, while the humanities and arts get short shrift.

The inevitable offshoot of such developments has been the relentless erosion of human values. Elementary human rights and decencies the world over are mercilessly trampled underfoot. Even worse, the belly of the beast has unleashed in several unfortunate lands ethnic conflict and genocide as in Rwanda, the ongoing carnage and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, terrorism and counter-terrorism elsewhere. Inter-religious and inter-ethnic strife are tearing at the guts of several heterogeneous countries.

Scholars see all this in rather simplistic terms, as the consequence of either a social, political, economic, cultural or civilizational crisis. But there is a spiritual vision from the heights which sees the crisis of the modern world as merely the end of a cycle in the immense journey of Consciousness on our planet. In his vast, synthetic vision derived from his own experience of *trikala drishti*, the simultaneous vision of the three times, Sri Aurobindo gave a radically different account of the modern crisis. He declared: "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny." And that choice of destiny is whether *homo sapiens* is to become obsolete as a species, like the mammoth or the giant reptiles, or whether at least some human beings choose to consciously collaborate in a spiritual revolution.

We are the only species thus far to be offered this privilege. But whether we collaborate or not, the supramental cycle of evolution will still come about. For the Mother made it abundantly clear that the transformation will be effected, not by us, but by the divine supramental force, which does not require our gracious permission to act. In fact, she announced in 1956 that it had descended into the subtle physical sheath of our earth. In other words, an entirely new and all-dominant factor has entered the planetary field, which will inexorably disrupt all the current equations and ordinances that govern mental man's perception of the universe. All our pretentious mental towers will topple. They are already toppling. Francis Thompson's lines in *The Hound of Heaven* come to mind:

Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
"Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me "

The Mother herself had wondered, in the last years of her physical life:

“Will we have to go through a complete breakdown of the mind for people to understand? Is it going to explode with a zero at the end?” But she also did say: “Seeing the world as it is and as it irreparably seems to have to remain, the human intellect has decreed that this world had to be a mistake of God.... But the supreme Lord replies that the comedy is not completely over, and He adds: **WAIT FOR THE LAST ACT.**”

We may be sure of one thing at least. Among those who will be totally flummoxed by that **LAST ACT** will be the crystal-gazers and fortune-tellers of all stripes. For, in Sri Aurobindo’s words: “It is the hour of the unexpected.” Regrettably, not everybody seems to appreciate that expecting the unexpected is a bizarre contradiction in terms. But that too is part of the comedy which is *not completely over*.

An evolutionary imperative is at work, and it is a radical evolution of consciousness—in our Age from mind to Supermind. Recall Sri Aurobindo’s words: “Man is a transitional animal; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood.” Mental humanity may even now be undergoing, perhaps consciously in a few, something more than a quantum leap into a radically different superconsciousness. Sri Aurobindo preferred the Latin word *saltus* (i.e., a break in continuity) to describe the process. He wrote:

“Mark that each of the great radical steps forward already taken by Nature has been infinitely greater in its change, incalculably vaster in its consequences than its puny predecessor.”

The giant leap from Mind to Supermind will be incalculably greater than all its puny predecessors. That *saltus* will take up in its movement a spiritual revolution of which Sri Aurobindo wrote thus:

“The changes we see in the world today are intellectual, moral, physical in their ideal and intention: the spiritual revolution waits for its hour and throws up meanwhile its waves here and there. Until it comes, the sense of the others cannot be understood and till then all interpretations of present happening and forecast of man’s future are vain things. For its nature, power, event are that which will determine the next cycle of our humanity.”

Our little gathering here, on this most felicitous of days, is just one of those waves thrown up here and there. Other small scattered groups around the world also constitute similar small waves. In truth, the precursors of all revolutions have invariably seemed a woeful minority. But what of that? Since when have forerunners ever begun as a majority at any stage of the evolutionary journey of life? We may be scorned as oddballs by the rest of the howling tribes. So be it. Regular squares stay put. But balls can roll. Indeed, we might add another beatitude to Christ’s great list: “*Blessed are the oddballs for they shall be the first to roll into the Kingdom.*”

We might also recall Sri Aurobindo, who wrote:

“If Krishna be alone on one side and the armed and organized world with its hosts and its shrapnel and its maxims on the other, yet prefer thy divine solitude. Care not if the world passes over thy body and its shrapnel tear thee to pieces and its cavalry trample thy limbs into shapeless mire by the wayside, for the mind was always a simulacrum and the body a carcass. The spirit liberated from its casings ranges and triumphs.”

Nonetheless, the Mother also announced: “SALVATION IS PHYSICAL.” A divine life in a divine body must necessarily involve a physical transformation. But that comes, as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother well knew, only as the culmination of the inner spiritual journey, not at the beginning, nor even at mid-point. Even in our external world, one cannot hope to obtain a PhD without first having gone through the primary, secondary, pre-university and university stages. And we tend to forget that the Mother began her Yoga of the Body, her descent into the cellular level, only after practising Yoga for nearly sixty years, during which time she had systematically gone up and down the ladder of the worlds. It was after ascending to the supramental level that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother began their descent through the physical subconscious down to the cellular and mineral levels. They were pilgrims of the Light first, before they became pilgrims of the Night, as Sri Aurobindo made clear in his sonnet: *The Pilgrim of the Night*:

I made an assignation with the Night;
 In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:
 In my breast carrying God's deathless light
 I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.
 I left the glory of the illumined Mind
 And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
 And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
 To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.
 I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
 And still that weary journeying knows no end;
 Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
 There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
 And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
 A pathway towards Immortality.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother hewed for us, through a trackless virgin jungle, a pathway to superhumanity. But one can be attacked by a grizzly bear even on a jogging track, as happened recently to a woman in Montana. Seekers need to be very clear in their minds that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is not an invitation to a picnic, and certainly not to an American-style extravaganza. There are serious pitfalls and dangers on the spiritual path, for the good reason

that it is Infinity we hope to explore and experience. And Infinity contains heights as well as abysses, gods and angels as well as the devils of the deep. The light some seekers imagine they see at the end of the tunnel may be, as Robert Lowell once joked grimly, only the light of the oncoming train.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1995)

SURESH Chakravarty (*alias* Moni) arrived at Pondicherry station in the early morning of 31st March, 1910 in order to find a suitable accommodation for Sri Aurobindo to stay in Pondicherry. After reaching there, his main audacious task was to search out a group of notable revolutionaries. Pondicherry at that time was under French rule and was a place of refuge for the political leaders who had fled from British India. Among these exiles were the renowned poet Subramanya Bharati, Srinivasachari, Krishnamachari, V. V. S. Iyer and some extremist leaders who were running a nationalist weekly paper in Tamil, called *India*, in which an interview given by Sri Aurobindo at Calcutta in January to one of its representatives was published. From that day Sri Aurobindo had a link with the South-India revolutionary group. Moni presented himself before Srinivasachari with a letter of introduction from Sri Aurobindo. Srinivasachari, a patriotic poet, was the manager of the Tamil paper at Pondicherry.

Srinivasachari and others were surprised and refused to believe that such an eminent political national leader as Sri Aurobindo was coming South seeking political asylum. Sri Aurobindo had decided to cut off all relation with the rest of India.

Srinivasachari suspected Moni to be a British spy who had come to play a trick in order to help the British Government. He avoided hasty action and did not attach any importance to the request for finding a suitable house for Sri Aurobindo.

But when Moni announced the date of Sri Aurobindo's arrival as 4th April, Srinivasachari gave him assurance that accommodation would be found. Moni noticed that two days had passed but they were still unconcerned and showed no enthusiasm to search for a proper house. They showed him a miserable place situated in a dirty part of the town—quite unsuitable for Sri Aurobindo's stay. But Moni was told that they had failed to find a better place than that.

Srinivasachari and others wanted to give Sri Aurobindo a rousing and warm reception such as a public leader of his stature deserved. It would be a token of recognition for his sacrifice to the Motherland. But Moni confided to the revolutionary group that Sri Aurobindo was coming incognito and preferred to stay in seclusion to avoid police attention. He prevented them from making public arrangements. At last they were satisfied and got rid of the suspicion that Moni was a British spy. So they went to the port to receive Sri Aurobindo on 4th April at 4 o'clock 1910. The coincidence of time may be noted: month, day and hour all 4. The number 4 has an occult significance according to the Mother. "Supramental Realisation in the physical."¹ The steamer *Duplex* cast anchor and the hosts gave a reception to the distinguished leader.

Sri Aurobindo, Bijoy who had accompanied him from Calcutta and Moni stayed on the second floor of Shankar Chetty's home in Comouty street. They stayed there till October as the guests of Shankar Chetty.

It is interesting to observe that Sri Aurobindo's final coming to Pondicherry was predicted by a South Indian Yogi, Nagai Japata. Before leaving his body he confided to his disciples that a Great Yogi from the North was likely to come to the South. Sri Aurobindo has made a statement about this fact: "The Yogi from the North (Uttara Yogi) was my own name given to me because of a prediction made long ago by a famous Tamil Yogi, that thirty years later (agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from the North would come as a fugitive to the South and practise there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of India. He gave three utterances as the mark by which this Yogi could be recognised and all these were found in the letters to my wife."²

Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry reminds us of a verse which occurs in the Rig Veda (8 44.10):

The illumined Seer and Priest of the call, free from harm, shining with light, carrying his banner of smoke, him we seek, the ray of intuition of the sacrifices.

"Sri Aurobindo's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Krishna Kumar Mitra, and also his grandmother, Mrs. Rajnarayan Bose, were very anxious about him and wanted to have authentic news of his safe arrival at Pondicherry. A week after Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta, a man came to see Krishna Kumar Mitra to inform him that Sir Charles Cleaveland, Director General of Criminal Investigation, who was staying at the Great Eastern Hotel, had received the news in code that Sri Aurobindo was in Pondicherry. The gentleman had come to give this information assuming that Mitra must be very anxious about his safety. This shows how well the secret was kept: Sukumar Mitra, who had taken a leading part in arranging Sri Aurobindo's departure, had evidently not told even his own father about it. In May 1910, Motilal Roy sent a man, Sudarshan, to inquire about Sri Aurobindo's safe arrival at Pondicherry. Balai Devsharma has written: 'After knowing that Sri Aurobindo had gone to Pondicherry, Monoranjan Guhathakurta and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty wrote a letter requesting him to guide them (and the party) in politics. The letter was answered. its purport was that Sri Krishna had taken the responsibility of freeing India. And so all of us must act from a firm status in yoga. This letter was read at the house of Shyam Sundar Babu, in Vidyasagar Street, Calcutta.'"³

Sri Aurobindo had left politics behind. Why did he do so? He has explained.

"I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there: such an idea was very far from me, I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct *adesh* in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried

forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal.”⁴

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

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- 2 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 26, p 373
- 3 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, by A B Purani, pp 141-42
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo*, by M P Pandit, p 152

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of December 1995)

To Listen

“THE Lord is my husband and I am his bride,” thus sang the famous Indian saint Kabir. In the Christian terminology too, the soul is called the “bride” of the Lord. Union with the Lord has been and is the sole aim of every awakened soul.

Alas, elusive is our Lord. He constantly calls us yet in a voice so soft, so faint, almost like a stray whisper that in spite of his nearness we rarely see or hear him. To catch the sweet cadences of his voice we are expected to fulfil certain conditions.

What are the imperative conditions which our Lord demands of us? The hustle and bustle of physical consciousness—the mind with its impetuous workings, the vital with its emotional storms, the body with its hungers and needs—the usual drama of men hurrying on the roads of life in a mad race leading nowhere—these are not the propitious conditions for the reception of our Lover and Lord. If he finds the being restive in any way, he retreats in the soul-recesses for the impulses and exuberances of life to pass and waits patiently millennium after millennium for a moment while the being becomes capable and worthy and faces life quietly, unhurriedly, without agitation. In such moments our Lord speaks to us. As the Mother wrote on June 27, 1913:

Thy voice is so modest, so impartial, so sublime in its patience and mercy that it does not make itself heard with any authority, any force of will but comes like a cool breeze, sweet and pure, like a crystalline murmur that brings a note of harmony to a discordant concert. Yet, for him who knows how to listen to the note, to breathe that breeze, it holds such treasures of beauty, such a fragrance of pure serenity and noble grandeur, that all foolish illusions vanish or are transformed into a joyful acceptance of the marvellous truth that has been glimpsed.

The voice of our Lover is so soft, his suggestions so modest that mostly we human beings, even if by some lucky chance we hear it, pay it no attention. It comes like a suggestion without any force, like a stray thought which has wandered in the mind’s mart by mistake. Usually such Divine interventions have no chance against the assertions of the mind, which is always sure of being right and which off-hand rules out suggestions which are not its own, or against the clamours of the vital which always presses for its share of life’s enjoyments and against the non-cooperation of the body which pleads for its supposed limita-

tions Rarely the Divine gets a patient hearing from us, still more rarely is the Voice followed.

The enlightened part of our being, eager to tread the upward path, may very well lament, "O why did You not order me to do Your Will?" Indeed it is a pertinent question why the Divine lets us act foolishly. And whenever we deviate from the right course why does He not immediately lead us back on the straight path? Why is He so patient and modest? The Mother has pointed out that He does so in His mercy. The enlightened part of our being may very well ask where is the mercy in letting us flounder and sink in the morass. Once a student asked the Mother why she consented to sadhaks' proposals or requests even when she knew they were not in their best interest. The Mother replied that if she refused permission for something and yet the sadhak insisted on doing it then that person would suffer very much for having disobeyed the Divine. And most of the time humans are ruled by their mental or vital beings which push them to actions which they do sometimes even when they know that they are wrong, bad or foolish. The Divine with infinite patience suggests something but in consideration for our human frailty he does not put *any force of will* behind it.

It is for us to learn to listen, learn to be consciously alert for that almost teasingly faint voice of our Lover, if we would not miss and forfeit his gifts and his treasures. If we but listen to him he will sow seeds of miracles in our most mundane moments and will colour with heavenly hues our myriad soulless doings

Let us then, at each moment, breathe softly and remain turned inward in the middle of the incessant march of time. For our Supreme Lover awaits us with his marvellous gifts.

*

O Heart, Have Patience!

For every step we take forward we are pushed back a mile, from each summit of consciousness that we near we are hurtled down into the valley by an avalanche of anger or desire. Bruised and sullied we get out of the muck of vital instincts, and chastened by our fall resume our forward march, our upward journey. Endless seems this striving towards perfection, unattainable the Divine Consciousness we aspire for. Sudden attacks of the enemy, lodged within, leave us cursing our adversary. Those who strive to exceed their human frailties are bound to have a hundred foes, a thousand detractors because any effort to rise above an average life of desires is a challenge, a gauntlet thrown to the Hostiles who see the danger of fissures developing in their laboriously built walls of contentment with the ordinary life. The Hostiles sense their crown slipping out of their hands and try to trip, topple and trap the wayfarer to Divinity. There will always be stones and hemlock cups and crosses awaiting those who dare to find

and unite with the Divine. There will be betrayals galore. The world will try to persecute those who dare to deny *maya* its supremacy and due.

When cornered and assaulted brutally, when bruised and bleeding, we lose our poise and curse those who have repaid our kindness by calumny, our generosity by slander. Then the Hostiles laugh and are satisfied because they have breached our *samata* and they let us live in comparative peace until we regain the lost ground and once more near our goal. Then they activate their armies and at each corner we face a Duryodhana. Again is broken our resolve to pardon, to remain equal to foes and friends alike

Sometimes tired of this common ruse, the adversary tries us through flattery and favours. Name and fame follow in our footsteps and suddenly we are swept off our feet and think, "How great am I!" There is a muted laughter of Satan when instead of saying, "All greatness is God's," we usurp the credit.

Thus sometimes through blows and sometimes through kudos the Lord tests us and the Adversary topples us, for in his servant and child the Lord would not bear any imperfections. We are put into the furnace again and again until we become pure and perfect. Tired and defeated, when we think of taking refuge in death or give up to Dr Jekyll, some hidden Power sustains us and keeps burning the lamp of hope and courage. We call for the Divine Help, get up, dust ourselves and resume the ascent

Endless patience is needed to pass through the crucible. On July 21, 1913 the Mother wrote,

.. Yet what patience is needed! How imperceptible the stages of progress!...

Oh! how I call Thee from the very depths of my heart, True Light, Sublime Love, Divine Master who art the source of our light and our living, our guide and our protector, the Soul of our soul and the Life of our life, the Reason of our being, the supreme Knowledge, the immutable Peace!

There is only one way to shorten somewhat our long-drawn-out struggles, our fierce battles and dire falls—it is to realise that there is hidden in our heart our Divine Master who is the source of our light and life and who protects us from annihilation at the hands of all-pervasive *maya*.

If in spite of our hundred and one falls, we still try to come out of the mesmerising vales of ordinary life, if we dare the crag and the cliff, then surely it is Her Grace and if we would have faith, and let go, she would fight our battles and would lift us in her arms to carry us where we belong.

O Heart! have patience, the Divine is not an imagination, the Grace is not a fib.

All-inclusive

Since her early childhood the Mother had been doing intense yoga, even though for some years it had not been a deliberate but rather an instinctive, inborn askesis. In her teens she started conscious yoga practice and mastered the Rajayoga and the Yoga of the Gita with the help of books which she chanced upon. Quickly she ascended summit after Yogic summit to achieve the coveted Union with the Divine. In the *prayers* written as early as 1913 we discover that she had already achieved this Union. On July 23 of this year, she wrote in her diary,

O Lord, inconceivable Splendour, may Thy Beauty spread through all the earth, may Thy Love be kindled in every heart and Thy Peace reign over all.

A deep and solemn chant, smiling and subtle, rises from my heart, and I do not know whether this chant goes from me to Thee or comes from Thee to me or whether Thou or I and the entire universe are this marvellous chant of which I have just become conscious.... Surely there is no longer any Thou or I or any separate universe; only an immense harmony is there, sublime and infinite, which is all things and of which all things will one day grow aware. It is the harmony of victorious Love, Love victorious over all suffering and all obscurity.

By this law of Love, Thy law, I want to live more and more integrally; to it unreservedly I give myself.

And all my being exults in an inexpressible Peace.

This is a testament of the highest yogic consciousness achievable or achieved by anyone till then. It is *sayujya*, the absolute union of the divine with the human spirit and *sayujyamukti* (liberation by) self-oblivious abolition of the soul's personal being in the absorption in the One; the freedom born of unbroken contact of the individual being in all its parts with the Divine. (*SABCL*, Vol. 30, p. 344.)

After attaining this poise, there is nothing left to achieve and usually the yogis dissolve their consciousness in the Absolute through the *nirvikalpa samadhi*. All this the Mother had achieved as if as a necessary preparation for the sublime undertaking of bringing down the Supramental Power on earth with a view to earth's transformation.

The total oneness, the sweet intimacy described here speak of one who has gone beyond all Godheads to attain the status of the Creatrix, she who is one with her Creation. The smile of *ananda* which is at the core of the Creation suffuses the Mother. The Universal *OM* permeates her being, there are subtle smiling notes of Harmony. It cannot be distinguished whether the Universe, the Mother and the Lord are the same or different Existences.

The most noteworthy thing in this *praer* is that the Mother is already using the terminology of the Integral Yoga. She talks of *Love, Love victorious over all suffering and all obscurity*. She wants to live by this law of Love more and more integrally and of its being kindled in every heart. This conquest of suffering and pain and even death by the Power of Divine Love is the essence of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and this the Mother had already realised by herself.

Though physically unknown to each other, the divine Twain were preparing themselves and the earth-consciousness for the future Dawns. And when the utmost possible had been achieved they met and united to make the impossible possible, to achieve the undreamt-of. Only at this point when all the millennial preparation was done the Lord and his Shakti came together. The foundation of a glorious future was to be laid on that day—29th March, 1914. In this connection it is important to read the following question and Sri Aurobindo's answer to it.

Q. There are some Prayers of the Mother of 1914 in which she speaks of Transformation and manifestation. Since at that time she was not here, does this not mean that she had these ideas long before she came here?

A. The Mother had been spiritually conscious from her youth, even from her childhood upward and she had done sadhana and had developed this knowledge very long before she came to India.

Thus it becomes clear that each of these *prayers* of the Mother is a milestone of Their agelong Quest for immortality.

*

Sweet Harmony

On August 8, 1913 in a short *prayer* the Mother especially speaks of the chief characteristic of silence—a sweet harmony which permeates the whole creation, and is to be found everywhere and in everything. She says,

O sweet harmony that dwellest in all things, sweet harmony that fillest my heart, manifest thyself in the most external forms of life, in every feeling, every thought, every action.

There is a mighty Power of Divine Silence which holds the stars in their places and is the secret of the beauty of the lotus and the rose, of all life indeed. Without the force of this silence the creation would disintegrate in Non-Time, the atoms would wander unfused, and no objectivization of the Divine in Matter would be possible.

The secret of sadhana is to bring this *harmony of silence* into the *most external forms of life*. We have to grow around us a garden of silent harmonies with the hues of love, understanding, forgiveness, strength—in short, of all the qualities which purify and sublimate. From these hidden harmonies came the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the statues of Michelangelo, the music of Beethoven and the poetry of Shelley. All art is the manifestation of this inherent Harmony in things. All great people and their greatness are only some minor refrain of this music of harmony. To have it in its fullness can make us divine in our nature and equal to the Gods in our action.

When we make a strong and lasting contact with this secret Power of harmony, then life, in spite of its manifest ugliness, takes on the attributes of the heavens. The Mother writes in the same *prayer*,

All is to me beautiful, harmonious, silent, despite the outer turmoil.
And in this silence it is Thou, O Lord, whom I see, and I see Thee in so unique a way that I can express this perception only as that of an unvarying smile. In truth, the real nature of the feeling experienced in the presence of the sweetest, most calm, most compassionate smile has a poor resemblance to what I feel when I see Thee in this way.

May Thy Peace be with all.

Once we enter this silence and the resultant harmony then surely the Lord will smile at us from every facet and each face of his manifestation.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

LOGICAL OPTIMISTIC ASSUMPTIONS

SUPERMIND may not act as a wonder drug but it is surely a medicine which, unlike the usual run of drugs, while not acting fast, penetrates deeper into the constitution in order to act from the root upward into the general constitution. The action of this medicine, however, seems to cause side-effects and allergies.

The first batch for the experimental administration of it is made up of Ashramites. The side-effects and allergies are evident in the form of situations that are often illogical and at times unpredictable.

This is perhaps because of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's laboratorial experiments to save the world from collapsing under the increasing pressures of the continuous descent of supermind going on uninterrupted since February 29, 1956. By use of the Ashramites as mediums, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother prepare the world for the full ultimate manifestation of supermind.

In some aspects, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are Divine Pathologists who not only know the occult and spiritual factors behind death but have also, from their occult pathological perspective, studied dead bodies in order to work out a body that cannot be subjected to death.

Perhaps this side of their occult-spiritual discoveries has not been disclosed, but it is logical to assume that it has been carried on. To evolve a body that cannot decay or be harmed or destroyed in any way is not possible without the study of dead bodies. Their whole unending career has expressed their process of unfoldments in the garb of experiments, and has paved a royal road for us to follow. Possibly they have followed their own Divine Law of not giving out clues of their research on these lines because science has to find out clues on its own. We do not know how many thousands of dead bodies they have occultly and spiritually evaluated to design a Supramental body immune to death.

If we think on these lines we can reason out with faith that their return in Supramental bodies is close; for unless they so return their work will remain incomplete.

Perhaps we can take a clue from the prophetic *Savitri* to deduce that the Mother left her body in order to bring Sri Aurobindo back to earth. *Savitri* clearly tells the god of Death to the effect that earth cannot flower if lonely she returns. Since the Mother has specifically told us to be optimistic we should eagerly await with certainty that they will return in Supramental bodies. If we take as final Sri Aurobindo's statement to the Mother that He will return in the first Supramental body built in the Supramental way, then we have to assume that the Mother will return in a Supramental body built also in the same way.

Let us not think on pessimistic lines that they will not return for a long time. If we did so, we would only be exhibiting our ignorance, frustration, and the wavering of our faith in their supreme capabilities. The one who says that they have failed has himself failed in Faith. We must long for their return with the full intensity of our love. They must feel our pull to be irresistible.

JAGAT KAPADIA

IN THE GREATNESS OF THE SONS OF IMMORTALITY

A REVIEW-ARTICLE

The Vedic Epiphany, Volume Two: The Vedic Action, by V. Madhusudan Reddy, Institute of Human Study, Published in 1994, Price Rs. 600/-

TRADITION accepts the Veda to be eternal in the sense that it has no beginning and that it is endless in every dimension, *anādi* and *ananta*. It is *Akshara*, the imperishable as well as the alphabetical Om, and existed even prior to the appearance of creation if we are to consider that such an event did occur in some deep past. Dissolutions or Pralayas do not touch the Veda. This belief has a certain philosophical merit too when its incontestant eternality has to be postulated as the first basis for everything that is in manifestation. It is the source and rich womb of all this magnificence stretching everywhere limitlessly. Veda is the ever-existent knowledge with its power to bring out, and to withdraw, what it holds as a potentiality of the Quiescent Truth-Self, the one Unmanifest. But, at the same time, it does not exclude itself from its own Truth-Creation howsoever it may seem to circumscribe it. In fact from the status of utter ineffability and incomprehensibility it steps into the dynamism of accessible realisability. Had it not been so, the Veda would have proved of no avail to understanding and, at best, would have been worshipped and respected from a distance, left at that to itself. Such a Veda falling outside the creation would actually be a contradiction in terms when we posit its nature to be interminably vast. Its trans-creational character does not necessarily compel it to stay away from the creation. If we speak of this supreme transcendental Veda as the unknowable Absolute, then its poise in manifestation, so to say, can be taken to be the knowable Unknown, an approachable Profound though far above the sun-splendid sky over our head. Indeed, we can assert biblically: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." This Word of the Revelation, the Veda of the Unknown, is the spring and fount of all our knowledge, all that issues out in its multiple Truth-movements. We can then say that somewhere in its audacious outgoing, in this forward surge of a widening delight in self-awareness, were the Gods born and did the Rishis colloque in a happy exchange of glowing hymns and gifts of benedictive immortality's rapture-wonders. This is the Veda we can know, see and touch and feel,—we can breathe it, it being the exhaled breath of Ishwara, *nishwasitam* as the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad puts it. We can be part of its creative Truth-Rhythm growing in godly greatnesses. Here the Veda, the unsyllabled Om, becomes the plurality of the Vedas, the Unauthored assumes several authorships, the monotone White the shades of infinite variety, *Apauru-*

sheya turns into *Paurusheya*; we begin to ascribe to these songs of exaltation and praise the names of individuals, call them works of seer-poets, the mystic singers of the spirit. Yet here also are the Vedas endless, *anantā vai vedāḥ*.

Therefore even these Vedas, because of their very special distinctive character, are not easily accessible to our common immediate mentality. They are meant for Gods and Rishis and the Initiates, as if deeply shrouded in an unsolvable mystery ever must they remain. What will he do with the Riks who has not practised austerities and who does not know the Supreme?—asks a Rishi himself. The Vedas are couched in a language that is born out of intense spiritual practices, out of *tapas-shakti*, from the fire of the *Yajna*; a strong God-will has taken here the form of reality's vision in a body of calm yet thrilled expressive cadence and chant. The very roots of the words are esoteric and the loud clear ringing utterances clothe themselves "in metres that reflect the moving worlds"; in their streaming flow is the voice of some luminous sea of heaven filled with the silence of the spirit. The unheard unstruck sound takes shape, and the pregnant Mantra is given, and what it holds in its charge is actualised. This was the true Devabhasha, the God-language of the dauntless pioneers, "spoken by men in Uttara Meru at the beginning of the *Manvantara*"—says Śrī Aurobindo. The denizens of this Mountain with golden peaks are the Overmental beings living in the company of the great universal Gods who guide and constantly help them on the path of the sunlit immortality. At the beginning of each Epoch a different set of seven Rishis appears and imparts the Vedic lore to men that they may practise it and uphold it for a griefless fulfilled life in the world. By performing Yajnic sacrifices the sages find, and meet, the Goddess of Speech residing in them and it is she who takes them to the realms of Truth and Light and Joy. Therefore, to know the Vedas we have to approach that gold-tongued divinity Vagdevi who can indeed open out their concealed marvels to us. Otherwise they will always be inexplicable puzzles. The Rishis lived constantly in the company of the Gods. They talked to Gods in pleasing admirable language given to them by *Chhandadevatas*, deities of the metres. They visited the Gods riding their *chandrathas* or happy chariots of litanic verses and communicated with them as friends. For them the question of explaining something to someone never arose. They, as heroes of truth-conquering might, lived all the while in a bright dense spiritual atmosphere. They drove their Mantric cars on the heaven-ascending Highways to the wonderful solar worlds, to the luminous expanses of undecaying grandeur and beatitude. Even while these cars as ever carry the abundance of spiritual experiences of the Rishis, there is the loftiest poetry in their addresses, full of sweet and secret meaning and sense, full of knowledge of working of the creation in rhythms of the Truth, full of beauty and charm and felicity. The expression is daring and very Aryan and the symbols and images bold; these, while remaining close to the life of men on earth, bring to us the fiery contents of divine plenitude. The poet has no inhibition in using homely and commonplace similes

and expressions even when he is extolling the great and distant respected Gods. What is taken as religiously sacred or profane, puritanically forbidden or acceptable, mundane and therefore not worthy of coming into literature, does not bar him in his aesthetic employment and enjoyment of whatever the creative inspiration can capitalise upon. The Vedic Rishi was at once harmoniously a sage and a priest and a poet, and of course a linguist and an intuitive thinker. His verses throughout bear witness to his thousand faculties; in understanding him we have therefore to be as universal.

Let us take some examples, at random, from the *Vedic Epiphany* of V Madhusudan Reddy under review. These are quite illustrative of the poetic paraphernalia of Vedic seer-poets. Very often the esoteric and the secular mingle in one vivid manner of seeking to express and to make tangible what would otherwise look vague or abstract or ungraspable. Thus: "The Supreme Being, Varuna, sees whatever exists in heaven and earth and beyond. He counts the blinks of every eye and enumerates like a skilful gambler his every move in the cosmic game " If Varuna is watchful and vigilant, Soma offers the riches of enjoyment: "May we enjoy the luminous effusion you give us as men enjoy their ancestral wealth. O Soma, prolong our lives as the sun makes the days grow longer." Agastya desires to be cured of the poison afflicting his body: "I stow all poison in the Sun, like a leather container in the house of a spirit-vendor. Verily, the adorable Lord is immortal, and with all his powerful rays will not let us die; he will overtake the poison, and transform it into the elixir of eternal life." But then there is night again: "Once more the night enwraps the earth like a woman weaving a garment." The dames come to Vayu following him to the assembly: "A cogent body of hosts follow the cosmic Wind after him like women Taking them all in his war-chariot the divine Lord of the world proceeds through high terrain." The hymn to Maghavan is very intimate and satisfying: "Remain with us a while, O mighty Maghavan, at our sacrificial place; I will offer to you the Soma-libation. O powerful Lord, with devout chantings I cling to the hem of your robe, as a child to his father's " This father-son theme returns in the Agni-hymn. "O Lord, be therefore easy of access to us, as a father to his son May you be ever with us for our good " But at places the parenthetical explanatory insertions of the author are quite jarring and tend to mar the beauty of the original compositions: "I accept your hand for greater felicity, that you may attain old age (illumination) with me as your spouse (guide). The gods Bhaga, Aryaman, Savitri and Purandhi have given you to me, that I may be the master of your household (destination)." Similarly, "Let Prajapati grant us progeny, may Aryaman anoint us into enlightened maturity; free from all evil may you, O bride (seeker), enter the world of your husband (domain of the Truth); may you bring supreme prosperity to all beings." At times the author shows a Victorian reservation in rendering the Riks as if the modern mind is shocked by the open audacity of the ancient Rishi employing female similes The Usha-hymns, so

lyrically delightful, bring the danger that, unless one is very pure, one can fall into a misled aesthetic-vital movement. The occult and the spiritual cannot be merely the ethical and must be seen in an occult and spiritual way, the trans-ethical intuitive and revelatory vision or image or symbol of the mood and manner of a rapturous being. Usha, the Goddess Dawn, is described as the youthful lustrous daughter of heaven, *divo duhita*, in many ways: "The sun follows the radiant dawn in the same manner as a young lover follows a maiden." Or else: "Exposing her body and being like a well-dressed damsel, she stands before our gaze, gracefully leaning like a young lady just out of her bath. Usha, the daughter of heaven, dispersing the encircling dark gloom comes with all radiances." This *divo duhita* like a shining maiden fully aware of her bewitching charms, that her fair figure be visible, stands while taking her bath. Griffith renders it as follows: "As conscious that her limbs are bright with bathing, she stands, as 'twere, erect that we may see her. Driving away malignity and darkness, Dawn, Child of Heaven, hath come to us with lustre." But she comes manifesting her beauty and splendour according to the dynamics of Truth, Ritam. In fact, that is how we must take her when the poet says, with a characteristic boldness, that she is exposing her breast—*vakṣa usreva barjaham*—instead of paraphrasing it as "she bears her secret body of Truth to the sacrificer". Even Nolini Kanta Gupta is somewhat trepid and faint-hearted here. He renders the Rik differently. "As a dancer decorates her limbs, as a cow displays her milk-heavy udder, Dawn creates for the world the Light and opens out the darkness, even as a herd does its shelter-stall." Let us take one last example of the category: "Usha goes westward like a woman who has no brother repairs to her kinsmen, or like one ascending the court-steps for the recovery of his property she ascends in the sky to vindicate her luminosity. And as a fond wife yearning to please her husband puts on an attractive attire she unmasks her radiant charms." It is interesting to note that even in these few verses there is plenty of material to get some general idea about the Vedic society and the life a common man lived in those ancient times. The symbols are sufficiently indicative of their worldly activities. But in the hands of the seer-poet these always remain mystically charged with spiritual experiences. Apropos of the divine Dawn or Usha, Sri Aurobindo says that everywhere "Dawn comes as a bringer of the Truth, is herself the outshining of the Truth. She is the divine Dawn and the physical dawning is only her shadow and symbol in the material universe." Even this last shadow in the material universe is removed by him when he opens his epic *Savitri* with the picture of the transcendental Dawn soon to arrive here on this earthly horizon.

The point can perhaps be best illustrated with examples picked up again from the *Vedic Epiphany*. While the Rik, "O Soma, for you the winds are gracious, for you flow the rivers; they all celebrate your greatness", is simple and lyrical, we begin to get into mystic symbolism with the accompanying spiritual

philosophy—if we have to see it in post-Vedantic terms—when the Rishī hymns this God of Happiness and Felicity as he kindles the suns of existence: “This purified, all-contemplating, all-knowing Soma lends radiance to the sun and all the orbs of light.” The symbolism becomes more complex in “O Soma and Pushan, givers of plenty, direct towards us the heaven-measuring seven-wheeled chariot which does not tow everybody but turns to everywhere, your master-chariot that is harnessed by the mere thought, the five-reined one.” The birth and growth of Agni, the divine Flame, is hymned gloriously as the material Nature progresses in Consciousness: “O youthful Mother... the unborn has grown in your womb through many autumns; I have seen him when you have brought him forth.” The aspiring young seeker approaches Agni as his guide: “O Agni, you exist in the manifest and in the Unmanifest, in the birthplace of Daksha and in the bosom of infinity. You are our elder brother and the ordainer of eternal laws. In primordial time you were both the bull and the cow.” At times the image of Yajnik sacrifice itself is used to describe the spiritual attainments: “Seized and bound to the threefold tree of life Shunahshepa invokes the son of Aditi: may the sovereign Varuna, all-knowing and irresistible, deliver him from the triple bondage and liberate him.” The Rishī is now free of the three lower natures or *vyāhrtis*. The fair-tongued (*suṣivhā*) and golden-handed (*hiraṇyapāṇi*) Surya is praised that he may descend and give complete protection: “The sweet-voiced, golden-hued Savitri descends from above thrice daily at the assemblies of devotees; may he accept the laudations of the worshippers and fulfil their aspirations.” Significant descriptions indeed!

But the Vedic language is very complex and one must have a supple intuitive feel for words and symbols and sounds. One has to be not only a scholar and master but also a sage and poet intimate with the spiritual ideas and truths and experiences it embodies. Otherwise even a simple-looking hymn can lead to utter confusion and absurd interpretation of the text. This has happened over the ages, with hypothesis heaped on hypothesis. Each translator and commentator has made his own version of the Riks, the truth yet eluding us because we have not climbed to that world of solar illumination. Pick up, for instance, the Gayatri-hymn addressed to Indra (I.9.8):

अस्मे धेहि श्रवो बृहद् द्युम्नं सहस्रसातमम् । इन्द्र ता रथिनीरिषः ॥

Asme dhehi śravo bṛhad dyumnaṁ sahasrasātāmam, indra tā rathinīriṣaḥ.

Madhusudan Reddy renders it thus: “O Indra, grant us the most powerful hearing born of divine inspiration, give us the Light enjoyable by all, and the fast-moving impulsions prayed for earlier.” In Griffith we have: “Grant us high fame, O Indra, grant riches bestowing thousands, those fair fruits of earth borne home in wains.” Chitrava Shastri Englished it: “Give us cartfuls of food, O Indra, that thousandfold wealth by which may our renown and glory increase.”

If the last two follow the Sayanite interpretation, the first is in close affinity with Sri Aurobindo's. Sri Aurobindo elsewhere discusses the word *sahasra*—which is taken by the Scholiasts as “a thousand”—and tells us that as an adjective it is “plentiful or forceful” and as a noun “plenty or force”. Sri Aurobindo himself transcreates the Rik as follows. “Dispose to us knowledge of the large, a brilliance of utterly forceful steadfastness and, Indra, those rapturous masteries.” We are suddenly taken to an altogether different world, far away from struggling thought and hesitant expression, abandoning wains and waggons for the gains of rapturous masteries. The truck-loads of analysis bring us nothing when the touch with the spirit is absent. Unfortunately, that has been the tragedy of the intermediate and the immediate past which we have not been yet able to shake off in spite of the arrival of the best of the best Light, *idaṁ śreṣṭham jyotisām jyotiruttamam*. The secret of the Veda revealed to us by Sri Aurobindo during the first World War still remains unacknowledged and unknown. In the 'forties Kapali Shastri annotated and commented on the first Ashtaka of the Rig Veda in fairly good detail. About his monumental work M. P. Pandit writes: “Whether these clues of symbolism, albeit based on linguistic research, could yield results in a systematic manner, whether the results thus arrived at could stand the test of the scholar's scrutiny and whether there was any support to these findings in the vast mass of the literature that grew around and flowed from the Vedas, were questions that naturally arose in the minds of earnest students and demanded a satisfying answer in the form of a regular exposition of the Hymns as done by earlier commentators. And it is precisely this desideratum that has been sought to be met by *Siddhanjana*.” Shastriar's *magnum opus* is a work of rich and mature scholarship and a lifetime's sadhana done at the feet of the Master-Yogi. His *Siddhanjana* was read out in manuscript form by A. B. Purani¹ to Sri Aurobindo who blessed it and sent it back to the author-disciple. That should put a complete seal of authenticity on the treatise. But the treatise is in Shastric Sanskrit and is as if meant only for specialists. Those who have merely a general acquaintance with the language but are in sincere need of the Vedas would certainly like to have an accompanying translation of it in English. The one person who could have completed it competently and with Vedic understanding was Pandit himself, but unfortunately it did not happen. Prof. Madhusudan Reddy's three-volume project to give us the Vedas seen in the light of Sri Aurobindo is an impressive work bringing with it the knowledge of the Western mind and the intuition and truth-sense of the ancient Indian sages. The presentation is lucid and pretty dependable to get a certain feel for the epiphanic experiences of the Tapasvins of the Past. The Vedic Vision, Action and Victory constitute three mighty strides in the measure of enlightened understanding of what the Master-Yogi has put in the germinally epoch-making work: *The Secret*

¹ Or did Sri Aurobindo read it himself before his eyesight became weak? But it is certain that he appreciated it immensely and praised the author

of the Veda. But a blind eye and a deaf ear are turned towards it. That's a pity, as Reddy says in his first volume: "Even Dayananda's spiritual commentary and Sri Aurobindo's monumental esoteric interpretation of the Vedas have not adequately succeeded in pulling out modern Indian Vedic scholarship from the disastrous umbra of colonial thinking. However, a few of them are beginning to see the light although they still do not fully agree with the esoteric import of the Vedas." The rebirth of the Vedic Dawn and the supramental approach have yet to establish themselves amongst us. To use the Vedic image: there is none seated on the sacred grass and no immortal Gods are offered the rejoicing Swaha. There is none who can proclaim to have seen Indra and Varuna and Agni and Savitri and Bhaga. There is none who can 'chant the Vedas with grandeur' and climb the slopes of heaven to the vast worlds of Truth and Light and immortality.

"When not understood, it is far away"—so the Vedas have remained far away from us because they have not been understood. There have been interpretations galore. Reputable people have considered them to be the works of a primitive race, of Nature-worshippers, the followers of some old crude tribal religion; at the best they have been credited to be high-poetic hymns, with the qualification that those are the songs of noisy birds, *fortissimo* of rustics. Rishi Vishwamitra was a farmer and ploughed his fields using obstinate bulls, all his concern was to urge and drive them to work with loud chants. Such is the physical mind's absurd interpretation. The extent to which pseudo-rationalism can go is best seen in the rendering of the famous Gayatri Mantra of Vishwamitra:

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥ III 62 10

S. V. Ganapati translates it as follows: "That Savita of excellent vigour, whose effulgence is great with ideas (conceptions) for us, satisfies us from the source and also nourishes us above with the course of life." Even Griffith does much better than this: "May we attain that excellent glory of Savitar the God: So may he stimulate our prayers." W. Jones's paraphrastic translation is certainly far more satisfying than both these: "Let us adore the supremacy of that divine sun, the godhead, who illuminates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understanding aright in our progress towards his holy seat." There is a fashion current today to speak in a scientific vein about everything and everywhere; but more often than not misplaced notions of conscious reasoning are introduced even while reading the Vedas, as if they were going to acquire extra prestige and hence acceptability by the present generation brought up in this milieu of overbearing science and technology. When people say that "brain-cells like the stars in the sky are referred to as Visvadevas", or "perhaps the radioactivity of some of the higher elements of matter is an effort at breaking free from this repressed state presaging life-activity to follow with the cooperation of matter", or "light behaving both as a

wave and a particle is accounted for by this basic principle of its genesis'', the principle of ideas getting densely packed to form matter, it is a travesty of both science and spirituality. We see similar things happening with Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* which is said to explain the Quantum Field Theory of Modern Physics; parallelisms are absurd and futile. The experience of Shiva's dance and the whirling of electrons in an atom belong to different categories of reality and, although there are multiple projections of one on the other, they cannot be brought down in an equation to the same level. This is just one more dimension added to the traditional naturalistic, ritualistic, theological, linguistic, psychological, philosophical interpretations of the revealed texts and, as there are so many traditional interpretations, none of them can be the whole truth; even the degrees of truth are varying.

The merit of Madhusudan Reddy's *Vedic Epiphany* is that it stays clear of all this speculative abstract uncertain stuff and plunges straight into the Aurobindonian spirit accessible to an enlightened will, feeling and intellect. It may not be based on direct spiritual realisations or experiences, but is definitely perceptive of the highest possible intuition and inspiration. For example, first he gives us Rishi Vamadeva's Surya-Rik: "May that divine Savitri who is the god of great felicity, the engenderer of good deeds, he who comprehends all and is the regulator of the movable and the immovable, grant us shelter in the triple world and protect us against all evil." Reddy then writes: "The revelation of the Sun of Truth precedes a prolonged preparation on the part of the seeker. It needs a succession of dawns to make the sacrificer fully receptive to the supreme Truth. His inability to retain the Light uninterrupted for a long time necessitates the periodic withdrawal of Light for long or short periods that helps the seeker to assimilate it, whereupon he emerges into greater Light. This continues until the Sun becomes more and more effective and dispels all darkness,—until the seeker grows ready and healthy for the supreme revelation." Following this is the corresponding Rik by Rishi Kutsa Angirasa: "Such is the divinity, such the might and majesty of Surya that when he has set he withdraws into himself what is spread over the unfinished task as if unyoking the horses from his chariot; then the Night extends her enveloping darkness." Thus we see that the whole yogic process is correctly and vividly described by Reddy. Periods of illumination and assimilation are a common experience in the sadhana of the aspirant. These are the successive dawns in the inner life of the seeker. But see again what a mess Wilson has made of it! Griffith quotes Wilson: "He hath withdrawn, that is, the cultivator or artisan desists from his labour, although unfinished, upon the setting of the sun; when the sun has withdrawn (into himself) the diffused (light which has been shed) upon the unfinished task." So here we have a pastoral picture, the nomads drifting from distant lands and settling down in the fertile plains of the country! But the pertinent question to be asked is: If this is pastoral poetry, can it hold a firm grip on the mind and soul of an entire race for centuries and centuries, as if fallen into a torpor it was awaiting the arrival of the Dawn

from the West? There have been alternations of days and nights, at times long days and long nights, in the collective consciousness of the country, but these again seem to be symbolic of another preparation. Such periods but indicate inner happenings in the spiritual progress and cannot be taken merely as natural phenomena in the Indian or the Arctic skies. Rishi after Rishi speaks of the riches of Light brought to him by the divine Dawn which is always the illumining consciousness of the Truth Sri Aurobindo explains: "The Night is clearly the image of an inner darkness; by the coming of the Dawn the Truths are won out of the Nights. This is the rising of the Sun which was lost in the obscurity... the sun of Truth and it now shoots out its tongue of fire towards the golden Light. Dawn in the Veda is the goddess symbolic of new openings of divine illumination on man's physical consciousness. She alternates with her sister Night; but that darkness itself is a mother of light and always Dawn comes to reveal what the black-browed Mother has prepared." In perfect conformity with this is the explanation given by Madhusudan Reddy for the above-mentioned Riks; in fact, this is generally true for the whole *Epiphany* and when we read it the original breath comes with a soothing freshness which carries the promise that we are on the true Vedic track though far away may seem the Home of that bright ancient Truth. We may differ in certain nuances but perhaps that is not quite important, certain depths may also be wanting but again there are depths below engrossing and hidden secret depths. Also there are a number of topics which need an in-depth study—like the identification of the Vedic Aditi with the Divine Mother of Sri Aurobindo—and the expectation is that these will be taken up by the author in his subsequent projects.

Infinite are the unsounded mysteries of the Vedas and occupation with them is always profitable, profitable in every sense, for secular gains and for rich rewards of the inexhaustible spirit. So much remains yet understood. But if the Vedas explain the Vedas, then the completeness of our fulfilment lies in them only. This is also a process of creative growth in the possibilities of the multidimensional. Divine abundances have to pour on human life and make it divine. A Rik exhorts the aspirant: "Set within thee the Will that knows all the births, the divine sacrificer in the seasons; today let thy sacrifice march forward unceasingly, thy sacrifice shall open to thee the whole epiphany of the god-heads." If so, then, perhaps we may have a glimpse of the Gita's revelation: "I am lodged in the heart of all; from me are memory and knowledge and their absence. And that which is known by all the Vedas (and by all forms of knowing) am I; and I indeed the knower of Veda and the maker of Vedanta."

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।
वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥

R. Y. DESHPANDE

THE MIDNIGHT MUSIC FOR JANUARY 1, 1972

IN the ethereal wideness above
Twinkled the smiling eyes,
The mystic miracle of the Formless!
Below on the meadow, mountain and sea,
The festival of silvery rays...

The worshippers, meditating around the Samadhi,
Aspired for the auspicious hour.
Counted moments with each heart-beat
For the advent of the Birth-Centenary Year!

Suddenly piercing the nocturnal silence
Broke forth the sound of music...
The earth's core throbbed with Love
Yearning for the message of the Mother!

"Let us all try to be worthy of
Sri Aurobindo's Centenary "
Sri Aurobindo, Avatar body!
The memory will ever exist
In the golden book of eternity

The musical strings ardently absorbed the voice,
The melody rose to its climax .
Then gradually slowing down
Sank into total soundlessness!

A silence pregnant with resonance of music
Pervaded the places around,
Then again set in the melody
Filling the sphere with an ecstatic call

The seed-word OM was sown into the earth
At the very inception of creation.
It emerged now in the worshippers' mind
And echoed from the moon and the stars!

The eyes that opened first one hundred years back,
In a solitary corner of the country,

Have since mingled vision with the supreme Sun
And illumined the seeking mind of the world!

O supramental Avatar Guru,
Let the year's incense of worship
Burn in the secret cave of all hearts
And the fragrance divinise the earthly nature
With the force of Thy symbolic Rhyme.

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—II

HARADHAN-DA

ANYONE entering the Ashram Courtyard couldn't miss Haradhan-da—not only because he was there almost all the time the Ashram Gate was open, but more because the sheer physical presence of the man was striking; so were his doings and his ways. We kids looked at him with curiosity, awe and some caution.

Haradhan-da, like Manibhai, was big—bigger. He was of impressive proportions, tall and broad, a mid-riff to match, that lent dignity without detracting from the whole. A great head adorned by a beard long but not too thick. Calm eyes with a gleam in them. A large nose. A larger forehead, with a 1/2 rupee-size vermilion mark (kum-kum), that merged into a great bald head, itself fringed with sparse shoulder-length hair. The attire was simple. Just-below-knees length dhoti, coarse and not too white. A chudder of the same material and colour as the dhoti was usually thrown over one shoulder and under the other arm and round the chest. This was enough to compel anyone to pause in mid-step and take note. But there was more. A string hung around his neck. What hung on to the string, hidden by the chudder? When perchance the chudder slipped, if alert you may catch a glimpse of a large folding knife. He wore thick “khadams”—wooden sandals—which must have seen decades of service. His footprints were deeply etched into them. The wood was polished to a glossy sheen by wear. No one saw him change those for new ones. He carried a kuja of water every day from the Ashram to his room. The kuja was an ordinary one, but bore his mark. It also shone like polished granite by constant, careful and long, long use. This too I have not seen him change. The lid must have broken and was replaced by half a coconut shell—as polished as the kuja. He used an umbrella when needed. Not the usual “Stag” brand nor the new-fangled midget spring-loaded folding one. What he carried was a bit more awkward but more effective—alas we don't see the like any more. It was a large dome-like affair made of palm leaves and bamboo strips, no closing or opening, always open. The handle too was bamboo. (We see pictures of our ancients, like Vamana Avatar, using this model.) He looked all of a Tantric of a couple of centuries back, who had stepped into our lives. He *was* a tantric in his previous life and he continued to be so this time—a worshipper of the Mother. Small wonder the awe and caution he inspired in us. Later the feelings were deeper—of respect and wonder.

Haradhan-da first came for a short visit long, long ago, in 1916. He hailed from Chandernagore (then a French colony). I heard he first went to meet Sri Aurobindo in our “Guest House”. He saw the Master washing his face at the tap (outside, near the back-stairs). Haradhan-da stood by, reverent, quiet. Sri Aurobindo, when he had finished washing, just glanced up and softly said, “Would you make me a cup of coffee?”

Haradhan-da was a soldier in the First World War (1914-1918) He fought in France He stopped a bullet with his belly. It got embedded there. As often happens, things most needed are not found and this was not the best of times to complain—a dirty war was on. This time there was no anaesthetic available—so he was just laid flat and the bullet dug out! Such were his guts. Taken prisoner, he was being shipped off to some POW camp. He jumped overboard when the ship was some distance off the coast of Algeria and swam ashore. (Must have landed with a fish in his mouth as any Bengali worth his salt would.) Later he wrote a book on war strategy in Bengali—“Lodayer Notoon Kayeda” (New Strategies of War).

He finally came and settled here at the end of 1930—actually on 30th December 1930. I first set eyes on him in the Ashram Courtyard. He loomed large on the scene. His work? He boiled water for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. (The boiler still stands, retired—a happy relic of the past.) It's in the little room where flowers, and dhoop etc. are kept by Vishwabani-di in front of the Cashier's office He moved around in the courtyard cleaning, sweeping, keeping an eye on the Fruit Room (erstwhile Pujalal-ji's room). He was there to guide and help people and regulate the flow of 'Q's, (daily Blessings, Darshan Days etc as Rajkumar with his hordes does now on Darshan Days). He did not speak much. He didn't need to He usually took the flower that the Mother gave at the head of the 'Q' and then stood at the turning in front of Bula-da's room. (Mansukh is the present occupant.) He stood, hands in 'namaskar' and just waved you to your place in the 'Q'. He stood until the Mother got up and went upstairs He was the sole barrier and guide. No chalk lines or ropes.

Rarely did I see him flare up. Once a visitor, a galling type, wanted to beat the system, would not pay heed to his guidance. Haradhan-da had to raise his voice and his eyes took on an ominous glint. The man shrivelled down to size, so did many near by. A mantle of hush settled over the area.

One of his jobs was a strange one. Don't know why he did it. Never thought of asking him. He would espy an insect, spider, centipede etc. and 'bang' his palm would go down on it He would then carefully wrap his handiwork in a leaf and tuck it in the fold of his dhoti at the waist. Later he would offer it up at a nest of black ants. Why is anybody's guess

The last of his duties was to accompany the body of any ashramite who passed away to the burning-ghat. Relatives and friends may return after some time, but Haradhan-da would stay back till the burning was well over half-way through He probably saw to it that the ghat attendants were not tempted to remove some of the fuel to resell for the next funeral. Be that as it may, he would come back much later and if he happened to meet any of the departed's relatives or friends, he would do a 'namaskar' and say with some solemnity “Bhalo Pudeche”—“He burned well ” I received this information after my uncle's cremation.

Haradhan-da lived many years here. He lived where Biren-da (masseur, ex-boxer) now lives, i.e. groundfloor of the Archives building. Yet in all those years he had seen and walked just two or three streets of Pondy—rue François Martin and rue d'Orléans (Manakula Vinayagar Street). His unchanging path was: Home to Dining Room (François Martin). D.R. to Ashram via the Ganapathy Temple (rue d'Orléans) He got off his khadams and made obeisance in front of the temple Got on to his khadams and off to the Ashram Then, back home via François Martin at night Of course the road leading to the burning-ghat was known to him He also walked through the Park when time permitted, to tell stories to some children who played there—Kiran Kumari (Jiji), Sujata Nahar. And, just once, I think, he had been to the Beach road.

1950—The Second World War was over in 1945. The world had hardly caught back its breath, the Korean War was on. This meant people's ears were itching for news A radio would ease the itch. But who had one? Not one of the 700-800 Ashramites of that time could boast of possessing one. We didn't even know enough to think of having one of these gadgets It was out of reach for most. Haradhan-da was one of the few who listened to a radio—Where? When? Pavitra-da's room had a radio—maybe there. He would repeat the news to those who wanted to hear My uncle (Pantulu—who may appear later as an A T N S.G.=Among the not so great) being old but interested, sent my brother and me news-gathering to Haradhan-da every night. We usually sat in the corner where Vishwabani-di distributes flowers and dhoop for the Samadhi (this was Haradhan-da's work before her). There is a little platform, Haradhan-da sat up, we two down. He would settle down comfortably and start with, "This is what the radio said," and repeat that as closely as possible to the radio announcement. Then, "This is what I made out of it" and proceed to give his views and interpretation We went home and regorged all this.

Once, after this "double news" he told us a story—an adventure he had gone through. He was known to be fearless. He had roamed the Sunderbans. In those days the forests were thick, teeming with animals. I will let him narrate: "One day a friend of mine came along, toting a gun and an ambition. He asked me to take him to the Sunderbans, to bag a tiger. So we went. We dug a pit about 5 feet deep, 4 or 5 feet across We got into it and stood back to back, he with his gun, I with a thick, strong lathi (stick)—waiting, watchful. Soon enough a tiger appeared, as luck would have it, on the side the friend was facing. That "father of the gun" promptly fainted to the floor of the pit taking the gun along with him. I had just time enough to look round to see the tiger make a leap. I ducked, and the tiger landed, fortunately, a pair of paws on either side of the pit. I was most upset with the friend and the tiger Having the lathi in my hand, I did the obvious—gave a mighty upward shove under the tiger. The tiger was thrown away some distance, recovered, and started pacing to and fro." I suppose he wouldn't let a dinner go cheaply The tiger must have been greatly taken aback,

never having been treated so inhumanly and from such an angle

Haradhan-da continued: "I was trying to keep the tiger at a distance, keeping both eyes on him and swinging my lathi to match his pacing. At the same time I was trying to rouse my friend with my foot, hoping he would pick up some courage and his gun and end this stalemate. This was not to be. Fortunately the tiger decided to quit."

The tiger must have learned that all men are not equal and decided to seek an easier meal elsewhere.

I heard long back, but could get no recent corroboration, that Haradhan-da helped the Mother in giving significances to flowers (what help and how much? I couldn't find out). But it is true that he never threw away a flower given by the Mother. He dried and kept the flowers. It seems there was a heap of them under his cot.

He fed crows in the afternoons from his window. They would alight on the window sill and pick up the bread crumbs. Sometimes a street urchin too may get a piece of bread. One day Parul (Capt.), under the able tutelage of Chitra Jauhar, stretched out her hand without showing the rest of herself and got a piece of bread. Next Chitra did the same. To her dismay her hand was caught. A struggle ensued. Chitra got away, but the game was up. Haradhan-da had seen her. He caught Chitra's hand and not Parul's—why? Not that he was kind to one and not to the other—no—Chitra forgot to remove her wrist-watch. Those days beggars could not afford wrist-watches.

A visitor once asked Haradhan-da, "Who is the foremost sadhak here?" Haradhan-da tried to sidestep, but the man was persistent. Finally Haradhan-da took him aside and in a stage whisper told him, "First you, then I," and left him more puzzled than enlightened.

In the earlier days a young aspirant on his first day or so here was reading a newspaper in the Reading Room (now the Fruit Room). He was a bit overawed to suddenly find this big Tantric-looking man beside him. More so when Haradhan-da, for it was he, spoke to him and ended with some advice. He said to the young man: "You have come to live under the Mother's wings. She will give you many opportunities to ask, and have anything. Things useful and even of luxury. Refuse all. Ask only for a leaf of Tulasi (Devotion)." The young man has, inevitably, grown older. But the imparted wisdom stood him well and is still fresh in his mind. The young man was none other than our Ravindra-ji.

Time passed, and Time knows no great, no small, no good or bad. All are sooner or later taken up. I don't know exactly how or when Haradhan-da took ill, nor what the illness was. I went to attend on Kavi Nishikanto—(Kobi a great and interesting man if ever there was one)—in the General Hospital. (Jipmer was not yet in existence.) There I found Haradhan-da in the next bed. He was already too far gone. He was not speaking—probably could not. His bed and he had to be cleaned every now and then. Kobi jokingly remarked: "Oré Batti,

Hitler o erokom treatment payeni” (“Batti, even Hitler didn’t get such treatment”). Soon after, Haradhan-da left us. The Ashram Courtyard was suddenly empty—for a while Time blunted memories. New events and new people quickly filled in the empty spaces. Yet one may verily say, “Where or when another like him?”

Haradhan-da’s life and work seem slow and spent within a small circle. Would you judge him as rigid, uninterested or uninteresting? The times were different. Life flowed slowly, between banks. These men were different They never knew what it is to be “bored”. They minded their own business at hand. The future for them was the next day or the next “yuga”. Maybe they looked inward and found many untrod ways.

Let us not judge at all. Rather let us, sometimes, light a small lamp in the shadows of the Past and pay homage to the likes of him who preceded us. They build the steps we climb later—maybe to add one more of our own.

(To be continued)

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

INDIAN TEMPLES AND MAN, THE EMBODIED SOUL

IN recent years there has been an awakening of enlightened interest in ancient and medieval Indian art and culture, in the West and also among the Indian élite. It is seen, especially, in respect of Indian temple architecture and sculpture. This eager interest has given rise to publications on the subject which are beautifully illustrated, well-documented and generally of high quality. The only *lacuna*, if one may say so, is that the authors usually lack spiritual insight, which is essential, into the subject they expound. This results in a mass of detail which engages and, maybe, satisfies the mind but does not illumine the heart, leaves it dry or touches it only superficially. For, if the spiritual basis, simple spiritual truths, which are the foundation, are left out, a mere web of mental complexities woven by the intellect cannot move the heart. The works on Indian temple architecture and sculpture, except in some isolated cases, give a mass of religious and mythological and even technical details but do not throw light on the spiritual basis of the object of their study. Before we look for this spiritual reality at the foundation of the temple, it would be useful to know the social purpose it served and the conditions giving rise to temple construction.

For over eighteen centuries the temples in India have been the hub of the community life of its villages and towns. They served the Indian society in several ways. They have been the source of inspiration to different forms of art like music and dance and drama as also architecture, sculpture and painting, and helped these to develop a high degree of excellence. The temples have been the focal point for the people around to gather on festive occasions and thus helped in promoting good artistic taste as well as a collective feeling of oneness. A number of these temples served the cause of education and other intellectual pursuits; and even the meanest of them provided food and shelter to the poor pilgrim on his way through the village.

In the Vedic period and the post-Vedic period of the Upanishads, the form of worship was 'yajna' and so there was no need of temples and neither the literature nor the archaeological studies of the period have revealed their presence as may be expected. The earliest known temples, I believe, date back to the third century AD. But from their mention in the Mahabharata and the Puranas we may infer that they may have existed around the third century BC. What later necessitated their construction and what was the idea behind its plan and structure are questions of some interest and may be of some value to the spiritual seeker.

But before we turn to the reality underlying the plan and structure of the Hindu temple let us briefly survey the major philosophical and mystic or yogic schools in existence around the sixth century BC. There was the 'Purva Mimamsa' school of philosophy which prescribed 'yajna' as the right form of worship; it had however lost its hold on the masses after the advent of Buddhism

and Jainism. There was 'Sankhya' darshana or philosophy with its insistence on the separation of Purusha and Prakriti leading to the conquest of Prakriti by Purusha. There were the 'Nyaya' and 'Vaisheshika' darshanas based on logical analysis demanding subtlety of thought and therefore having a following only among the erudite pundits. There was 'Patanjali Yoga' and 'Tantra discipline', the former trying to realise Ishwara through a system of eight stages, the latter worshipping 'Shakti' by somewhat unusual methods. There were 'Vedanta' philosophies based on the thought and teaching of Buddha and Mahavira initially simple for the common man to understand but not so simple to follow in practice, besides being dry. It was in these circumstances that the 'Bhakti Yoga', the path of devotion and surrender to God, became increasingly popular, with the recommendation from the epics and the Puranas to back it, being easy to understand and follow and with the doctrine of Divine Grace which serves as a factor in its favour. It therefore seems that it is this Bhakti cult with additional support of yoga and tantra schools which helped evolve the temple concept. Mahayana Buddhism also may have helped the cause of the temple.

It is, however, the Upanishadic and Puranic view of creation and man, which was accepted by the Bhakti Yoga philosophy, that led to the evolution of the form and structure of the temple. The Upanishads and the Puranas speak of the creation as consisting of seven "Vyahrtis", to use the Upanishadic term, or seven planes (or worlds) of existence as Sri Aurobindo names them, a ladder of consciousness connecting the physical world to the transcendent Divine. Man is described as an embodied soul, a microcosm, a soul with a mind and a vital being and a physical body as its instruments but also a causal body consisting of "Vijnana" (knowledge) and "Ananda" (bliss) and "Chit" (pure consciousness) and "Sat" (being) as unevolved elements of his nature.

Thus we may conclude that the temples in India are the creation of not the primitive but the philosophically quite advanced and spiritually awakened man whose view of himself and his universe might be reflected in the form and structure of the temple. Now, although the temples in different parts of India and at different periods of time do differ in certain external aspects, they have certain basic features in their plan and structure common to all of them.

The Indian temple usually consists of three or more courts each inside the other and each on a slightly elevated platform, which are generally unwallled but have pillars to support the roof, and at the centre there is a walled-in sanctum whose only opening is its entrance door. The sanctum is thus a dark, cool place of the temple where the idol is installed on a pedestal. Below the seat of the idol a vessel with objects symbolising spiritual wealth is buried deep. Above the sanctum rises the temple structure called "shikhara". The shikhara is built in several layers culminating in the "kalasha".

The significance of the plan and structure of the temple should be, from what has been said before, quite obvious. The temple represents man, the

sanctum his heart and the idol his soul. In the Gita (IX 11) Sri Krishna says, "Men, out of delusion, do not recognise me lodged in the human body", and "The Lord, O Arjuna, is seated in the heart of all beings" (XVIII.61). The three outer courts are man's mental, vital and physical envelopes. The shikhara may be considered to represent the ladder of higher consciousness rising towards the transcendent Infinite and the kalasha the nectar of Immortality and Bliss. It is interesting to compare the form of the Hindu temple with the Buddhist stupa which, in the form of an inverted hemisphere, is like a human head. Perhaps it is so because the Buddha did not talk of the divine soul in the heart, but rather preached of attaining Nirvana by personal effort and will, by concentrating on the centres in the head.

What was the necessity of the temple? The consciousness of man, until he realises God, is turned outward. To him all that he needs or desires is or appears to be outside of him. So when he seeks God his search is first directed without, for within he finds only impurity and sin and confusion. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo says, "The spiritual progress of most human beings demands an extraneous support, an object of faith outside us. It needs an external image of God..."¹ The temple serves this need and helps man to awaken to the Divinity in his heart.

Were they, who conceived of the temple and its form and structure, conscious of the temple as the symbol of man, the embodied soul? The answer is yes, for the treatises on temple architecture mention that "the devotee's body is the temple and the Jiva or soul the eternal God" (*deho devālayah proktah jīvo devah sanātānah*) or "the idol is the Jiva" (*pratimā jīva ucchyate*). The construction of a temple starts with the construction of the sanctum, which is a significant fact as regards the relation of soul and body in man. Once the temple is constructed there is the ceremony of consecration (*prāna-pratisthā*) with invocation through Vedic mantras to the Godhead so that the stone idol becomes the living deity.

That the temple represents man is a truth which needs to be emphasised if man, for his spiritual progress, is to turn from external to inner worship. And this inner worship must start with adoration which brings with it an increasing consecration and self-purification "for the entrance of the Divine into the temple of our inner being, or for his self-revelation in the shrine of the heart."² In answer to a question about doing yoga, the Mother says, "Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down. A fire is burning there, in the deep quietude of the heart. It is the divinity in you—your true being. Hear its voice, follow its dictates...."³

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo describes the experience—

Here in this chamber of flame and light they met;
 They looked upon each other, knew themselves,
 The secret deity and its human part,
 The calm immortal and the struggling soul
 Then with a magic transformation's speed
 They rushed into each other and grew one.⁴

Reaching the cavern of the heart is like entering the sanctum of the temple.
 But the "shikhara" of the temple is there like—

... a chariot of the Gods
 Motionless under an inscrutable sky.
 As if from Matter's plinth and viewless base
 To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
 Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme..⁵

Here is a beckoning to an adventure of the apocalypse.

V. JAYBEE

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- 3 *The Mother's Collected Works*, Vol 3, p 1
- 4 *Savitri* (1954), Book 7 Canto 5, p 598
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CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of December 1995)

Reunion

I WAS floating upon waves of the memories of what had taken place at the Court of King Peace till my eyes grew heavy

Night settled on our world, time given for our tired bodies to rest and be grateful for heaven's gift of mercy sleep Sleep that has so many gifts hidden in its folds. Repose from labour, recharge of energy enough to face another day. Healing touch for the sick and balm for pain. But its greatest gift is yet to be discovered, the chance for our souls to seek their own fulfilment—and this became my greatest boon. Maybe one day I should write a book on it.

"Shall we write it together?" Here was my friend, tinkling his bell-like speech again.

"You will never cease to surprise me," I said to him, "even after all this time when you come reading my thoughts. But I am so very glad for it when it brings you to me "

"In that case, off we go! A secret to tell you, I too am as happy to come. Aha, there's a little bell inside your own head too—so come, ring it to me, let me hear what it wants to say?"

He was in a teasing humour today, so I worked up courage and popped the question. "Dear Christalis, may I ask you something?... but I am a little shy about it—it concerns my Christopher and his father. Can you please tell me, do they meet often and can I meet him too?"

"My dear Halio, now here is one wish that I cannot fulfil and I will explain why. I knew that one day you would ask me for this. but, you see, his soul has its own life now on quite another plane, and you must not pull him back from it. It is best if I don't go into this matter in any great detail, since your own field of development moves also in its own way and must not be engaged in any other pursuit to distract it.

"As for Christopher meeting him, that was on one or two occasions only, in the interest of fulfilling a desire left deep down in each one of them. But, in fact, they met as a boy-and-a-father figure, not as beings related to one another as such. This, however, was ample fulfilment for both of them—without any ties to pull them in some undesirable direction. That would not be in the interest of their development, as you will understand. Does this satisfy you?"

"However, I do have another treat for you. You have often wondered, haven't you, if I would take you to my parents one day—and to tell you the truth, they themselves have expressed the same wish. I shall fulfil both these wishes today. Would you like that?"

"Would I like it? Dear me, this is my day of joy! I would be so happy to meet them. I can hardly believe it, you will take me to them, really?" I bubbled over with expectation, like a child promised a birthday gift.

"You cannot imagine how much I think of them. Sometime I think it was a dream, you know what I mean. When you were born, if that is the word for it."

"What else do you wish to call it then? Of course I was born to this body."

"But you were just a boy then and also when you first came to me, and then you became so much taller so soon—how was that?"

"Now, that is really a silly question, Halio, I am surprised truly. You should know by now that in our world the Law of Growth has a different intensity and can be effected at will, as one's work requires it."

I felt that he was a little impatient, so I offered no further comment.

"Let us not delay now," he said, "give me your hand, you haven't been to this region since your soul first took you there. It is a high plane of the spirit and I feel that you have earned your proper entry to it. However, the truth is that I sought permission for this. As you know, no one should act without the higher sanction if they want to go in the right direction. Not so, Halio?"

"Yes, it is good that you teach me this, but my heart is jumping with excitement. I cannot help it!"

"I can see that," he said, smiling. "We could almost sail by the force of it!"

I was accustomed to go with him to some lovely garden or to a flowering field for our teaching sessions, except on occasions when he had taken me to witness some important functions for my learning. At such times, we would arrive very fast, without stopping on the way. Today's journey was different. The atmosphere was unlike the ones I had experienced before. Maybe, I thought, we will go through the Plane of Illumination again.

"Not there today, Halio." He held my hand firmer now, which gave me much needed stability, as I was soon to learn.

The road stretching before us was... was... "What?"

"Good God," a cry escaped me, "look, Christalis, look over there! What is that glitter on that road? Road?... But it is made of .. not stones... but of some gems, giving light! If that is a road, how will I step on it? Will we float over it, or do what?"

"Wait, please, let me wait a little... I want to see, I never have seen such a place before. Christalis, look, look now!" I pleaded, pulling him to a stop. "I feel. . I feel that the road is alive! Nothing will make me go further from this wonder."

"Really, Halion, if you are going to behave like this, we shall never get

there. I beg of you not to hinder me, and as for the road being alive, well, of course it is—everything is alive here. It pulsates with joy, with an expression of love radiating it all around—that is what you feel. Only contra-love, which is hate, contracts. Don't you know at least that much?"

No, I didn't know, at least I had never thought of it as this, but I kept quiet, which took no little effort on my part. Of course, he is right, love is flowing outward and it expands, but hate becomes rigid, it solidifies into a fixity hard to mould. We even used to say: he has a heart of stone, nothing can move him! Nor me, from this glorious sight!

"Now what happened?" He gave my arm a good pull—"Are we to go ahead, or just stop here having you stare at the road? For once, I was glad your thoughts kept you occupied for a while, but now enough is enough! Shall we proceed, or would you rather that we went back?"

That did it—"Excuse me, Christalis, I am all thrown off balance from seeing this.. and I also think unnecessary thoughts. Please, please, do take me farther. I will not disturb you again. I promise."

"Thank you," he exclaimed, "for a moment I believed that you would just stay put here, admiring the road. However, your thoughts were not unnecessary, I will speak of them to you later on."

Now I felt, as I did once in a dream: whatever I saw, seemingly fixed objects, even scenery, came alive before my eyes. But, of course, why do I forget it again? He has just said that everything is alive here.

A faint recollection played on my mind's strings... this is familiar. I have seen this before. those buildings over there! Crystal houses. when have I seen them? And how could I have, since he never brought me here till now?

Christalis was smiling, he knew something but would not tell me. Well, I'd best wait for it.

That feeling again. so entrancing, the air was vibrant with it. I stared ahead. Here was an enchanted world of buildings, more like palaces really, that looked like little worlds all by themselves, made of crystalline substances, each a different colour. They were in constant movement, I observed, when I looked at them intently, yet stayed in one place where they belonged. Truly remarkable they were.

One building among those, "that one!".. it pulled me like a magnet toward it. I trembled all over, then breaking his hold of me I began to run in its direction, Christalis close at my heels.

"I wondered if you would remember it, now I wonder no more."

I was still stupefied, I only knew that I had to enter that one particular house. "What was that? .. was it saying something? Am I dreaming or am I awake?" Whichever it was, I could not resist that pull and having come before the house I stopped abruptly.

"You have entered here before, enter again, Halion," said the house to me.

“Ha? Who spoke?” I waited, since I detected no opening, yet the feeling that I was expected here, was quite unmistakable. Should I knock? I wondered

“That will not be necessary,” came a voice from the wall in front of me and with that it opened itself—sliding apart, as if by a magic touch.

“But I haven’t touched you!” I heard my own voice saying.

“No, you haven’t but your wish did Enter then ”

“Be welcome, dearest Flower Halon. We were expecting you, but waited to see if you would remember your first visit to us. We are so happy that you have come again.”

There they stood, with arms open to embrace me—those beautiful two, my dear friends, who first received me and, as their confidant, took me with them to. . to, yes . to Lotus Lake! They were to receive their child, whom they called, and who rose from the heart of a lotus... Christalis, my beloved teacher-friend

My heart was overflowing with joy. Memories lapped at the shores of my mind. I flew toward them, offering flowers at their feet. How the flowers came to be in my hands, I no longer questioned—I could only utter—“By the love of God, please receive mine, I bring you the fire of my heart. Dear ones, accept my gratitude... I could not be happier than what this meeting makes me today.”

I turned around, “Christalis, where are you? You brought me here, do come to share my joy! Where is my lovely Christalis?”

Ringing laughter all around—“I am standing beside you, but what can I do if you have eyes only for my sweet parents?” Then turning toward them—“Shall we remain standing here, or are we permitted to go further, my beloved ones? I can hardly tell who is more overcome by this reunion? At least I am steady, looking steadfastly at that richly laid table over there! You may all remain standing here, whilst I go for a little tour of discovery.”

“Oh dear, you really put us to shame! Do come further, lovely Halon from earth And please call me by my name—I am Lumina, and my friend and spouse is Sunray. Forgive our thoughtlessness, blame our hearts for it, but how would you like us to call you—Halon or just Halio?”

“As you deem it best and fondest,” I replied. “You see, when Christalis came to me for the first time.. in a vision it was, he asked me what I was called? I told him that my name was Lillian, but that was when my husband was alive . , but you know that, forgive me for mentioning it now. Well, he used to call me Lilly for short. It was then that Christalis decided to call me Halon—or Halio for short, to make me feel better I thought. Wasn’t this so, Christalis?” But he only smiled and gave no further explanation, so I guessed that he agreed with what I had said.

“Well, then, since he has, so shall we call you Halio. Not for short, but for affection.” Two loving arms, one from either side, held mine enfolded, and led me to the interior of the crystalline world that was their home

“Our hearts are enriched by this meeting, they are as filled with love for you

as yours is for us,"—spoke the lovely Lumina

"Come, dear mother of the many children, this felicitous moment will benefit their lives. We do live in felicity, that is true, but we never forget to send it towards earth where you live—O hero-mother Halio!"

Sunsray came closer to me now, and I saw that the radiance of his eyes was as his name: full of light. He looked at me warmly, penetratingly before he spoke

"We have seen your heart of love when you first came to us. We understand your need and it was this need that has bound us together, and which called our dearly loved Christalis to come to us. For he wished to serve that need. You see therefore, Halio, how very close is our bond."

He held both my hands, then released them, yet keeping me close said:

"To commemorate this bond, receive from us this gift and the token of it," and with these words he placed a golden chain around my neck, with a single drop of vibrant ruby pendant which pulsated like a heart.

"This gem," he continued, "will give you protection and the strength you need for your self-chosen task, dear mother on earth, heaven's Halio."

I stood before them in sublime elation, only my eyes spoke of my gratitude and of my emotion. With tears welling in them, I looked into his. Words did not come to intrude on such bliss.. We remained for some time like this; indrawn, silent, each spirit a light unto itself and of its own kind, yet united by the higher Light that gave us life

Christalis touched my hand slightly and turned to his parents: "You know, dears, that I have my duty and the time allotted for it. Would you therefore excuse us for now?"

"Indeed, Christalis, but will there be a little time left to enjoy these things prepared for the occasion?"—asked Lumina. Sunsray had already made a gesture, which brought the table near us, laden with delicate things, fruits unknown to me, and some honeyed drinks.

"I was waiting for your call,"—said the table. Lumina smiled and handed each of us a golden platter filled with an array of sumptuous things, both sweet and savoury—and we uttered—"Oh the Light Divine"—and all those delicacies were taken and enjoyed by us. We were fulfilled—the table was gone.

Suddenly I remembered something: it rose like a call from my heart.

"Angels of heaven! All these lovely things and I enjoyed them without my children! This is not well. They are in need of nourishment, good things to eat to make their bodies strong.

"Lumina, Sunsray, will you help them? Will you, please? Their need is very great! They are very patient, they never complain."

"Your heart's love, Halio," he said tenderly, "is large enough to store all the things you ask for them. Your unselfish devotion to your task on earth is heaven's link for fulfilling its own wishes. Let the earth be ready to receive them.

Go now with Christalis, he is waiting to take you back, do not delay him. All will be well. . harmonious, such is the Will.”

I rose, ready to part, but my heart longed to stay longer .. I looked about me, hoping to keep in my soul’s memory all that I had seen here... a photographic souvenir to keep.

I looked at my friends wistfully .. Opening my arms for one more embrace, I rushed towards them, holding back my tears that came not from the well of sadness but from the tenderest of affections.

“Be of good cheer, Halio,” spoke Lumina, “we are never far... our love goes with you to keep you company.”

The touch of Christalis seeking my hand told me that we could linger no longer. It was time for us to leave.

“The Light be with you,” said my glorious friends, and we replied—“The Light be for all”—and were on our way.

As in a flash, we came down rapidly, till I beheld the starlit sky over the portion of the world where we lived, hardly noticing how fast was our return to it. All was silence within me, bringing down heaven’s bliss in my heart to share with my kin.

“The Light be yours!—I must leave you now—until later, then.” My good friend was gone on his many errands

“The Light is for all,” I whispered, wishing to spread my own around me as I awaited the dawn.

(To be continued)

THE PRAYERS TO SŪRYA AND AGNI IN THE ĪŚĀVĀSYA UPANIṢAD

(Continued from the issue of December 1995)

9. The Worlds of Light after Death

THOUGH Śrī Aurobindo has brilliantly worked out the unity between the last four verses and those preceding them in the Upaniṣad, he does not seem to be satisfied with what he has done. He is at great pains to show also the other dimension of this textual unity in terms of the idea of the worlds after death. In a footnote to Verse 3 Śrī Aurobindo writes: “The third verse is, in the thought structure of the Upaniṣad, the starting-point for the final movement in the last four verses. Its suggestions are there taken up and worked out.”¹³ He returns to the same subject in another place also. Towards the end of his commentary Śrī Aurobindo goes into the different aspects of the worlds after death and says that on this basis the invocation to Surya and Agni is made in the Upaniṣad.¹⁴ From these we may see the measure of importance Śrī Aurobindo attaches to the other worlds after death in understanding the intimate connection between the last four verses and other verses of the Upaniṣad.

Ironically, in discussing this question Śrī Aurobindo has merely thrown up many illuminating suggestions but withheld the connection so as to be developed by the reader himself. A keen student of Vedānta may be able to see the connection by arranging the suggestions in the right order, whereas others will see only loose ends and no connection. Naturally one finds this to be a difficult part of Śrī Aurobindo’s commentary.

While explaining the worlds after death, Śrī Aurobindo says that there are “three distinct objects beyond death”.¹⁵ (1) “a better or more fortunate life or lives upon earth”; (2) “eternal enjoyment of bliss in an ultra-terrestrial world of light and joy” called Heaven; and (3) “a transcendence exclusive of all universal existence, merged in the Supreme as in one’s true self, but having no relation with the actual or possible contents of its infinite consciousness”. If we look at Śrī Aurobindo’s interpretation of the prayers to Surya and Agni and try to note which of the three above ideas is developed in these prayers, we find the prayers to have no connection at all with them. Although his enumeration of the objects beyond death is said to be based on the 17th verse,¹⁶ that is only a *prima facie* and not a final view, for his interpretation of that verse shows that it is concerned not with the process of leaving the world and taking another birth after death but with that of winning the other worlds even when one is here. In the original text there are certain words suggestive of departing from the terrestrial world or leaving the physical body—such as *bhasmāntam śarīram* (ashes are the body’s end), *kṛtām smara* (remember the past deeds), and *naya supathā* (lead by the

good path). In fact, Shankara takes these words to imply the idea of physical death and the passage to the higher Heaven, *brahma loka*, beyond the physical world. But Śrī Aurobindo does not share this view of Shankara. In his view the prayers to Surya and Agni cannot be considered as those of a dying individual, for otherwise they are contrary to the robust enthusiasm for world-existence reflected in the second verse and therefore constitute an inappropriate end to the Upanisad. According to him, *bhāsmāntam śarīram* does not signify impending death but the perishable nature of the body as against *vāyu* which is imperishable, *amṛtam*; *kṛtam smra* is not remembering the past deeds as a mental preparation for leaving the body but a process of gaining conscious control over all past deeds done in this life and other lives; lastly, *naya supathā* is an entreaty not for leading the departed soul by the path of the gods, *devayāna*, but for completing the process of “raising, purifying and perfecting human action”.¹⁷ Thus, on Śrī Aurobindo’s own showing, there is hardly any text in the four verses which can be related to the objects aimed at beyond death. But still his assertion stands, the assertion that the suggestions of the third verse are “taken up and worked out” in the last four verses.

There is one more thing which further complicates the issue—it is Śrī Aurobindo’s own verdict on “the three distinct objects after death”. He dismisses all of them as falling short of “the supreme consummation” offered to the soul. Rejecting the first object after death, he says: “After liberation the soul is free, but may still participate in the entire movement and return to birth no longer for its own sake but for the sake of others and according to the will in it of its divine Self, the Lord of its movement.”¹⁸ Rejecting also the second, he observes: “After liberation the soul may possess these worlds (the worlds beyond) as it possesses the material birth, accepting in them a means towards the divine manifestation in which they form a condition of its fullness, each being one of the parts in a series of organised states of conscious being which is linked with and supports all the rest.”¹⁹ Like the first and second, the third object too is not favoured by him. He writes: “Transcendence is the goal of the development, but it does not exclude the possession of that which is transcended. The soul need not and should not push transcendence so far as to aim at its own extinction. Nirvana is extinction of the ego-limitations, but not of all possibility of manifestation, since it can be possessed even in the body.”²⁰ In view of his consistent disapproval of these objects and also of his repeated affirmation of the continued existence of the liberated soul in this world, we may not be wrong if we conclude that Śrī Aurobindo would prefer to stand by the interpretation he has put on verses 15 to 18,—the interpretation that the aim of the two prayers is to attain to the highest spiritual freedom without renouncing life and works in the world,—rather than to find a support in them for the objects he has envisaged. But his remark on the relation of “the worlds of Light after death” to the two prayers is unqualified and clear²¹ and, therefore, cannot be easily set aside.

It is our task now to find a way out of these contradictions without at the same time compromising on the well-expressed opinions of Sri Aurobindo. This depends on identifying the right suggestions in verse 3 and relating them to the two prayers. There are three general suggestions in the verse: (1) beyond this world lie other worlds; (2) the other worlds are places of living for those who have deserted this world, (3) the passage to the other worlds is connected with death. It is much easier to connect verse 3 and the two prayers on the basis of the first two suggestions. If we take other worlds to represent other states of consciousness, soul-states other than the one possessed by the mortals in this world, we can see how these two suggestions are developed in the prayers to Surya and Agni. The other worlds of verse 3 appear here as the superior states of divine consciousness as against the ordinary state associated with concepts and percepts. Likewise, the second suggestion is transformed here into a state of union with the Lord which the devotee of the Truth has won by leaving behind the limitations imposed by his mental consciousness. Now we come to the third suggestion whose connection with the prayers is too subtle to be easily discovered. Here we are not sure of our steps, for we do not know how in the prayers the passage to the higher state of consciousness is connected with death. As we have already stated, there are some words in verses 17 and 18 which can be linked with physical death. But we are prohibited from doing so in view of Sri Aurobindo's psychological interpretation of these terms. Now we are left with one possibility, namely, the possibility of taking the term "death" (*mṛtyu*) in a sense other than the sense of physical death and of trying to work out the connection in this light.

In verse 3 the expression *pretya* definitely means physical death. If we pass on to later verses, particularly 11 and 14, we find that the term *mṛtyu* is used twice. In both the places it is said that one should cross beyond death, *mṛtyum tīrtvā*, in order to attain immortality, *amṛtam aśnute*. That it is not used in the sense of physical death is very clear. If it were used in this sense, then the Upanisad would be speaking about crossing beyond physical death which is inconceivable in view of the teaching of the second verse which suggests that physical death is inevitable and cannot be removed from human life. If *mṛtyu* in verses 11 and 14 is used in a non-physical sense, what kind of death does the term really denote? The Upanisads offer many definitions of *mṛtyu* and all of them are psychological, for they are related to a certain state of consciousness completely separated from the Self or the Lord. Of them one is relevant here—a man may be alive but is considered to be bound by death if he is subject to the ego and the dualities it imposes on him. In the same psychological sense Sri Aurobindo takes the term *mṛtyu* in verses 11 and 14 and interprets them accordingly. He says that death is the state of "a limited ego bound to the dualities of joy and sorrow, good and evil, truth and error, love and hatred, pleasure and suffering."²² Now we see the connection which is as clear as crystal—the connection between the third

verse and the two prayers to Surya and Agni. The third suggestion in verse 3 is developed in the two prayers as a passage to the highest state of divine consciousness after the conquest of death i.e. the ego and its dualities. It is in this sense that Sri Aurobindo speaks of “the worlds of Light after death culminating in the identity of the self-luminous One” in his concluding comments on the two prayers.

We see in the prayers to Surya and Agni the awakened soul ascending to the highest state of divine Purusa and attaining union with Him, *so’ham*. But do they explicitly mention that the ascension takes place after the conquest of death? If so, where? Sri Aurobindo himself gives the clue and says that “the state after death” is “symbolically indicated”²³ in verse 18 of the Upaniṣad. Agni symbolises the supreme Lord, Īśa, in his aspect of Will. The devotee in verse 18 invokes the help of Agni to release him from “the devious action of sin”, *juhurānam eno*, and guide him safely to the supreme state of divine felicity, *rāye*. Rightly understood, the release and the destination he is praying for represent his release from death and union with the Will of the Lord. We know sin to be a counterpart of virtue; and we also know that with virtue it constitutes a duality. We may not be wrong if we take sin to represent the whole class of the dualities to which we are bound. To be bound to them is to be bound to death. When one is released from sin, one is freed from death and enjoys immortality.

10. Conclusion

The difference between the two interpretations is admittedly marked and wide: while the former is devoid of the profound wisdom natural to the sages of the Vedānta and full of cracks and flaws which betray the author’s ill-advised approach, the latter succeeds in unfolding the secret harmonies of the sage’s thought and vision, the beauty of the all-embracing aspiration for freedom and mastery, the majestic efflorescence of the ideals which inspired the founding fathers of the Aryan culture. Besides the individual differences that account for this wide divergence, the way in which the Vedic corpus was divided and its parts were related seems to have played a major role in determining the type of commentary the Upaniṣad has received from its commentators. We may not be far from the truth if we say that the prayers to Surya and Agni give their best when viewed in the light of the Saṁhitā.

Apart from the suggestions contained in the prayers to Surya and Agni, Shankara’s interpretation seems to have been influenced by an ancient tradition, much anterior to him, which associates the prayers with the process of reaching the worlds of Light after death.* Sri Aurobindo is inclined to give credit to this tradition, but at the same time he tries to show that we should get the best out of

* The tradition still survives in the form of a religious ritual observed in orthodox Hindu families where the prayers are recited before removing the dead to the cremation ground

it by giving it a significance most appropriate to the sages of the Vedanta whose aim is to conquer the worlds of Light not after departing from the world but even when they are here, *thaiva*. His purpose in linking the worlds of Light after death with the prayers is, therefore, to affirm that the devotee's aim is certainly to reach the higher worlds—not in the way Shankara seeks to understand but in the way the Aryan sages originally understood; not after physically going through death but after psychologically going beyond death, *mṛtyutaranam*. Apart from the textual necessity, this explains why Sri Aurobindo has attached such a great significance to the worlds of Light after death and their relevance to the concluding verses of the Upaniṣad.

(Concluded)

N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

References

- 13 Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads* (Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), p. 64
- 14 *Ibid*, pp. 120-21
- 15 *Ibid*, p. 119
- 16 *Ibid*
- 17 *Ibid*, p. 17
- 18 *Ibid*, p. 119
- 19 *Ibid*, p. 120
- 20 *Ibid*
- 21 *Ibid*, p. 133 See the quotation in the article under footnote 8
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 109
- 23 *Ibid*, p. 72

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo Circle, Fifty-first Number. Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry-2. 1995. Pp. 128. Price Rs. 30 00

THIS volume contains a selection from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, half-a-dozen essays centring on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and teachings, and eighteen poems that belong to the Aurobindonian school.

Sri Aurobindo in the very first essay prescribes ways and means of dealing with difficulties. Detachment, he says, enables one to live more in a part of oneself not troubled by them. In his other essay on the *śraddhā* of the Integral Yoga, he speaks about faith in the Ishwara as the most central thing: "... all things are possible when the Ishwara as our supreme Self and Spirit takes up the action and all that has been done before and all that he will do hereafter was and will be part of his infallible and foreseeing guidance and intended towards the fruition of our Yoga and our perfection and our life work." Ego is considered as the greatest danger to our sadhana. There are also a few sayings by Sri Aurobindo on True Knowledge. To quote one: "True knowledge must arrive at a oneness which embraces even though it exceeds the totality of things, not at a oneness which is incapable of it and rejects it." Cryptic though they may be sometimes, the writings and sayings of Sri Aurobindo are very effective and occupy our thoughts. There is also a lengthy essay on the result of the manifestation of the supramental principle in the earth-consciousness. Its effect, according to Sri Aurobindo, would be the evolution from Ignorance towards the supramental Light.

The volume has about half-a-dozen essays by the Mother. The supramental Power working upon this world, as the Mother perceives it, is "a certain quality of vibration which is difficult to describe, but which gives the impression of something coagulated, not fragmented.. with a golden luminosity,.. it is like a vision that imposes itself in order to be realized—in a domain that is very close to material Matter, but invisible except to the inner sight."

The Mother also stresses the need to end the reign of ego and replace it by divine consciousness. Two other interesting essays by the Mother are: (1) How to Develop the Faculty of Intuition, and (2) The Problem of Woman. An intense power of concentration is the key to all activities in the human and superhuman fields, says the Mother. The solution found by her to the eternal problem of woman is in the treatment of both sexes on a footing of perfect equality and by teaching them to find, through a constant contact with a Divine Reality, the source of all possibilities and harmonies.

These essays are followed by four poems by Sri Aurobindo. There are three poems by Arjava and four by Amal Kiran, with comments by Sri Aurobindo. Other poems included here are by Nirodbaran, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Thémis,

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, R.Y.Deshpande and Romen Palit. All the poems are of a high standard and worth reading. They are thought-provoking and are certainly inspired by the Master, Sri Aurobindo.

Kishor Gandhi's essay entitled "Limitations of Guru-Disciple Relationship in Integral Yoga—II" is a commentary on Sri Aurobindo's sense of the inadequacy of the Guru-disciple relationship. There is an interesting letter written by Sri Aurobindo to K. D. Sethna in reply to some of the critical points raised by the latter about Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*. Dr. Prema Nandakumar's critical treatise on Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Indian religion is a scholarly piece which is bound to draw the interest of any discerning student.

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee in his essay discusses clearly the metaphysics of standards of conduct for a Sadhak of the Integral Yoga. He also suggests a twelve-point programme for such a Sadhak seeking self-transformation.

A. S. Dalal's essay "Sri Aurobindo on Self, Ego and Individuality: An Integral View" is on the sense of I-ness in our ordinary state of consciousness, in cosmic consciousness and transcendent consciousness. Sachidananda Mohanty in his essay "The Burden of the Past" tells us the ways and means of serving the interests of both history and archaeology and thereby making the past a source of strength.

This elegantly designed volume carries three admirable pictures of the Mother and one of Sri Aurobindo. The writings are bound to be beneficial to students of all ages who are interested in Sri Aurobindo's teachings and philosophy.

C. P. PRASITHA BALAKRISHNAN

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

74. THE MILK OF WISDOM

TRADITION records that during the great deluge when the whole world was submerged, one spot remained untouched by the waters of the flood. And the unaffected spot came to be known as Thonipuram, meaning boat-city. Gifted with God's plenty, this ancient city, honoured with a dozen names, prided itself on housing the great and noble souls who were at once sincere, honest and God-fearing.

In this holy city, now known as Seerkazhi (Thanjavur district), lived a devotee of Lord Siva named Siva Paadha Virudayar. His wife Bagavathi was a boon to him for she put into action the thoughts of her husband. Whoever uttered the name of Lord Siva was given a sumptuous dinner by the couple. Pleased with their faith in Him, Lord Siva blessed them with a boy child.

It took three years for the parents to know that their son was a divine child.

It was customary of Virudayar to go to the temple pond for a holy dip before his morning prayer at the temple.

One morning when he stepped out of his house, he heard the tinkling of anklet bells following him. He stopped awhile, turned around and said to his wee-footed son: "Oh, no, my boy! Don't follow me. I'll be back after my prayers. Till then be a good boy and stay with your mother."

The child was adamant. He shook his head and cried.

Feigning anger, Virudayar raised his hand above his head gesturing to slap the child. But all his attempts to silence the child failed, for the boy raised his voice by a few more decibels.

"Take the child with you, lest he should cry his eyes out," said Bagavathi.

"But he is just up from his bed. He has not yet taken milk. I can't take a hungry child with me. Suppose he cries for milk?"

"If you don't take him with you, I'll be doomed. He will throw a tantrum," said Bagavathi.

Virudayar hesitated for a moment. But his son's cries and his wife's pleadings changed his mind.

The child gleefully journeyed on his father's shoulders.

When they reached their destination, Virudayar seated the child on the bank of the temple pond and said, "Be here like a goody-goody boy, till I come back."

As the child nodded his head and lisped "Yes", Virudayar waded his way to the centre of the pond, had his bath and then moved into the temple to pray.

A few minutes passed. The child searched for his father. Not finding him anywhere in the pond, he moved around on the banks of the pond all the time crying "Pa...pa...Pa...pa." When his calls went unanswered he cried out for his

mother. "Mma Mma. "

The lisps of the child was music to the ears of the divine couple in the temple. Lord Siva and Parvati stood before the weeping child

"Feed him," said Lord Siva to His consort

Parvati jetted milk out of Her breasts into a golden bowl Mixing it with divine wisdom, She offered it to the child.

The child smiled at the divine Mother and gratefully took the cup from Her hands. As he began to empty the bowl, the divine couple blessed him before they vanished.

Virudayar returned from his prayer He was shocked to see his son smacking his lips and licking the corners of his mouth. There were still a few drops of milk sticking to his upper lip.

"Hey! Who gave you the milk?"

The child smiled at his father and motioned his head towards the temple.

Virudayar became furious. He picked up a stick lying on the bank and, shaking it vigorously, asked in a threatening tone: "Tell me truly... who gave you the milk?"

The child continued to smile. The divine forms of his divine parents inspired him. The milk of wisdom still on his tongue tickled him to lisp. He lisped in numbers and the numbers came. As he sang a hymn of ecstatic delight, Virudayar stood motionless like a statue. The stick slipped from his hand and fell down.

By the time Virudayar came back to his senses, the child had already toddled his way into the temple.

Virudayar ran after the child, blissfully proud of him.

The child prostrated himself before the image of Lord Siva and honoured the Lord with his mellifluous songs.

The three-year old became the talk of the city. People thronged to see the divine child, who had drunk the milk of wisdom. He came to be known as Thiru Gnana Sambandar.

Virudayar himself became an admirer of his hymnist son. And when Sambandar desired to visit places sacred to Lord Siva, he very willingly acted as a human vehicle for the divine songster.

Thiru Gnana Sambandar, the child prodigy, was destined to establish his reputation as a miracle-worker.

75. OPEN, O DOORS!

Thiru Gnana Sambandar became a household name in the entire Tamil country. His hymns became quite popular with the common folk

Curious to see the divine child and listen to his devotional songs, a musician

couple named Thiru Neelakanta Perum Paanar and his wife Mathanga Soolamani journeyed to Seerkazhi. They worshipped the blessed feet of Sambandar and requested him to grant them permission to set his hymns to music.

Sambandar, who had already heard of the calibre of the musician couple, took them to the Siva temple. Being born as untouchables the couple stood at the entrance and began to sing the familiar hymns of Sambandar to the accompaniment of *Yaazh* music.

Sambandar and others who had gathered in the temple felt that the hymns pleased their ears more than ever before. They were all praise for the musicians.

The couple thanked them for their words of appreciation. They then gratefully looked at Sambandar and requested him to grant them a boon.

“Boon! What is that?” asked Sambandar.

“Allow us to accompany you to all the places of your pilgrimage and sing your hymns accompanied by *Yaazh*,” pleaded Thiru Neelakanta Perum Paanar.

“Permit us to live with you... We would like to spend the rest of our lives serving you with our *Yaazh*,” said Mathanga Soolamani.

Sambandar’s brahmin lineage did not in any way deter his interest in the untouchable musician couple. He readily said, “Well! The pleasure is mine.”

Followed by the musician couple, Sambandar journeyed on his father’s shoulders to the many abodes of Lord Siva. One day he took pity on his father and refused to use him as his vehicle. He began to walk the distance in spite of his father’s repeated requests to jump on to his shoulders. Lord Siva sympathizing with the wee feet of Sambandar sent him a palanquin. It was heavenly to look at.

Sambandar never ran short of palanquin-bearers.

Thirunavukkarasar, the well-known Saivite saint, having heard of the blessed child longed to see him. And when they met at Seerkazhi, they vied with each other to fall at and touch each other’s feet. They became friends, went on worshipping Lord Siva and exchanged notes.

Years later the old saint and the boy saint met at Vedaranyam (Thanjavur district) after visiting several other shrines.

Flanked by hundreds of devotees, Thirunavukkarasar and Sambandar went to worship their Lord at an ancient shrine there

A shock awaited them. The main portal of the temple remained shut.

“Huh!” muttered Sambandar, “Don’t we have access to the temple?”

Thirunavukkarasar looked at the natives inquiringly.

“This old shrine has long remained with doors shut. And our ancestors have made a small entrance at some other place of the temple. We use only that entrance to go into the temple,” said one.

“Why don’t you break the lock and open the doors?” asked Sambandar.

“But where is the lock?” asked another native.

“We have made all efforts to open the doors. But we have failed,” said still

another devotee.

"The lock must be invisible then," said Thirunavukkarasar.

"It should be... Long long ago, none of us here know how long ago, this shrine was worshipped by the four Vedas* themselves. And when they left, they closed the doors tightly and the doors are now held together by an invisible lock. The Vedas no more offer their worship here. And nobody here could break open the invisible lock," said an old man in the crowd.

Thirunavukkarasar and Sambandar thought of a way to open the doors.

"In the eyes of our Lord Siva, none is great and none is small," said Sambandar. Then looking at Thirunavukkarasar he said, "If the Vedas could close these doors, our Tamil hymns can very well open them. Hence sing and let your hymns pry open the doors. Come on, sing."

Thirunavukkarasar sang ten stanzas. The doors showed no sign of life. But at the finish of the eleventh stanza, the portal swung open with a bang and everyone had *darshan* of Lord Siva.

"Now it is your turn to sing... Sing your hymns to close the doors so that the portals can be put to use," said Thirunavukkarasar to Sambandar.

Sambandar in his turn sang a song, and at the end of each successive stanza, the sacred doors alternately opened and closed, and thereby enabled the public to use the main portal.

The two saints paid their respects to each other and went on their way to continue their pilgrimage.

76. THE MIRACULOUS CURE

Having gained immense popularity through his hymns, Thiru Gnana Sambandar commanded a wide audience wherever he went. Scholars and pundits unanimously declared that his hymns had all the authority and sanctity of the Vedas. His contemporaries hailed him as having spread Tamil and Saivism with his sweet hymns day after day as he moved from one shrine to another.

But the friends and relatives of the untouchable musician couple nursed a different view. They believed that Sambandar's hymns were not worthy of hearing unless accompanied by *Yaazh* music. Hence they credited all fame and popularity to the musician couple.

The musician couple didn't relish such a comment. In fact, it pained them.

Sambandar, who had heard of the difference of opinion, wanted to teach a lesson to the dissidents. He composed a song and asked the musician couple to set it to *Yaazh* music. They tried and tried and tried. Having miserably failed in the attempt Thiru Neelakanta Perum Paanar broke into tears and went to the extent of trying to break his *Yaazh*.

Sambandar stopped him from doing so and said: "The hymns and verses

* The old Sanskrit Scriptures

that my tongue warbles are all God-given. It is foolish to break the *Yaazh* if you are unable to tune it. Leave out whatever is beyond your comprehension and let my hymns be as usual accompanied by your *Yaazh* music. Lend deaf ears to all praise and criticism. They are of ephemeral value only."

"Forgive us, O Saint, forgive us. We learnt our lessons today," so saying the dissidents fell at the feet of Sambandar.

"Who am I to forgive you?" said Sambandar. "Go and weep before Lord Siva. He will forgive you." Then looking at the musician couple he said, "Forget all about it and continue to accompany me."

The musician couple exhibited jubilation as they followed Sambandar on his pilgrimage.

After having *darshan* of Lord Siva at various centres while pilgrimaging in the chozha kingdom, Sambandar reached the temple at Thiru Paatchi Laatchiramam (near Trichy). There he saw a young woman lying motionless at the entrance of the sanctum sanctorum.

"Who is she? What's wrong with her?" inquired Sambandar.

"She is the only daughter of Kolli Mazhavan, the chieftain of Mazha Nadu," said someone and continued, "She was the most beautiful girl in the whole land and poets would fumble for words to describe her. When she was old enough for marriage, her father searched for a suitable boy. Then the unexpected happened."

Sambandar became curious. "Was she affected by any killer disease?" he asked.

"A sort of disease called *muyalagan* disfigured her face and body. She became lean and haggard-looking. And as weeks passed she became very weak and couldn't even stand up. Food she couldn't take and sleep had shunned her."

"Is there no remedy for that disease?"

"Several physicians have tried their best to cure her. But the disease proved very obstinate and everyone of them confessed their inability."

"And so..."

"Her father brought her here and left her to the mercy of Lord Siva."

"Maybe that is the reason why the Lord has called me here," said Sambandar and meditated upon the Divine. He then sang his hymns with a plea to cure the diseased woman.

Every stanza of his brought a visible change in the young lady and by the time Sambandar completed singing his hymns, she stood up and to the surprise of everyone regained her lost charm.

Rejoicing beyond limit, Kolli Mazhavan and his beautiful daughter prostrated themselves before Sambandar and received his blessings.

A few weeks later many boys clamoured for the hand of the beautiful maiden and she had a real tough time choosing the most suitable of them.

(More legends on the way)

Students' Section
THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-ninth Seminar

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**THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SRI AUROBINDO'S AND
THE MOTHER'S TEACHING**

MAN, A TRANSITIONAL BEING

Speech by Sunayana Shukla

ALTHOUGH SRI AUROBINDO is well-known now in India and abroad, he is known more as a great yogi and less as a revolutionary thinker. People who are unfamiliar with his works want to know what has been his special contribution to world thinking. When this question comes up for discussion our best answer can be: In his view man is only a transitional being. This sentence has become almost commonplace to us here but it always surprises those who hear it for the first time. For, even though Sri Aurobindo belongs to our times, his thought and vision belong to the future.

Everyone has his own idea of what the world will be like in a few decades or in a century from now. Many sociologists have tried to predict the future but their theories are based on the assumption that man will continue to behave the way he does today and that science and technology will continue to develop in the same direction. Some, like Toffler, even believe that the future will come as a shock to man who will not be prepared to adapt himself to the fast-changing environment

In 1969 when man first stepped on the moon, even the most ordinary people began to dream of the future of mankind. Everyone thought then that space-travel would become a common thing and that in a few years people would go from one planet to another as they now go from one city to another. Even today when we talk of the future we talk of a world where technology will control everything in our daily life. We talk of robots, the global village and how life expectancy will exceed a hundred years. We visualise a world where man will share the planet with machines. But we cannot guess how man himself will have changed in the future. Will he still be man?

In Sri Aurobindo's view the "élan" of evolution will continue and go beyond man the mental being and bring forth the supramental being. This new being will be to man what man is to the animal now. He will not be a superior kind of man,

rather he will be altogether beyond man. And just as an animal cannot know the workings of man's mind, so too man now cannot know what the workings of the Superman's consciousness will be like.

A child once asked the Mother what would happen to man once these supramental beings began to inhabit the world. Would men slowly cease to exist? To this she replied that the two would co-exist harmoniously in the same way that men live in harmony with plants and animals at the present stage of evolution. One form of life has evolved from the other without throwing the latter out of existence.

The steps of evolution have been slow. Nature took her time to fashion her successive creations. Out of the seething mass of gases she made this planet a habitable one. This first step took her an incalculable number of years. But even in that seemingly inanimate world her aspiration was present. "Mute in the trance of the Eternal she sleeps with the stone and the azure,"¹ says Sri Aurobindo in his long poem *Ahana*. Millions of years passed once again before life stirred blindly in the silent depths of the ocean. Who knows on which unmarked day of the history of this planet the first plant stretched out its leaves to the sky? How long did the forests stand in their "inconscious beauty," before the insects, birds and animals scurried and prowled in their shadows? From the static majesty of the mountains and trees Nature went forward and evolved the swift and graceful movement of the beasts. But it was not only that, for with the animals came definite and coherent sensations such as hunger and thirst, pleasure and pain, fear and love. Life in all her multitudinous splendour was there, intense as well as subtle; Life, bringing the beauty of colour, sound and movement on the one hand and the mystery of birth, growth and death on the other manifested itself. And all this happened in the slow cycle of millions of years. At that point in evolution what guided the higher animal was its instinct, which is sensation bordering on knowledge. What a wonderful phenomenon it must have been! But even the most evolved animal could not have known that Nature would continue her progress, go beyond instinct into the realm of the thinking mind. It is not difficult to visualise what must have been the reaction of the animals when they first came in contact with the first true men. They must surely have been in total awe of this being who was perhaps not as strong as they physically but with the strength of his mind far surpassing them.

The history of mankind is only a short paragraph compared to the long history of the world. Millions of years preceded man's coming, millions of years during which Nature laboured to produce one marvel after another. It would be utterly illogical then that her striving should end with man, who in spite of all his achievements still remains an imperfect creature. Nature's work has to culminate on a note of perfection, as a *grand finale* to a long symphony.

To come back to Sri Aurobindo's thought, he says that so far this process of evolution was being done by Nature. It was the momentum of her progress that led one step to the next. But now it is in man's hands to actively participate in this process. He can hasten this change by his conscious choice and need not wait for centuries to pass by before the next step can be taken by Nature in her normal course. For the first time in evolution the element of choice has come. Man can, with his conscious will, aspire to be transformed into superman.

Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teaching, in one form or another, always comes to this point: we must consciously make ourselves more ready in every part of our being so that we may hasten the coming of the new race of supramental beings.

I would like to end my speech by sharing with you a paragraph from Sri Aurobindo's essay, "The Evolution of Consciousness".

"From the clod and metal to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man, so much has she completed of her journey; a huge stretch or a stupendous leap still remains before her. As from matter to life, from life to mind, so now she must pass from mind to supermind, from man to superman; this is the gulf that she has to bridge, the supreme miracle that she has to perform before she can rest from her struggle and discontent and stand in the radiance of that supreme consciousness, glorified, transmuted, satisfied with her labour."²