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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE GOLDEN LIGHT

Thy golden Light came down into my brain
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to Wisdom's occult plane,
A calm illumination and a flame.

Thy golden Light came down into my throat,
And all my speech is now a tune divine,
A paean-song of thee my single note;
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.

Thy golden Light came down into my heart
Smiting my life with Thy eternity;
Now has it grown a temple where Thou art
And all its passions point towards only Thee.

Thy golden Light came down into my feet:
My earth is now thy playfield and thy seat.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 134)

‘LET THE PURE PERFUME OF SANCTIFICATION...’

March 13, 1913

...LET the pure perfume of sanctification burn always, rising higher and higher, and straighter and straighter, like the ceaseless prayer of the integral being, desiring to unite with Thee so as to manifest Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 18)

‘THE DIVINE HARMONY IS THERE...’

May 11, 1913

As soon as I have no longer any material responsibilities, all thoughts about these things flee far away from me, and I am solely and entirely occupied with Thee and Thy service. Then, in that perfect peace and serenity, I unite my will to Thine, and in that integral silence I listen to Thy truth and hear its expression. It is by becoming conscious of Thy Will and identifying ours with Thine that there is found the secret of true liberty and all-puissance, the secret of the regeneration of forces and the transfiguration of the being.

To be constantly and integrally at one with Thee is to have the assurance that we shall overcome every obstacle and triumph over all difficulties, both within and without.

O Lord, Lord, a boundless joy fills my heart, songs of gladness surge through my head in marvellous waves, and in the full confidence of Thy certain triumph I find a sovereign Peace and an invincible Power. Thou fillest my being, Thou animatest it, Thou settest in motion its hidden springs, Thou illuminest its understanding, Thou intensifiest its life, Thou increasest tenfold its love; and I no longer know whether the universe is I or I the universe, whether Thou art in me or I in Thee; Thou alone art and all is Thou; and the streams of Thy infinite grace fill and overflow the world.

Sing O lands, sing O peoples, sing O men,
The Divine Harmony is there.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 19)

THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE: EUROPEAN VIS-À-VIS INDIAN

EUROPE'S gift is science, i.e., the knowledge about motion and about cause and effect. When a question is raised about a thing, the European thinkers prescribe two clearly distinct ways of looking at it: one is the process or the mode of action, and the other is the content or the analysis of the ingredients of the container, one is its 'how' and the other is its 'what'. Although Europe has spoken of these two aspects of a thing, she has exhibited her genius particularly on the aspect of 'how', on the discussion of the operational process, while the answer to the aspect of 'what', i.e., the knowledge about the content, has come more as a concomitant to that discussion. European science cannot say with certitude what is matter, what is electricity, but what it can say is about their operational process. And it is for this reason that metaphysics—the special purpose of which is to acquire knowledge about the true self or the content of a thing—is not of a very high order in Europe; there, the European mind has turned somewhat clouded. But in Physics, where we get the discussion about the application of a thing, Europe has shown an extraordinary proficiency.

The genius of India is diametrically opposite to it. What is a thing essentially, what substance is it made of? It is particularly these aspects with which the Indian mind remains absorbed. We want 'the knowledge of the thing', but we have not paid much attention as to how the thing came into being and how it moves, i.e., on the chain of action. That is why, in India, we do not find as much knowledge of physics as that of metaphysics. Europe sees the mechanism of a thing, and therein lies the mystery of her action and of her culture. India sees the ingredients or the substance that constitutes the thing: she longs to know, as it were, the mystery of the self or the mystery of the existence of a thing. The Indian mind is indifferent to the science or mechanism of action, to the 'how' of it and its outcome. India is satisfied merely with the knowledge of the outcome of an action. She wants to know what is to be done and what would be its outcome—minute details of the process do not bother her much.

In whatever subject it may be, our *śāstras*, scriptures, aphorisms or maxims bear witness to this very fact. We have recorded the result of our knowledge in the scriptures, aphorisms and maxims but effaced the process of that knowledge. We have, of course, discovered a good many things, but proclaimed only about our discoveries; more often we have remained absolutely silent about how we discovered them, or about the way, about the secrets of the way following which others may again discover or initiate researches in a certain manner. For instance, the aphorism

calā pṛthir sthirā bhāti

(The earth is moving but seems to be stationary.)

expressing a scientific truth does not give the reason behind the truth. Or the idea that even the plants have a life of feelings—on which meticulous researches have been undertaken by the European scientists and with regard to which our Jagadish Chandra has been bringing out newer truths following the very path of the European scientists—was announced by us long ago in absolutely clear terms:

antahsamjñābhavantyete sukhaduhkhasamanvitāḥ

(They are inly conscious and they feel pleasure and pain.)

However, it is doubtful whether we really had any curiosity to know how and in which manner or by what collective action of forces it takes place and about the wonderful history of this phenomenon. Bhaskaracharya laid down the value of the ratio between the circumference and the diameter—the European mathematicians are surprised when they come to know that ancient India had discovered long before them and more accurately too the value of π (pi), to determine which they have racked their brains so much! But the person who solved this mathematical problem has not left behind anything in writing about the process by which he solved it. It is the same story everywhere, right from Khana's predictions to mathematics, astrology, ayurveda—everywhere we witness, in the words of Rabindranath, a plethora of statements while their reasoning is more often either implied or extinct. However true the statement may be, since it is not founded on reason, we can only accept it, but for the proof of it we have to seek help from Europe and Europe alone and measure its validity in the light of the European science.

It is particularly on this point that we want to draw the attention of those who do not want to accept that even in the field of physical science or in organic matters India has anything to learn from Europe and who are busy collecting evidence to prove that even in the field of lower knowledge [*aparā vidyā*], even in worldly matters, India was equal to Europe. We do not admit at the same time that India had plunged only in the supraphysical being, that the genius of India remained engaged exclusively in abstract ideas, that she had no questionings regarding mundane things or that she failed to achieve anything in this regard. She unravelled many a mystery of the lower knowledge, of the sixty-four arts, of the physical sciences; not only did she unravel them, but she also used them fruitfully with a view to enjoying an opulent life. But the fact is that it is not so much these matters—whether or not we were more knowledgeable than Europe in such-and-such a thing, whether or not we used or failed to use so many more things in a more patent manner than Europe in the conduct of our daily life—that reveal the difference in mental attitude between Europe and us. It is rather the means by which we acquired those things, the manner in which we are still carrying on research on them that reveal this difference. India seems to focus on the thing or the object, whereas the attention of Europe is turned to its modes and

manners, to its causality, to its science or mechanism. India seems to have got the thing, the object by virtue of a natural genius—you may as well call it instinct or intuition or sorcery; or she seems to have got it by chance, as a result of a sudden fortuitous coincidence; or if there exists in her attainment any endeavour in the form of logical intelligence, reason and experimentation, then our discoverers have totally abstained from mentioning them: we have got the conclusions, but we have to reconstruct their causal parts anew. It is as in the case of a middle-term missing in a compound. In the field of indigenous medical science, we only know that this particular drug will produce precisely this result, but we know neither the how of it, nor its inner process, nor its chemistry. With regard to the causes of a disease, we are satisfied with our knowledge of these three elementary things, namely, wind, bile and phlegm. Europe on the other hand, while discovering in this sphere the germs or the bacteria that give rise to diseases, is on the verge of developing even a separate science called bacteriology. It is for this reason that many scientists do not hesitate to say that our science is empirical and that of Europe alone is scientific. The European science, even without showing the result in each case, can predict the result, whereas for us there is no other alternative but to know by the result—'*phalena pariciyate*' (the tree is known by its fruit). The inquisitive faculty of Europe has not remained satisfied only with the effect, nor has it stopped short of arriving just at the cause behind the effect; it has on the contrary observed closely the link between cause and effect. It is no great wonder that Europe, because of the aforesaid reasons, was able to conjecture the existence of the planet Neptune even before observing it through the telescope or that it has been possible to make predictions about the existence and nature of newer elements from the periodic law of atoms.

We find two characteristics in the state of knowledge and wisdom where the revelatory pronouncements alone are its principal proofs, where the rationale behind the proof is not considered to be so very important. Firstly, this knowledge and wisdom seem to be static: it is no longer possible to make newer discoveries or to unravel everyday, newer mysteries; we repeatedly apply and ruminate upon the same truth that was once found and confine ourselves within the limits of its sub-truths or even its appearances. It becomes no longer possible for us to easily come off the beaten track and hew a novel way. Secondly, we find that this knowledge and wisdom do not spread among the masses at large, they remain confined to a select class or association of people as an arcane lore. As a result, with the passage of time, it turns out to be an extinct lore. The archaeologists will be able to give an account as to how far such a thing happened in the history of India's knowledge and wisdom. Europe too, in her medieval ages, had passed through such a situation—the whole world of knowledge and wisdom centred round the translations, annotations of or commentaries on the words of Aristotle, and the culture of knowledge was confined to the ascetics of the Christian churches. But the Renaissance movement in Europe tore off in a trice this black veil spread over her mind and thus she found her own nature. What

was an exception for Europe was for India a general rule.

Europe by nature cannot hold on to any truth as something everlasting and eternal. Whereas, when we arrive at a truth, we want to cling to it, we want to see it established for eternity—*yāvat candra-divākarau* (as long as the moon and the sun [shine]); but Europe accepts it for the time being, temporarily, as a working hypothesis. Europe is in no hurry to reckon any truth as a permanent one; she seems to find delight only in experimentation, in breaking the truth constantly into pieces; she is not after the form of the truth but after the manner of it. It is as if it were Europe rather than India which has followed by all means this verse of the Gita: *karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana* (Thou hast a right to action, but only to action, never to its fruits). We are desirous of the fruit, of a rigidly fixed truth, of a thing clear and concrete which could be the basis of our action. If that truth proves to be correct, it is well and good, but, even if it does not prove absolutely correct, we accept it as good enough if it does not engender any serious error. But the mind of Europe, despite its being outwardly pragmatic to a high degree, is not of this sort; her mind is completely open with regard to the fruit, the consequence, the eternal truth. What is important to her is the middle term, the means, the action by which one can arrive at this fruit, at this consequence, at this eternal truth. Let us take for example our places of pilgrimage—they are all located in such inaccessible and difficult places! We have set up places for pilgrimage but we are totally indifferent to the roads needed to reach these places, as if the road is of no importance, as if the problem will be over if by some means or other we can reach the destination just for once. But Europe has a different attitude—she thinks first of the road: after carefully observing and surveying the proposed areas, she first constructs a concrete road and only after creating the necessary facilities for movement she concentrates on the urban destination. She would rather desert the town if it is not connected by good roads, but she will never build a township without a good access. The same holds good for knowledge and for truth also: is the road to knowledge or to truth safe and sure and well laid out or is it necessary to take a leap to reach there? The knowledge or the truth which does not possess or lay down a profound and concrete sequence of cause and effect to act upon, however great that knowledge or that truth may be—be it of Brahman or of a pillar—can be India's knowledge or truth, but it can never be Europe's knowledge or truth.

There are ample proofs of this trend of the Indian mind of which we have just spoken, not only in lower knowledge [*aparā vidyā*] or in physical matter but even in higher knowledge [*parā vidyā*] or in spirituality—the latter being the special contribution of India's genius. The Upanishads, which represent the storehouse of India's spiritual knowledge, are entirely the accumulated fruits of realisation, we can call them a catalogue of the profound spiritual experiences which our ancient sages obtained. Of course, they have narrated their realisations, their experiences very beautifully, arranging them in an orderly fashion—the catalogue is not a haphazard list; if one delves deep into it, one will certainly find there a logical order. Yet all

these are about the thing as a whole and about its formation and not about its inner mechanisms or about the modes of action and reaction of its inner forces. The verses which enlighten us with the object of knowledge do not throw enough light on the process of knowledge. There the question is: what is the thing to be known? The question is not how to obtain this knowledge. It is as though our inquisitive faculty gets satisfied by knowing only what the Transcendental state is, that is to say, what are its characteristics and what are the discernible signs of the knower of Brahman. We do not have enough curiosity to know about the link between the normal state and the Transcendental state: how the normal state, through gradual changes and transformations, reaches the Transcendental state, what play of forces controls and directs the nature and activity of the Transcendental state or how does a Brahman-knower conduct himself? These are but external details for us. The inner need is the knowledge of Brahman—the nature of its dialectic is not the main issue of our scriptures. In the terminology of Europe we can say that our philosophy is basically ontological and that of Europe is epistemological.

Many will perhaps hesitate to see eye to eye on this conclusion of ours. They may say: this may at best be applicable to the Upanishads because the very purpose of the Upanishads was like that, but keeping in view the six philosophies and their innumerable annotations and commentaries of the philosophical age that followed the era of the Upanishads, who can say that with conviction? The minutely scrutinising analysis of the machinery of the human mind that is found in Sankhya in the form of theory, the secret process of transformation of the mind and heart that we find in applied yoga—do they not refer to the mechanism of the thing, can the science of Europe find out any lacuna of thought in them? We would reply that India, when she spoke of the mechanism of a thing, only showed the various parts of the mechanism opening them one by one; she demonstrated that there are so many wheels, so many screws, so many bolts, so many springs of the mechanism; but we do not get in her delineation any information about the principle through which these parts are interlinked, about the law of causality which is controlling the properties of the entire body of the mechanism. We get there only the laws of being; but the laws of becoming are altogether another thing. In each philosophy of ours, hair-splitting details are there of the various parts of a thing—be it a thing of the inner world or of the outer world; but they are all definitions only of the various parts of the thing, as if we are relieved of our responsibility presenting somehow a definition for recognising each thing! But the process of their gradual march to the culmination, the play of their inner forces have not aroused much of our inquisitiveness.

It is true that through the practice of yoga the mystery of a subtle play of Shakti became clear to our mind. But here too the aim was towards the fruit, towards the Siddhi; it is on the effect of transformation that we placed special emphasis, we did not realise the necessity of looking thoroughly into the mechanism of this transformation. We were told: when the *citta* [basic mental consciousness] becomes still

and unruffled, the Self becomes manifest there. We were provided also with the explanation as to what is *citta*; it was also explained to us as far as possible what is the Self; even the eightfold ways of being (*aṣṭāṅgamārga*) were prescribed to us for showing the way to still the *citta*. Following this means we gained also the desired results. But what is the mystery of this grand thing, how does it happen? Regarding them we seem to have remained as ignorant as before. We put together in a glass two separate things—hydrogen and oxygen—and then passing electric current through them we got water; but we did not pay any attention to the chemistry that worked behind this event. Acting upon Sri Ramakrishna's gospel, we, after entering a mango-garden, feel satisfied with just eating mangoes, but we consider it as wholly unnecessary to know how many mango-trees are there or how many varieties of mangoes are available there.

Yoga speaks of eightfold Siddhis or attainments of yogic riches. Through the practice of yoga one attains, at least they say, various kinds of miraculous powers, e.g., clairaudience, clairvoyance, ability to make one's body light or heavy at will and so on. The proofs of the fact that many yogis have attained these kinds of powers cannot always be discarded. But why does this happen and, when one follows yogic discipline, what kind of changes are bound to come in the body and in what manner? And as a result of these changes how do the aforesaid astounding and miraculous powers manifest infallibly? We think that our yogis and rishis may not be able to give the right answers to all these questions. Perhaps they will only say that the day breaks as soon as the sun rises, where is the need to explain it? It is but an axiomatic truth. But Europe now presents instances as to how satisfactorily these axiomatic truths can also be explained. Many people must have heard the news about the hue and cry that has been going on in Europe over the scientific basis of 'occult events'; and we cannot but remain tongue-tied coming to know of the innumerable unprecedented facts that are being discovered in this way.

Or, let us take the case of *mantra-śakti* [power of the *mantra*]. The fact that *mantras* do have a power, that a proper combination of words and a proper articulation of sounds have a creative and formative capacity was known to our ancients; they explained and analysed this fact in great detail and they showed its applications many a time, but, always taking it as an axiomatic truth; as if accepting it at the outset they made researches in its branches. That this fact is true and that its hidden mystery is linked with an infallible sequence of cause and effect have been discovered and proved recently by the science of Acoustics as developed by Europe. It is Europe that is enhancing the value and the dignity of this realisation of India by revealing all its inner significance.

As Europe is in search of the physiology of things, her researches in the anatomy of things are being done interminably; as a consequence, she has been delving deep into the minutest matters of chemistry while excavating the data for physics. We are satisfied just with five primary elements that form the fundamental substance of a

thing, though in the past Europe had only four elements and not five. But later she has extracted seventy-two chemical elements out of these four primary elements; of late, she has broken even the atom of these chemical elements to claim the electron. We might have cried halt at this stage and said enough is enough; but Europe shows no sign of stopping, she moves on and on: what is the weight of an electron, how are the electrons arranged and what is their velocity? The mathematics of their mutual relations is the latest problem of the scientific researches in Europe. Who knows where and how far Europe will go in her understanding of the mechanism of the things of the world!

European science stands in reality for such a mind or such an intellect under whose influence it pursues the unending zigzag of the chain in the order of things. The speciality of European science is not the knowledge of matter, nor the discovery of newer elements—its speciality is the scientific method. This method consists of two simple rules: first, facts of as many varieties as possible have to be collected to the extent possible, and, second, the law of intimate relation between two facts has to be highlighted. But between these two rules, science leans particularly towards the second. Europe is collecting facts in order to understand the manner in which that play of relation takes place and it is in order to make clear that play of relations through examples that she is taking resort to facts.

However, the narrowness of the European science or the Scientific Method lies in the fact that it seeks the relation between one thing and another only on the levels of the body. The more it goes forward in search of subtle relations, dissatisfied with the gross relations, the more it breaks atomic matter and proceeds towards sub-atomic levels. The facts that it verifies and tests in its bid to discover newer and more intimate relations are all physical facts. European science is neither able nor willing to surmount this materialistic knowledge. The vision of science is turned towards the exterior, that is why even while taking a dip in the inner it floats up again on the surface. Cutting the body into pieces, it has reached such a stage that if it proceeds further, it is bound to enter into another world beyond the body, but European science with its materialistic mind is still unable to cross that stage; it wants to catch by conjecture, even from afar, the play of that organisation beyond body, casting it in the mould of the physical truth.

On the path of knowledge Europe is moving with two lamps of light, relying on two faculties: a) gross senses and b) logical intelligence. The gross senses furnish the facts and logical intelligence reveals the laws of the material order of things. But the facts that the gross senses bring within the range of our knowledge are on the one hand limited and narrow and on the other hand piece-meal and incoherent. That is why Europe has been able naturally and easily to lean towards the causal relationship of their methodical order.

India could not pay much attention to the material order of things, to the secret of the sequence of cause and effect because of the fact that for acquiring knowledge

she took the support of such a faculty before which facts appeared continuously in innumerable and incessant streams. She got so engrossed in and intoxicated with the joy of discovering new and newer facts that she could not attend to anything else. We have already stated that India has moved on the path of knowledge as if under the inspiration of a subtle and innate feeling—our subject of discussion will be clear if we elucidate a little more this particular point.

It will come to the notice of one and all—it has already come—that all the *śāstras* [subjects of study] of our country, even the *śāstras* dealing with gross matter, have been included in the fold of spiritual scriptures, that all fields of knowledge, even the lower knowledge, have been presented as a step to the acquisition of the knowledge of Brahman or the highest wisdom. Be it logic or astrology or ayurveda—all start their exposition introducing themselves with great *éclat* as to how they are conducive to salvation. This means that we do not regard any knowledge from a thoroughly secular point of view. We want to acquire all kinds of knowledge not through sensuous experience but through the light of a suprasensual consciousness. On the contrary, we find that Europe wants to keep her science bound to the senses, turned towards this world and as far as possible secular. She wants to carry on experimentation and observation only after segregating distinctly the world of science from the suprasensual or spiritual world. According to her, to bring any kind of suprasensual and spiritual postures into the scientific pursuit is tantamount to adulteration, to the creation of confusion resulting from a mixture of two things of different kinds.

In yet another matter we find an instance of India's manner, the characteristics of which we have just noted. In India, those who are wise are also sadhaks, i.e., they not only cultivate the mind or engage themselves in intellectual pursuits but they try to control and organise their life as well through some strict austerities. In our country yogis and rishis alone are wise. Those who imparted knowledge, wrote *śāstras* [scriptures] even about worldly matters, were also yogis, rishis and sadhaks. Even in this modern age we find that those who are in touch with the ancient knowledge of India or those who are following her ancient path of knowledge are the Brahmins and the Ayurvedic practitioners and it is in them only that some traces of the past tradition still exist. There too, perhaps, the inner sadhana has been lost but it is they who still perpetuate the external rituals; and as a class, it is in them in particular and in a great measure that we still get perhaps a faint echo of a pure *sāttvic* nature.

Our wise men were ritualistic, active and devout. Those who were again the best amongst them, were yogis and sadhaks. That is why they were pure-souled, that is to say, their *ādharma* [instrument] was cleansed and their mind and intelligence were completely filled with a calm transparency and, as a consequence, a subtler faculty emerged there, a faculty which could, without the help of external senses or any apparatus, determine easily and directly the information relating to things. In modern terminology, this subtler faculty is called Subtle perception—in Bengali we may call '*tanmātrik anubhuti*' or else '*sukṣma anubhuti*'. It is not akin to the spiritual

revelation, it is a kind of concentrated consciousness, an acute and poignant power of feeling. Even today we witness at times a thing of this nature amongst those hailed as prodigies or child prodigies. We have heard a good deal about children or boys who, without undergoing any regular practice in mathematics and even with an immature intelligence, have effortlessly worked out off-hand or through mental calculations many difficult and complicated sums. They can say with absolute exactness the result of a sum in no time but, as to the process, they follow a new and amazing shortcut. The path our wise men trod for acquiring knowledge was to some extent identical with that of the subtle perception as we have termed it. Their perception used to move directly, as if at a lightning speed, towards knowledge, towards the fruit. No doubt there was a special process of this movement but it remained concentrated and involved. Hence the stress used to be laid on the end result or fact, not on the process or movement.

We do not think that our ancient sages used to cull all kinds of knowledge with the help of this subtle perception. Though they used to take the help of this faculty even in materialistic or scientific matters, it is not that they never took resort to practical means as well. Even in this domain they showed remarkable achievement. However, what we want to say is that this process and nature of the subtle perception left such an impression on their mind that they used to act inspired by that process and nature even in the practical field. Hence, in this case, in this scientific path too, their attention was turned more to the end result than to the process by which that result was obtained. As a result, we are startled to see their perfection because they have altogether effaced the secret of the process of their sadhana.

India has to learn and master this little trifle from the scientific path of Europe. India will not gain in any way if she becomes as materialistic and as dependent on the senses as the European science. The ancient subtle perception peculiar to India has to be kept awake but in the midst of it has to be planted the genius of the European science in seizing and manifesting the sequence of cause and effect. It is not *nam*—dynamic aspect of Truth—of the Vedic seers, that is, not the name and form of a thing, nor even its truth, but the true rhythm, the intense movement of that Truth acting behind the name and form and preserving it in the world-play that contains all the great secrets. In order to acquire this truth of divine rhythm, what is required is the inner vision of India which incorporates the scientific viewpoint of Europe.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Courtesy SACAR, for this essay taken from *Education and Initiation* translated by Amarnath Dutta from the Bengali original—*Shikkha O Dikkha*, first published in 1926.)

MY LIFE AS ARTIST

A Letter

As you are yourself a painter I think you will be interested in knowing the background to the scene Jayantilal has depicted of the Mother taking up the development of a number of budding artists in the early 'thirties of this century. Jayantilal, a fine artist himself, deals in particular with his friend who was also my friend, the gentle and devoted Sanjiban, who passed away recently in the Ashram Nursing Home while I was there too, lying under complicated traction for a multiple fracture of the thigh-bone where it makes a joint with the shin. The article is well done and brings out effectively the right psychology of art in the Ashram and the Mother's way of fostering it. It is authoritative on the period with which it concerns itself, but it creates the impression that before the youngsters—"Anil Kumar, Sanjiban, Chinmayi and one or two others including Tajdar", as Jayantilal lists them, seeming to forget the youngest, Romen—came under the Mother's wings the state of art in the Ashram was a howling desert.

Why it could not have been so may be inferred from the fact that some preliminaries of perspective were shown to Romen and Anil Kumar by Amal Kiran! In the course of time either of them proved a much more competent artist than I could have ever developed into. But the fact remains that for several years before the Mother took up the artistic education of the sadhaks in Jayantilal's list, she concerned herself with the Parsi newcomer—23 years old when he entered the Ashram—in whom she detected the capacity to draw and paint.

In the early days when I used to watch people meditate with the Mother rather than do meditation myself, I made a series of sketches of many of them and put short sentences below my pictures. I had seen Purani's neck grow twice its normal width when he had plunged into meditation. Something from above his head appeared to be descending into him with tremendous weight, as it were, and his neck had to bulge out all round most spectacularly in order to hold the descent. Later I came to know that the descent could be like a bar of steel entering the head and sending one dizzy at first. My witticism below the little sketch of Purani ran: "Purani trying hard to swallow the Supermind." I remember my picture of the old American Vaun MacPheeters staring grimly in front of him with fixed eyes and set mouth. He earned the comment: "Vaun hypnotising the Absolute into submission." Another cartoon that comes up in my memory is of the young Muslim, Ishak, renamed Prashanta. He used to take a posture of absorbed self-giving, losing all grip on himself, the face bent as far as possible over his right shoulder as if it hung loose there. Below it stood the gloss: "Prashanta in a state of dislocated devotion."

My drawings were seen by Purani and a few others, but we were afraid of letting the Mother see them lest she should frown at fun made of so serious a matter as

spirituality. I did not know at that time how witty a person she was and how she would have marked the technique of what had been drawn well. I recollect the keen attention she paid to the way I had sketched the chair on which she used to sit during her lunch-hour. My wife and I wanted to present her with another such chair. So, with Champaklal, an artist in his own right, helping me with accessories, I had drawn the Mother's chair with due attention to all the niceties of perspective. There was welcome given also to a series I had done in ink after an injury to my left knee from a fall. I was partly immobilised with synovitis, but had recovered sufficiently to think of attending somehow a little concert which had been arranged in the Meditation Hall downstairs in the Ashram's main building, with the Mother presiding over it. My gurus were in doubt about my scheme. So to set their minds at rest, I drew how I would get with a backward movement into the vehicle then in use called Push-push—and next how I would hold up straight with a hand the injured leg—and then start on my drive to the Ashram with my hair standing up with a bit of pain and my friend, Ambu, tripping ahead of the Push-push carrying my crutches aloft, each in either hand, while behind my vehicle would come with long strides the old big-built physician famous in the Ashram as “Doctor-babu”, his right hand combing with its fingers his abundant white beard flowing down his bare torso. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were convinced of the viability of my plan. My sheet of drawing came back the next morning with a line written in Sri Aurobindo's small neat hand: “Seen and appreciated.”

To return to the early days soon after my first plunge into drawing in the Ashram. One evening while the usual small group had gathered round the Mother in the Prosperity Room before the Soup Distribution downstairs a little later, the Mother suddenly asked me: “Will you draw and paint the various flowers I give to people every morning at Pranam?” I was rather surprised and replied: “Mother, how do you assume that I can do such a thing?” She answered: “I know by looking at your right hand. It is quite clear to me.” I was happy to take up the work.

In parenthesis I may say that object-drawing was no new thing for me. I had been addicted to pencil and brush since my boyhood. I had even passed the so-called Intermediate Examination in Art with a prize for the memory-drawing of a huge gorilla! Indeed at one period of my life I was posed with a choice between developing as an artist and devoting myself to writing. The enthusiasm to be an artist was most intense when, at the age of 6, I was taken out of India by my doctor-father, along with my mother, for treatment to my left leg which had been affected by polio three years earlier. London was our destination but we had a halt in Paris where we visited various picture-galleries. In one of them I saw a number of artists on high ladders which took them to paintings hung on the walls. They must be either copying the paintings or touching them up where they had faded. The sight of these men, with berets on their heads and palettes in their hands, fired my fancy so much that I could not think of a more romantic job when I would grow up. But in my middle teens I got

the feeling that I would never do anything absolutely original and first-rate in painting, whereas there were fair possibilities of my growing into an effective writer. So I practically gave up the art-career which had seemed open to me, and yet I cherished the dream that towards the end of my life I would have a studio and paint away. One of the projects I had conceived quite early during my stay in the Ashram was to make a painting for each of the poems which had won high praise from Sri Aurobindo. Under the encouragement of the sadhika whom Jayantilal has mentioned as “Tajdar” I made two paintings, one of a poem called “Creators” and the other of a poem entitled “Two Birds”, an old Upanishadic theme. Both the pictures were seen by the Mother several years later and she praised them for what may be termed their vivid symbolic and atmospheric suggestion. The rest of my poetic work remains un-illustrated. I am fairly old—87 years of age—but the vision of a studio is still unrealised.

After the Mother had appointed me the Ashram’s flower-painter she presented me with drawing-books and a paint-box, as well as small drawing-pads she had brought from Japan, made by a firm styled “Bumpodo”. Every week she would look at my work. I got an insight into her way of judging from the remarks she made. There were paintings which I thought I had done very efficiently. She did not pause over them. There were others which did not have what I could have called the finishing touch and yet she smiled happily at the sight of them and passed appreciative remarks. The fact was that when doing these pieces I had a special warmth and glow in my heart in relation to her while the others had not been surrounded with as much of an inner attitude. The former must have spoken to her directly while the latter took her somewhat as part of the world in general.

Here a side-story which has nothing to do with painting as such will not be out of place as it shows an aspect of the Mother and is apropos of an item connected with my paraphernalia as a painter. There was a tube of pink water-colour which had somehow come up for inspection. I unscrewed it and for some reason smelt the paint and exclaimed: “It has such an appetising smell!” At once the Mother seemed to recoil and sharp words came out of her: “Never talk to me of food and eating!” My wife and I were both taken aback. Then my wife picked up the tube from where I had put it down and started pressing it somewhere near the nozzle. The Mother at once took her to task, remarking: “I can see that you have never been taught painting.” Obviously we were not under fortunate stars on this occasion.

Besides the daily painting of individual flowers, I was asked to combine several and paint them skilfully intertwined to match the sentences which the Mother had composed for the ensembles. Very carefully the Mother had collected the sheets—smaller in size than the ones in the standard drawing-books—and kept them with her, wrapped in a silk handkerchief. I have no idea where at present this collection may be.

Another job set me by the Mother was to prepare small-size paintings of

individual flowers with their specific meanings typed below—paintings which were meant to be affixed to the walls of certain rooms. Thus a flower which looked like a rose but was not a rose had been dubbed “Falsehood”. Its picture was put up in the Reading Room where the daily newspapers used to be spread out on mats every morning. I must have prepared a number of such labels. I don’t remember any other label of room-significance except the one the Mother made me do for my own room. The flower she chose here signified: “Krishna’s Light in the mind.”

Some other jobs also came my way. I had to make designs for the bands round the Mother’s head—either when she wore a sari or when she wore just a “kitty-cap” going with *kameez* and *salwar*. Designs had to be prepared also for borders to the Mother’s saris. Vasudha and her companions made embroideries from them. Once I remembered to have been asked to draw a peacock on a large sheet of paper to serve as a model for a curtain. My official career for such work ended when Sanjiban and some others joined the Ashram and were available for various drawing and painting work. I may conclude my tale by mentioning that I did a few portraits too. Once in the evening gathering in the Prosperity Room it happened that both the Mother and I started sketching the face of Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire). She did the front face while I attempted the profile. She used swift bold strokes in contrast to my method of slow delicate lines. I seemed to be after precise resemblance, she cared more for general striking suggestion. Once I followed her way and sketched my own self—bearded at that time—and put some colour on the portrait. But, though people have liked it, I considered my own “masterpiece” to be a side-face drawing of a young Bengali girl named Savitri who was studying English under me. I called this picture: “Savitri on the verge of meditation.” Both the portraits have somehow survived the sweep of the tides of time, whereas it has left no trace of a sketch I did of a Gujarati friend—Girdharlal—who was quite a character. A calculating worldly-wise strain bordered the basic spiritual aspirant in him and I rather piquantly flashed it out without really submerging the latter. I imagine his sense of humour enjoyed the double disclosure. Along with the pair of paintings I did of two poems of mine, the sketches of myself and my student are the sole signs today of my life as the Mother’s earliest artist from a period when none of the sadhaks and sadhikas counted by Jayantilal had taken up pencil or brush and the one on whom the Mother as artist-moulder spent later the most time—Huta—was indeed a far cry. Huta whom the Mother assiduously taught and inspired to paint Sri Aurobindo’s epic *Savitri* belongs to the late ’fifties and after, but she happens to be perhaps the single friend in relation to whom the generally forgotten proto-artist of the Ashram has lingered in stray action on private occasions.

(9.3.1992)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

MATTER AS 'SUBSTANCE OF THE SPIRIT'

I

Not from Mind to Supermind... the ways are 'other'!

THIS is not—and, perhaps, cannot be—a paper like the usual ones! There is nothing 'usual' about the subject itself.

A presentation—sequential and standing complete by itself—would not be a true rendering of the experience,—an experience which is taking place in the life of humanity, in the being of man and in the new structures of his life and his civilisations, in the upheavals and movements that mark our times.

We will be true to the experience as it is being lived—in its concreteness and in its specificity—without trying to 'organise' it in a seeming pattern of 'coherence', which is the mind's way of dealing with everything. We shall only attempt to share some of this experience, as it comes, without an effort to 'explain' it in any way whatsoever.

Such is the nature of the action of the Supermind in Matter... it sees, it acts, it creates... and the multiple vibrates with its single movement. This movement is visible, it is there....

An intermediary instrument—such as the mind—is not needed to explain and organise this 'action' in the limits of its own characteristic functioning.

As the nature of the experience—so the form of sharing it. Direct... and as it comes, in its pristine quality.

When the mind reaches its zenith of development and arrives at the same time at a keen and agonising awareness of its inability to deal *effectively* with life and with matter—then it is getting ready to *exceed* itself. But not by an *increase* of its own activity, but by a *silencing* of it and by a grounding of the *stuff of itself* into the material base of one's being. Specifically, in the *body* itself.

Thus *held* in the body, the mind's habitual functioning undergoes a change. A kind of *totality of perception*—in which knowing, feeling and action form one single movement of perceiving *and* of being—begins to emerge. It is *direct* in its nature, not inferential, not successive, not constructional in any way. To be is to *see*. To see is to know, to feel and to act in one sweep, where there is no distinction between them. There is one movement in which the being participates in *all* that is around—from the most minute to a wide sweep of existence.

Here lies a path to the Supermind. There must be others—for the infinity of possible approaches have to make themselves manifest.

But it is certainly not by a further and further increase of the activity of the mind as we have known it that we can reach it. A *falling away* from this activity, in

whatever way, seems necessary at a certain stage of the human journey. More one cannot say—but this seems to be sure.

These words of the Mother resound in us:

“The effect of the supramental action will be multiple, infinitely varied, not forced to follow one precise line and the same line for all...”¹

“...the Supermind is already realised somewhere in the domain of the subtle physical, it is already existent and visible and concrete, already expressing itself in forms and in activities.... And inevitably there is a subtle influence of that physicality on external matter if one is ready to receive the impressions and admit them into one’s consciousness.”²

Matter seems to ‘haunt’ us... with what it carries within itself. We are happier using the French word *hantise*—which is more sensitively expressive of what we feel. It has almost become a passion of the Spirit!

Not so strange in our times that are unusual...

We share, in these pages, a few lines of the experience—concrete for us—without trying to link them up as an ‘organised presentation’.

II

Supermind... emerging in Matter?

There is a new Matter—palpable to our touch. To our feel, to our sense of texture, to our sense of fragrance... A matter, of a molten density, of a fullness of ‘love’. ‘Love’ that is not an emotion. Love that is the very stuff of matter. Love that is power—matter in its omniscience.

A matter that has become aware of itself as being the ‘substance of the Spirit’.

*

Through a perfection of ‘form’ and an organisation of ‘forms’—which is the great achievement of our times—it has pierced the veil of its own ‘objectivity’, that kept it from knowing itself in its true state. Its very perfection has fine-tuned it to ‘turn within’.. matter ‘turning within’ itself to know what lies hidden in its core. And it discovers that it is none other than the ‘body’ of the Spirit.

In this poise of itself as the Spirit, it begins a new creation. The beginning of a new ‘possibility’ in creation....

No longer one that evolved from a base of inconscience, but one that rises in the full blaze of a golden light from a matter become conscious of its ‘self’ in the Spirit.

This new creation bursts forth in a ‘translucency of matter’... in its forms. And ‘form’ presents itself as consciousness—between ‘form’ and ‘form’... there is no veil that interposes itself. There is only a direct contact of ‘conscious being’ with ‘conscious

being'... in a space of utter transparency.

A change that is beginning to take place on earth, with us humans... and with nature, as the first instrument to respond to this new manifestation.

This throws the world of man and his civilisations into utter chaos and confusion, with jets of the transparent air piercing great holes in the opaque fabric of the world's life.

Till the 'new' stabilises itself and grows in fullness and in extent as a growing embryo. And by such growth, it replaces the old.

The 'old' is not transformed—it is replaced. Like the 'new particle' of the physicist, whose very presence makes the old particles lose their energy and disappear in the 'mass'.

This 'new' matter—"self" aware of its own true reality—is there, in our body, in the first instance—and around us, in the contiguity of matter, in which we live and have our being. The old tries to crowd in, but the new emerges and holds its own. It has come to stay. To be—and to grow in fullness.

*

There are—or, must be, we do not know—a million ways to sense and live in this 'new' matter. We can only share our own.

Perhaps, the steps that have led to this can be shared. We will try to do so...

As embodied beings, our very personality is grounded in matter. It is the matrix in which we live and move and work. Our entire external personality—not only the body—but in a large measure, the life parts in us and several levels of the mind even, have their base in matter. We have a ground of rootedness in materiality. It is thus that we are here on the earth and live and function as we do.

And, yet, as the mind develops the activity innate to it and takes it to a high peak of achievement, it finds itself... for a while... in a circle of its own self-sufficiency: of ideas well worked out, of processes that are deductive, constructive or sequential. Or, it even has a glimpse of totalities or vast inter-connections, but it cannot turn them into direct and concrete 'experience', in which the conscious being, in its integrality, takes part. Mind spins its world, takes it to a lofty perfection and, by the very perfection of this cogency and well-orderedness, shows its limitations! Limitations that are inherent in it—by nature and function.

It makes an abstraction of the rest of life, matter included! It seizes 'figures' of it, offers explanations, but does not enter into the living reality of their existence.

This is a powerful experience that one goes through and it marks a turning point in one's movement of consciousness... with its barrenness and a kind of inconclusiveness that leaves life where it was, cold and untouched. The brilliance of thought hangs up above—planing on another level of existence—and existence, in its concreteness, vibrates at its own. Between the two, there is a chasm—in no un-

certain terms and of no mean magnitude. The gap is wide, difficult to bridge—and the labour painful in the extreme. Painful... in the sense of being ‘physically’ painful.

For the link with matter is lost, and to recover it—in another mode of being, for one does not travel backward in a process of growth—there is need of an arduous labour.

*

How does it take place and work itself out?

The need of it has to be acute—till it hurts! Till one can no longer live in this vacuum, splitting the planes of existence in one’s being. Otherwise, the effort needed would not be forthcoming.

The activity of the mind—that is at the ‘top’ like a point or position of attenuation, of the ‘column’ of consciousness that is oneself—has to ‘travel’ down the levels, till it comes to rest in the material base of one’s total being, in the body itself, and be firmly held there. This is a first step. And, then, to take its abiding ‘station’ there and start on a new kind of functioning of itself altogether.

This process takes time and it is painful to the body itself—not in an emotional way but in a ‘physical’ one. The natural activity of the mind tries to persist, to re-assert itself at the least provocation. It doesn’t *unwind* its own processes easily! To settle in ‘matter’—it has to do the latter. For, *in* matter, there is a directness—whether of perception or of willing or of action—which is at the level of existence as such. Matter goes straight to the point. It does not deduce, construe or build up.

But this settling down of the activity of the mind... in the base of the material substance of the body itself... does take place. With this, the mind’s own functioning begins to change. It perceives, wills and moves into action in one direct movement of conscious being. And the concrete result and effect on life is both immediate and visible.

There is no ‘thought’—but there is ‘seeing’, which effectuates itself at the level of existence, in a ‘self-realising’ manner. There is no effort, no straining. A totality of process of the conscious being existing in life and matter begins. There is no sense of hiatus anywhere. There is an ease of self-effectuation, marked by simplicity.... There is no ‘knowing’ and, then, a ‘doing’. There is a ‘seeing’—that just ‘works’ itself out!

When this new positioning of the mind is firmly established—which takes time, as there are customary recurrences of its earlier activity, because the habit is of long standing—then, one finds that one is *within* matter... through the body itself. And, through the body, in the ‘contiguity of matter’ around us.

*

Our habitual way of dealing with matter, of working with it, is to see it from the ‘outside’—to handle it ‘organisationally’. To see its bits and pieces and to organise

them in spatial relations in an objective sense of dimension.

But to be 'inside' matter and to reach out to it from the core of one's conscious being is to discover matter in an entirely different way. It is supple, malleable, offers itself in a movement of 'self-giving'. It is not fixed, rigid, obdurate with hard surfaces—to the touch, to the feel, to smell. It has another quality of substance—for 'substance' it is and always remains.

And this way of being 'inside' matter—of thus penetrating it and working with it—makes one experience all the matter around one's body as an unbroken contiguity of material existence.

There is relation, structuring, form—but no separation, no distancing. Space is there—but as extension of this 'contiguity' of material existence. Time keeps changing its modality. It has its own evolution—it is not given to be always and ever the same! It grows, it changes in its very nature and 'form of being', as the rhythm of the universe creates and re-creates itself endlessly from its Eternal source.

The body itself spills over into space and tunes itself to the changing modality of time...

In this contiguity of matter, one lives the life on earth. And matter reveals more and more the stuff it is made of... with a vibrancy, a concreteness, a power that has no parallel, and an 'infallibility' in action unknown before.

There is a joy in that discovery, a sense of delight that floods the entire being. The senses themselves partake of that delight—each in its own manner—in touch and feel, by sight and smell. Matter offers itself as 'substance of the Spirit' to the senses that are turned within! The joys of matter, it is said, are greater than the joys of the mind.³ They have to be experienced to realise how true this is....

*

We are witness to another line of action on matter—not as an intimate participant in its existence—but one that consists of a disengagement of its constituents by an objective analysis of it, under externally controlled conditions of experimentation.

We see the physicist using a reductionist method to break up the constituents into their smallest elements and then to re-construct an aggregate by a sum of them—so as to arrive at a knowledge of matter, its properties, the forces at work in it and the potencies they carry. The knowledge of the parts leads to the knowledge of the aggregate. A process of reduction and subsequent re-construction is the path followed in an exploration and 'utilisation' of matter.

At a certain point of this labour—arduous, disciplined and productive of astounding results—the physicist has arrived at a discovery that has totally, and irrevocably, reversed this position on which he had earlier taken his firm stand. That there *are* no parts that can make an aggregate! He finds himself in the presence of *wholes*. A 'whole' of dynamic energy, conscious and self-existent, which presents

itself in the parts, losing nothing of its totality and imbuing each part with the role and function it has the specific purpose to serve *within* the ‘whole’.

As if a reversal could be more total—or, more irrevocable!

The functioning of this ‘whole’—in matter—is like a rhythmic action that touches the multiple points of its own fine and complex structuring in a single movement of conscious force. The movement of the entire universe is of this nature.

*

Today, we have a wide world of a networking technology that is created from the knowledge of forces and of points of transmission and their specification, springing from this perception of matter and of its working. We live by this technology and function by it, a technology that is changing and evolving, by the dizzying speed of new revelations.

A question arises.... The physicist has arrived at this reversal of the knowledge he had of matter by continuing to pursue the reductionist method of investigation. Either—the deeper he delves into the stuff of matter, newer realities emerge; or—some change in the quality of his perceiving consciousness must have taken place for him to seize hold of realities other than the ones accessible to him earlier.

We cannot say but, possibly, both have their part to play. The practical application of this reversal of the knowledge of matter, in the form of present-day technology and its fast pace of further advance is an all important fact that stamps our life in every way.

Moving deeper into the stuff of matter by the method of objective analysis, the physicist reaches a point of great and incredible ‘sensitivity’. We use this word, in place of another, because how else to describe the progressive disappearance of a line of demarcation between the objective and the subjective! Matter appears to shed its own objectivity and reveals itself in its utter subjectivity—even to the physicist!

This is the miracle of our times! By whichever method we move into matter—through our conscious being or by a process of external disengagement of its constituents—we reach its intrinsic status and reality... that of a *whole* of conscious energy, giving form to itself in a substance that is the ‘stuff’ of the Spirit.

*

A massive action is in the making.... Levels of being, in a vertical dimension, and in the movement of a many-sided axis focussing on to a nodal point seem to be pressing down and into us. With an effort to ‘ground’ the entire graded complexity of existence into matter—the matter of our being, the body... and into the matter of the world and of our civilisations.

A massive action reaching into the stuff of matter itself to make something

'new' emerge from it? To make it conscious of its own omniscience—as substance of the Spirit?

A totality of being—being-in-matter—like the compressed curves of a spiral seems to be our mode of existing! Complex and not easy—but the experience seems to carry an incredible kind of plenitude. Or, the near possibility of it!

*

The time of great achievements is not marked by a cloudburst in the sky or a rain of gold, though both may be there! Matter—by its own refinement in seeking a perfection of the 'form', and by a sounding of its depths by a movement of consciousness—reveals its identity in a totality of its being, of *being conscious of itself* as the substance of the Spirit. It is this that is significant—it has become conscious of its 'self'.

The millennium that has just begun witnesses the birth of this new creation—beginning from a matter that knows what it is: the body of the Spirit itself.

What will it create? How will it spin a new raiment for man from the gold threads of the Spirit's stuff?

The future awaits us—to reveal its fullness. But the process of this new creation has begun...

Signs are there... visible and active. A translucency of gold is in the air, it throws up all things dense in a blaze of light. A power of love and a sense of delight make it possible for us to bear such an action... gratefully... and to ask for more...

A new perfection beckons—too new to be even given a name...

ASTER PATEL

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1. The Mother, *Towards February 29, 1960*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1960, p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
3. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 214.

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

PART II

SRI AUROBINDO begins his book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, by observing that man knows very little of the why and wherefore of the evolution of his collective life. His sociology and his history do not unfold to him the inner meaning of “all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time”, of the institutions and the forms of corporate existence that he has evolved in his long history. What is very necessary today is a wider, wiser and more potent research.

Today, the ideal of human unity is pushing itself forward in our consciousness, though, as yet, in a vague manner. Its appearance in man's thought is an indication that Nature is going to attempt it, that it is going to determine largely man's life in the future. But, at the same time, it will be impossible of accomplishment till the mind and heart of man are truly prepared for it. Social and political adjustments can achieve little or nothing of a permanent character.

There has undoubtedly been in the past a tendency towards forming larger and larger human aggregates. But a larger aggregate is not, Sri Aurobindo warns, necessarily a boon. It is worth trying for, only if it means a richer, happier and more potent life for the individual and the group. In the centuries gone by, we have had innumerable instances where smaller units gave man a richer and fuller life.

“Modern Europe owed two-thirds of its civilisation to three such supreme moments of human history, the religious life of the congeries of tribes which called itself Israel and, subsequently, of the little nation of the Jews, the many-sided life of the small Greek city states, the similar, though more restricted artistic and intellectual life of mediaeval Italy. Nor was any age in Asia so rich in energy, so well worth living in, so productive of the best and most enduring fruits as that heroic period of India when she was divided into small kingdoms...”

The impulse of the great empires like the Moghul, the Gupta and the Maurya “was rather towards elaborate organisation than original, stimulating and creative”. So far, so good. But there was in the small units an inherent defect characteristic of transience, often of disorder, which pushed man towards the formation of larger aggregates. These latter have sometimes been extensive empires, sometimes smaller states. Sri Aurobindo draws this distinction between the two. As a rule, the smaller nations had a more intense life than the big empires. This distinction becomes very clear when we compare life in a colossal empire like the Egyptian or Assyrian or Persian with the life in a Greek city state.

About the more modern countries Sri Aurobindo observes that Europe has lived

all her later civilisation in England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the small states of Germany, and that progress showed itself there and not in the huge mass of the Holy Roman or the Russian Empire. Sometimes even the bigger states have attained an intellectually vigorous life by concentration of vitality in some special centres like London, Paris and Rome. But the price that the nation had to pay was very great, for there ensued a marked stagnation in the life outside the metropolis. The Roman Empire is discussed at length in a later portion of the book, but there is a passing reference in the first chapter to both the advantages and the disadvantages of a strong and elaborate central organisation like that of Rome. The vast imperial structure, though outwardly strong, became rotten and began to crack and dissolve at the first shock from outside.

When we contemplate a social and political unification of the race, we have to consider all this difficulty beforehand and be warned in time.

Sri Aurobindo, next, proceeds to examine the collective units formed by man in the past and observes that the perfection of human life depends on our harmonising the two poles of our existence, the individual and the collective. The perfect society is that which favours the perfection of the individual. The perfect individual is he who helps in developing the perfect society—and, ultimately, the unity of the race. The very gradual process of Nature, the slow evolution of man's group life, has introduced a further complication. The family, the class, the tribe, the nation, the empire are the successive stages that man has passed through. But the earlier aggregates have, by no means, vanished, and man is called upon to bring about harmony and accord, not only between the individual and the group generally, but also between the greater and the lesser group.

There are many examples in history of both failures and successes, which are highly instructive. The two Semitic peoples, the Jews and Arabs both failed to develop an unified State, except for a very brief period. The Celts, Scotch and Irish, likewise, could not combine their clans to form a larger national aggregate. It was foreign rule which, ultimately, crushed out of existence their clan life. The failure of the Greeks to merge their city states in a Hellenic Kingdom culminated in their subjugation first by Macedonia, then by Rome and lastly by the Turks. The failure of Greece is as instructive to the student of history as the remarkable success of Rome. As to India, Sri Aurobindo says, her whole past "has been the attempt, unavailing in spite of many approximations to success, to overcome the centrifugal tendency of an extraordinary number and variety of disparate elements". In the end when the problem was not solved, Nature had recourse to her usual panacea of a foreign rule.

But even the organisation of a nation-unit does not bring about complete unity. For, the conflict of classes always remains. The progress of all the component parts of a people does not proceed at an equal pace. Some surge ahead, some stand still, some fall back. A dominant class is, therefore, bound to come out on top. And, as within a nation the rise of a dominant class is inevitable, so in the world the emerg-

ence of a dominant nation is unavoidable. This is the law of Nature and it has always occurred. At every stage of social evolution, Nature for her own purpose needs a particular type of man and whichever class produces that type easily will predominate at that stage—the sage, the warrior, the organiser of production, the toiler.

But this necessity of a dominant class or a dominant nation can only be a passing thing. The final aim of Nature cannot be the exploitation or subjection of one class by another. Such domination carries in itself the seed of its death. It ends in two ways; either by the ejection or destruction of the exploiter or by general fusion and equalisation. In Europe today, the masterful Brahmin and the masterful Kshatriya are sinking back into the mass of people. The present obstacle to a final equality seems to be the masterful Vaishya, the Capitalist, the profiteer, whom Tennyson once called the Mammon-worshipper.

About equality Sri Aurobindo says, “Absolute equality is surely neither intended nor possible... but a fundamental equality which will render the play of true superiority and difference inoffensive, is essential to any conceivable perfectibility of the human race.” A dominant majority should be on the lookout and abdicate in good time after imparting its culture, ideals and experience to the rest of the aggregate. If this is not done, misfortune will overtake the whole structure of society as has happened in India, “where the final refusal of the Brahmin and other privileged classes to call up the bulk of the nation as far as possible to their level, their fixing of an unbridgeable gulf of superiority between themselves and the rest of society, has been a main cause of eventual decline and degeneracy”.

But even if the unity within has been achieved, the question of the individual still remains. The human individual is not like a body cell. He tends to exist in himself and to exceed the limits of the group. All societies that stand in the way of the perfection of the individual man and seek to coerce him must change or dissolve in the inevitable course of Nature. No plea of class interest or communal interest or national interest can save them from their inevitable destiny.

Individualism and collectivism are two human tendencies that are at constant strife. They appear equally matched and during the strife the balance leans now on one side, now on the other. Throughout this long-drawn struggle, they are possibly trying to arrive at some conclusion. But a compromise between two egoisms is no true conclusion. The only real solution is fusion of the two—“swallowing... of each by the other” and the problem of State vs. Individual does not depend on the size of the State. Nor does it depend on the constitution of the State. The tyranny of the majority in a democracy is every whit as bad as the caprice of the autocrat. Even if the collectivity is all mankind, the problem will still remain,—in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity”.

Was man always the member of a group or pack, or was he a lone animal to start with? History and sociology tell us that our race began with the all-engrossing group. Biology also appears to indicate that association was man’s necessity for

survival. Originally, in Matter, uniformity was the law of the group. Free variation and individual development began with the growth of Life and Mind. From the point of view of evolution, then, we can say that man started with uniformity and subservience of the individual and proceeded towards variety and freedom thereof. But there is a very old tradition in the race that man was a lone animal to start with. From the scientific point of view, if the human being was ever unsocial, he must have been anti-social too, preying always on other men, the implication of the saying, *Homo homini lupus*. The poetic point of view is, however, that the early unsocial age was an age when man was “freely social without society”—a golden age, some such romantic conception as we find in Rousseau’s *Contrat Social*. We cannot ignore altogether this tradition of man’s isolated life. Sri Aurobindo says that it is possible that our progress has been a development in cycles (rather than in a straight line) with stages approximating to the noble dream of philosophical Anarchism—men associated by the inner law of love and light and right action. Various probabilities are put forth here, the most remarkable being “Our progress may be a devious round leading from the easy and spontaneous uniformity and harmony which reflects Nature to the self-possessed unity which reflects the Divine.”

However that may be, history and sociology tells us only one thing, that man has ever been an individual in the more or less organised group. There are three distinct types of this group life set forth by Sri Aurobindo. The first asserts the State idea at the expense of the individual—e.g. Sparta, modern Germany. The second asserts the supremacy of the State but seeks at the same time to give as much freedom, power and dignity as is consistent with its control to the individuals who constitute it—e.g. Athens, modern France. There is a third type in which the State abdicates as much as possible to the individual, boldly asserting that it exists for his growth and to assure his freedom. Behind this third attitude there is a half belief that the best interest of the State is assured by granting the fullest freedom to the individual. Said Sri Aurobindo 30 years ago*, “Of this type England has been until recently the great exemplar...” But even then he found “the collective or State idea breaking down the old English tradition” and feared “that before long the great experiment will have come to an end in a lamentable admission of failure by the adoption of that Germanic ‘discipline’ and ‘efficient’ organisation towards which all civilised humanity now seems to be tending.”

We have already noticed that the tyranny of an absolute monarch and the tyranny of the majority are forms of the same tendency, the tendency of the State to suppress the freedom of the individual. The idea behind is that the State is something sacrosanct and no limit can be set to its absolute supremacy. In the modern world the State idea dominates the thoughts and actions of humanity. It demands that the individual shall immolate himself to it and asserts that the hope of human welfare and human progress

* This instalment first appeared in the 29 September 1951 issue of *Mother India*.

lies in its efficiency and organisation. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "The State idea is rushing towards possession with a great motor force and is prepared to crush under its wheels everything that conflicts with its force..." It makes a twofold appeal—one to the external interests of the race, the other to its highest moral tendencies. It is incumbent on us to make a careful examination and see if this appeal is admissible.

It is easy enough to understand that the State idea is one thing in theory, but quite another in practice. Theoretically, it is subordination of each person to the good of all; practically, each person is sacrificed to a collective egoism—political, military, economic—an egoism foisted on the State by a masterful individual or a masterful coterie. Whether the dominant coterie is hereditary or elected or comes to the top by its own cleverness, or by force of circumstances, matters little. This ruling class does not, in fact, represent the best minds or the highest aims of the nation. The modern politician nowhere stands for the soul of a people or its aspirations. Sri Aurobindo paints him in lurid, but very true colours:—"What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. ...high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the clap-trap of a party." Such minds decide what the common weal is, such hands carry it out, to such persons is the individual expected to surrender his freedom of thought and action.

But even if the governing classes could be trained up to high aims and noble ideas as was done in some ancient communities, the State would not be what it claims to be. In actual practice, only that much of the intellect and power will be available for the administration of the State as its particular machinery will allow to come to the top, and possibly quite a lot of folly and selfishness will also float up therewith. Possibly things being what they are, we cannot expect any better. But still, if the effort of the individual is less hampered, it will always help the group to move nearer to the true goal, the realisation of the common good. "It is this energy of the individual which is the really effective agent of collective progress." But it is clear that the modern world is tending towards an increase of State power, and towards the elimination of the essential corrective to the defects and drawbacks of that power. The organised State takes no account of the thought and energy of important minorities; if anything it suppresses them. "It is a collective egoism," says Sri Aurobindo, "much inferior to the best of which the community is capable." What that egoism can be in relation to other such egoisms we are seeing again and again. Its ugliness is growing greater still every day.

The State is not an organism, but a mere machine. In its dealings with other States, it is not hampered by any scruples. A "sacred egoism" is still the guiding force. It knows no restraint but the fear of defeat and an economic setback. As to its inner life, the organised State has largely shed the brutality, intolerance and rapacity that marked its conduct. There has been much improvement of late. It feels the need

of looking after the animal welfare of individuals and smaller aggregates. But that does not in any way justify its claim to absorb or subordinate all free activities of the individual. The swallowing up of individual thought and action by the State cannot be justified by the plea that its government is benign and humane. The idea is summed up beautifully by the sentence—"The State is a convenience, and a rather clumsy convenience, for our common development; it ought never to be made an end in itself."

Another claim of the State idea, that its supremacy ensures human progress, is equally untenable. What a State Government can do is to facilitate co-operative action of individuals and to remove obstacles in its path and there its utility ends. When it presumes to control co-operative action, it condemns itself.

The State being a soulless machine, its working is bound to be crude. It lacks the force, the harmonious and intelligently varied action which characterises an organism. Its tendency is to manufacture instead of helping free growth. This is amply exemplified in State-controlled education, which tends to become a routine, a lifeless system. No doubt it secures uniformity, but, as Sri Aurobindo says, uniformity is death, not life. A State culture and a State education are unnatural violences. Progress, growth, realisation of wider life give the greatest sense of happiness to the individual, and status, safety and comfort give it to the collectivity. Till the collectivity becomes a conscious soul, this must hold true. Therefore, it is very improbable that the State machinery would bring about a healthy unity of mankind, a World-State whatever be its form—a single empire or a federation. Still all the experience that man has gained in making and breaking and remaking his political and social institutions is very necessary.

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

CORRECTION:

Mother India, November 2004, p. 1043

The 7th sentence in the new paragraph should be: "The Mother asked Krishnamma to learn from Rukmini, sister of Duraiswamy, the preparation of a sweet which Sri Aurobindo liked very much."

Tripura was Duraiswamy's niece.

A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

THE next letter I have in my records is, uncharacteristically, undated and is sometime in mid-1974, informing me that the only poem I had written would be out in the October issue and supplying some interesting insights apropos my question regarding the symbolic meaning of certain incidents in the *Mahabharata*—specifically the Uttanka and the Ocean-churning episodes.¹ The distinction Amal draws between the double significance of the turtle is quite unique:

I have no particular solution to give for the problem you have posed to me. The *kundala* earrings most probably have to be interpreted along your lines. All I can say is that the ears, according to Sri Aurobindo, symbolise the medium through which spiritual messages and inspirations come from the Cosmic Consciousness to the individual consciousness. Your question on the turtle (*kūrma*) calls for a twofold answer. The turtle as one of the primal supports of the earth in Indian mythology is different from the turtle that belongs to the traditional Indian series of Avatars. The series has, as Sri Aurobindo points out, an evolutionary implication. The choice of certain animal figures marks the different definite stages of earthly evolution. As far as I can see, the evolution is considered significant after the vertebrate stage is reached. The sea is a symbol of, among other things, the universal life force. Scientifically, life is considered to have first appeared in the prehistoric waters of the earth. India seems to have had an intuition of this fact and, putting a stress on vertebrates, selected the fish form as the first Avataric manifestation. The next step in life's development and diffusion would be a vertebrate mediating between sea and land—an amphibian creature like the turtle. Perhaps we may say that with the coming of the turtle-Avatar we have the true meaningful Avatarhood, for the evolutionary progress has been a land-phenomenon and the turtle marks the first stage of that progress. In this way we may connect the *kūrma* which supports everything with the *kūrma* that constitutes the basis of Avatar-led evolution.

He goes on to comment on the epic, giving an excellent condensation of Sri Aurobindo's views and offering information that led me to track down a particular edition of *Mahabharata* in the Ashram library which Nolini-da confirmed to be the one containing markings indicating the original text as identified by Sri Aurobindo.

1. These were the subject of my *Secret of the Mahabharata*, inspired by Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Veda, that was serialised in *Mother India* and later published as a book by Parimal Prakashan.

I wonder where this copy lies now. Unfortunately, no one has pursued the course Amal suggests to identify the Ur-epic.

You want to interpret the *Mahabharata* in the light of Sri Aurobindo's revelation of the Veda's secret. And if we consider the Vyasa who wrote the epic to be Veda-Vyasa your venture is legitimate. But you must remember that Sri Aurobindo takes Vyasa's epic to consist only of 24,000 lines. According to him, the present *Mahabharata* is the work of three hands. There is the original Vyasa with his strong, bare, terse, direct style of vivid ideative illumination. He is overlaid by another poet who is more romantic and decorative, a sort of secondary Valmiki—a good competent bard. Then we have a third layer—somebody continuing the trend of the Valmikiesque inspiration but with less poetic power and a more and more elaborative and decorative movement. This triple division holds so far as the poetry is concerned. Along with it we have the incorporation of a lot of dharmic verse. Of course each of the three poets must have had a side of dharma-exposition—particularly the original Vyasa who as an intellectual *kavi* would naturally have a good deal of dharmic lore to impart. But his contribution would still be highly poetic. What is not so in the mass of dharmic versification would be the work of the two other hands or else a dumping of goody-goody stuff by various later reciters of the epic. In any case, it is important to ascertain what exactly or approximately is Vyasa's own *Mahabharata*. Sri Aurobindo showed in detail what portions of the enormous poem came from Vyasa and what from the two inferior sources. I think Nolini has transcribed in his own copy of the epic Sri Aurobindo's classifications done on a copy brought from Madras. You may ask Nolini whether you could come over and transfer to your copy whatever he may have. Some indication of the threefold or at least twofold division may be had from Sri Aurobindo's English verse-versions of parts of the *Mahabharata*. All that is not Vyasa's he has put within brackets. Working on that clue, possibly you can on your own disentangle the three authors. But you must first read Sri Aurobindo's book on Vyasa. You have to steep yourself in what he writes on Vyasa's specific genius and manner of expression, and then read whatever Sanskrit passages he gives as characteristic of Vyasa and, using them as a touchstone, set about reaching the true *Mahabharata*. Possibly several parts which you have wished to explain *à la* Sri Aurobindo will get excluded. But, if your aim is not to deal with Vyasa's own composition but with the *Mahabharata* as it has finally come down to us, there is no need to bother about the authorship-question: you can go straight ahead and offer the right interpretation suiting a *śruti*. Poets inferior to Vyasa may be, as much as the Master, creators of Vedic symbols and legends. But I wonder whether the whole of the epic can be thus interpreted. There is a definite historic nucleus. You must not fall into the Gandhi-mentality which, unable to accept Krishna as

the encourager of a violent war, desired to take him, as well as Arjuna and all the rest, as an allegory of a certain part of our psychological make-up and the entire battle of Kurukshetra as an allegorical event and not an historical episode.

I had asked Amal for tips on learning Sanskrit about which he said:

I am afraid I can proffer no advice on learning Sanskrit. Yes, I was told by Amrita that Sri Aurobindo had a private pamphlet on simplified Sanskrit-learning, but nobody has been able to trace it. Perhaps Nolini knows what the method was, for he must have learnt Sanskrit by it.

In a subsequent letter of 28th October he added,

I am glad you have struck upon Pujalal's Sanskrit lessons in *M.I.* I had completely forgotten about them... I don't know whether he has published any book on simplified Sanskrit but perhaps he can correspond with you on whatever problems you may have. I believe Jagannath has done some simplification, but that is not a simplifying of the study of Sanskrit but a Sanskrit rid of its knots and made easy to be India's *lingua franca*.

I tested this out when I visited the Ashram by attending Sri Jagannath's class, and was taken aback to find I had little difficulty in following the Sanskrit!

Then Amal turns to *Savitri*. What he writes indicates what a treasure-trove remains untapped, only awaiting transcription and publication:

My work on *Savitri* is sporadic. Quite an amount of comment on certain books has been tape-recorded by Nirod or his helpers, who have been coming to talk poetry with me every Wednesday. But not all of it is in final shape. I have to do the editing—but where the hell is the time for it? When I was in Bombay I wrote out some observations on the first five lines of the poem. The observations ran to twenty pages or so in typescript. One day I'll publish them in *Mother India*. But where is the space for them?

Now financial trouble rears its Hydra-heads:

Mother India is in trouble at present. The tripling of paper-cost and of other things has burnt tremendous holes in *Mother India*'s pocket. We are straining every nerve to get Ads but we still need at least seven more pages of them every month: otherwise, Naresh Bahadur tells me, we shall face a deficit of about Rs.7,000 at the year's end! I am looking out for donations on whatever scale, and at the same time cutting down the number of pages. The issue of August 15

will be for some time our last bumper issue. I hate to diminish the reading matter, but what else am I to do?

He ends the letter with a sigh of relief that his *Inspiration of "Paradise Lost"* is complete:

The bally thing is over at last, with a triumphant last chapter: *The Metaphysics of "Paradise Lost"*.

His letter of 28.10.1974 stresses the financial crisis and provides the first information regarding the number of his unpublished works:

Yes, it will be a boon to have some Ads, particularly if they are on a long-term basis. We are looking out for donations too. If some chap feels inclined to help us, do encourage him as much as you can. Anything will be welcome.
P.S. It will be fine to have you in Pondi again. How will you devour 23 unpublished books in a short stay? You'll have to go *à la carte*.

I had been asked to set up a Directorate of Homeopathy for the Govt. of West Bengal in 1975. I must have mentioned this to Amal, for in one of his rare "dateless" letters—as ageless as his scintillating mind—that can be dated by the contents to 1974, he writes,

Homeopathy I know at first-hand. I haven't practised it but it has been practised on me and I have seen it practised on others. Our Ashram once had a homeopath who could easily be thought of as Hahnemann reincarnated—or, if we can play with German and Indian names, we may say he was Hahnemann reappearing as Hanuman! The latter name would be all the more appropriate because he was a devotee of Rama reappearing as a Consciousness which could be called a Cosmorama (*alias* Sri Aurobindo). Homeopathy is a useful system and often does what Allopathy or Ayurveda and Unani fail to do, but is certainly not infallible. Every system has its successes and failures. Much depends also on the practitioner himself. The homeopath I have spoken of—Dr. Ramachandra—was a dynamo of vitality and Sri Aurobindo could use him as an effective *vāhana*.

There is then a quick shift to *M.I.* problems:

I am enclosing a dozen Advertisement Tariff forms. I hope your hunch proves right and we get a number of long-term Ads. We badly need all the help we can get—as you must have learned by now from the "To Our Subscribers" on the title-page of the October issue.

Again he moves away to inform me of correcting misconceptions about Sri Aurobindo and provides a delightful tongue-in-cheek account of his latest book of poems, weaving in information that would delight me about my own poem:

By the way, in the December *Mother India* I'll be publishing a long article by Abbé Jules Monchanin, *Sri Aurobindo the Philosopher and Prophet*, with a fairly long *Editor's Note on Sri Aurobindo and the Veda* at the end to correct the Abbé's utter wrong-headedness in this matter—wrong-headedness which is in conformity with the attitude of most Western and Indian commentators...

My Exodus book is still high and dry on my shelf, along with my other twenty unpublished books. The only breakthrough in all these years is that an American woman luckily (for me) fell in love with my poetry instead of with the poet and is bringing out a beautiful edition of some of my unpublished poems. It is being printed here on handmade paper at the All India Press but will be published from the USA. The title is *Altar and Flame*. That reminds me to tell you that your *Illusions* adorns a full page of the latest *M.I.*

I used to send Amal whatever material I thought would be of interest to him, such as on the Mahabharata war. His eagerness to get his research published is something that is repeated in letter after letter—even asking me if any government grant could be available. It is here that one realises how long he had been working away on the Harappa problem—from 1963, a good twelve years! His response dated 26.3.76 pinpoints with his characteristic precision what is lacking with current revisionist historians seeking to establish that whatever the epics record is historical:

The articles are a mixed fare. As answer to Dr. D. C. Sircar's sweeping declaration of the War to be a myth, they make out some sort of a case—and they are right because the Epic bears the stamp of a historical truth behind its complex theme. But the writers don't seem to be *au fait* with current archaeology. There is a reference to Painted Grey Ware which shows that they are unacquainted with the present view based on multiple carbon-dating. They still hold the original position of Lal that PGW goes back to the eleventh century and ends in 800 B.C. Except for one freakish date from Atranjikhhera all the other dates point to *c.* 800 B.C., for the beginning of PGW. Even some readings from Atranjikhhera itself confirm this chronology. The writers also subscribe to the modern placing of the Rigveda in 1500 B.C. at the earliest, which would imply an Aryan invasion for which there is no evidence at all, either archaeological, linguistic or literary. I wish my huge study, *The Harappa Culture and the Rigveda* running into 511 typed pages (double space), could be published. It will clear up a host of historical problems. Recently I brought it up to date and it is ready to meet the scrutiny of historians. But how to get it published? Our press estimates the

printing charges as nearly Rs. 17,500. Do you think some government department can give a grant for it? I feel that this work is a very important one and one of its important points is that it provides to Sri Aurobindo's insight and research on the Rigveda a ground which historians would be bound to accept. Sankalia thought very highly of the first draft (1963) and wished that it would be published. Perhaps it is all to the good that it wasn't for the one weak point he put his finger on has been fully strengthened by archaeological research in the last 10 years. Even without this research my stand was quite defensible but now it is as good as confirmed. Once the Rigveda is far removed from 1500 B.C. the entire problem of the Mahabharata War assumes a different complexion. So do a number of other questions of Indian history.

By the way, V. N. Datta speaks of the absence of iron in the time of the Mahabharata War. Sankalia, in his recent article in the *Times of India*, harps on the presence of iron in it—and indeed at first sight he has a host of terms in the poem containing the prefix or suffix *ayas* to support him. And as iron in India cannot archaeologically be dated beyond 800 B.C. the War would naturally have to come down to that date. I can't understand Datta's oversight. It would be different if he were to contest the usual interpretation of *ayas*. But his statement is as if *ayas* did not occur at all in the poem.

The citing of Hiuen Tsang as evidence that the bones of the Mahabharata warriors were still visible in the 7th century A.D. at Kurukshetra is simply ridiculous.

After this he turns to an article I wrote after discovering a five feet high 12th century Vishnu statue while digging a well in the district of Malda. What he writes shows his encyclopaedic grasp of matters, the attention to minutiae and how he would temper his trenchant criticism with warm humour:

Your article is a pleasant composition and touches on several interesting matters. It does not seem to be you at your very best but it is surely publishable and the reflections on the meaning of the Avatar-succession has sound Aurobindonian sense. There are just two or three little slips. First, the jellyfish is not a "unicellular" creature. If it were, it would be quite invisible. The amoeba is unicellular and has to be studied under a microscope. Second, the Dryden-Ode does not end with "Music shall untune the sky" but with "And Music shall..." You have to put three dots before "Music", or else quote it correctly after reinstating the matter omitted after "devour". Third, Keats did not use "spirit" as noun-adjective in the phrase "spirit ditties of no tone". The word goes with what precedes it. Properly punctuated, the whole line would read: "Pipe, to the spirit, ditties of no tone." So, I would make your sentence run: "...Vishnu who piped 'to the spirit ditties of no tone'..." That would save Keats from turning in his grave.

Despite the pat on the back, my article didn't get published in *M.I.*!

There is a gap in correspondence after this as I was transferred to Delhi. Here I got to know the Director General of Archaeology, Shri M. N. Deshpande, who encouraged me to submit a synopsis of Amal's research on Harappan Culture. When I informed Amal of this, he wrote heart-warmingly on 15.4.78 (by now he had shifted to 30 Rue Suffren):

It's been a long time since I received a long letter from you. I suppose the "long" of the letter is in just relationship with the "long" of the former. But there is some lack of balance because of the fact that at short intervals I have not been receiving short letters from you. Anyway, a communication from Pradip is to be received with deep thanks—palms open and eyes rolled upward.

The thanks become deeper because of the cheque enclosed (*this refers to the subscription*), and deepest since there was no call for it at all. I would gladly post you *Mother India* free and it was a pleasure to send you my books.

Now to the matters that most matter. It's very gallant of you to make a 22-page synopsis of my book and send it off to Deshpande. If you have a copy I should like very much to be a second Deshpande.² In despair of ever getting my mammoth published, I carved out portions of it and with suitable follow-ups got together two smaller books: (1) *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, (2) *Cotton in Ancient India: A Chronological and Cultural Clue*. The first runs to 129 pages and has been taken up by some chaps in Calcutta who were eager to bring it out by January this year but haven't got past about one-fourth of it up to now. The second is 179 pages long and is waiting for somebody to eye it favourably.

Now he proceeds to remove misconceptions that have caused considerable misapprehensions among students of ancient Indian culture:

The excerpts you have made from *Aspects of Indian History and Archaeology* are all very significant. I am especially interested by the discussion of so-called lingas found in Harappan sites. Sankalia's contentions are quite correct. Actually no alleged linga has been found in association with any seeming yoni. So the inference of linga-worship is hasty on the very face of it. Sankalia, however, is mistaken in saying that "there is a derogatory reference to phallic worship in the Rigveda". He has the word *śísna deva* in mind. The translation "phallus-worshipper" is in accord neither with Indian tradition nor with Sanskrit scholarship. Yaska explains the word as meaning "profligates, those who are

2. I did so and he took the trouble of making detailed corrections that went on through exchanges of letters till August, adding "You have done well to make a slightly different ending... The whole thing is very presentable now" and gave me the go-ahead to have it published in *Puratattva*.

plunged in unbridled sexual enjoyment”. Religion does not come into the picture. Bidhu Shekhar Bhattacharya read a paper before the 6th Oriental Conference at Patna and lucidly explained the various senses of the term “deva” when it comes as the latter-half of a compound word in old Sanskrit. “Deva” in that place does not signify “worshipper” but “dedicated” or “devoted”. Thus “Matrideva” and “Pitrudeva” connote “dedicated to mother” and “devoted to father” and not “mother-worshipper” and “father-worshipper”. In the Puranas we often get the compound “Strideva” which has to be interpreted as “attached to women”. *Śisnadeva* points only to sensualists and is intended to condemn indulgence in sex. Even Dr. Muir, the famous collector of Sanskrit texts, observes: “However interesting... it would be to find a proof of the existence of phallic worship among the aboriginal tribes contemporary with the Vedic Rishis, it must be confessed that the word does not supply this evidence.”

We get some news about the state of his publications:

It’s good news that your Mahabharata commentary is shaping into a book. My book, *The Spirituality of the Future*,¹ should go to press any day. All the tedious task of obtaining permission from various publishers to quote from their books by or on Teilhard is over. If all goes well, I expect it to make its debut before the end of this year. My Exodus book needs a little redoing on account of some helpful criticisms by a foreign friend at Auroville. I shall soon attend to it. The criticisms relate only to some dates and not to the central thesis.²

Sri Aurobindo may have endorsed Hindi in his early political days, but in his Pondi period he recommended English as a link language for the present and spoke of simplified Sanskrit as the *lingua franca* of the future.

Eagerly awaiting your next, yours affectionately, Amal.

(To be continued)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

Ed. Notes:

1. *The Spirituality of the Future: A Search Apropos of R. C. Zaehner’s Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin* was published in 1981 by Farleigh Dickinson University Press, U.S.A.

2. As *The Beginning of History for Israel* this finally got published in 1995.

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI AUROBINDO: THE RECONCILIATION OF KAPALI SASTRY

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

PART 2A

THERE is a tendency among some of our religious leaders and intelligentsia to regard Sri Aurobindo as somewhat out of step with our ancient tradition, and to justify their stance, they often take shelter under Ramana Maharshi. They argue that going beyond the teachings and the realisation of the Maharshi is either superfluous or logically impossible. For example, it is said that when one becomes a Jivanmukta, one's separative consciousness is replaced by the consciousness of the One, the Self, and there is no world left for you to worry about perfecting. Sri Kapali Sastriar was no stranger to this contention and put it as follows:

...the Divine is indeed everywhere. But first you must find your own self, your own centre in the Divine who is everywhere. Once you find it you are no longer yourself in the usual sense, you are in His hands. What you call yourself is nothing, does not count; it is that, the Self, the Real 'I' that matters. There is no longer any problem for you; your problems are His 'problems'. If He wants any transformation to be effected in your body, it is His Will that will effect it. Manifestation, non-manifestation etc. are all His lookout, not yours. Then one is no longer oneself in the usual sense. One is in His hands.¹

This argument makes the assumption that there is only one kind of finding of one's self in the Divine and that when that is done, we come to the end of all spiritual seeking. Furthermore, it assumes that even after this experience there is something that can be called "His lookout" and "your lookout". It also assumes that whatever changes have to be effected will be done by "His will" and not by "your will". To say the least, this is a strange kind of oneness with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo has dealt with this spiritual issue extensively, and, it should be noted, he was speaking on the basis of first-hand spiritual experience—his teachings were not armchair speculations. He had found his centre in the Divine and he had given himself completely into the hands of the Divine. As for Nirvana, he lived for months in that experience, in that stupendous peace and silence, in that infinity of release and freedom. And then, as he said, "the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow".² It was in relation to this Reality that the manifested world looks imperfect

in so many ways, and the urge to bring perfection to this world was in his case part of a genuine spiritual urge.

Two issues must be made clear here. First, that “bringing perfection to the world” is not to be understood in the sense of ameliorating the condition of the world for practical, ethical, social, pragmatic, altruistic or humanitarian motives. Second, the perfection we are talking about is not something merely outward, social, a thing of action, a more rational dealing with our fellow men and environment, a more effective citizenship, a better discharge of duties, a richer, kindlier and happier way of living. Nor do we mean by it something merely subjective and inner, such as the development of a nobler ethical being, a richer aesthetic being, a finer emotional being, a healthier and better-governed vital and physical being. The motive for this perfection is essentially spiritual. This world belongs to the Divine and it should be perfect like the Divine, His perfect manifestation. And, just as our soul must grow in power and be the luminous and perfect reflection of the Divine, so our body, life and mind must shed their present limitations and grow into their perfect counterparts in the Divine.

The attempt to attain Nirvana is an effort of the mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconsciousness. Theoretically, the way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see them as illusions. Once successful in this denial and withdrawal, the mind can move rapidly towards that great short cut to the superconscious, the mindless trance, called *sushupti*. All this is based on the assumption that mind is the last word and that there is nothing beyond it. But Sri Aurobindo’s experience revealed to him that there was in fact something beyond mind. As he wrote to a disciple,

For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect—even when true, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance.³

So much then for the contention that once you have found through Nirvana your identity with the Transcendent Divine, there is no manifestation left for you to be concerned about.

Let us now briefly look at another critique of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings from the Maharshi’s perspective. The Maharshi’s yoga aims at Jivanmukti and if there is any action after that, it is a liberated action from that liberated state of consciousness.

In his yoga, the nature is purified, but it is not transformed. His yoga does not aim at the transformation of the nature. Sri Aurobindo's yoga aims at both, liberation and transformation. It takes liberation, even a certain Nirvana, if it comes, as a first step. "Whatever exit to or towards the Transcendent it achieves", he said, "is an ascent accompanied by a descent of the power, light, consciousness that has been achieved by it and it is by such descents that is achieved the spiritual and supramental transformation here."⁴ Such transforming descents are not admitted in the teachings of the Maharshi and from his perspective they would be considered superfluous and logically impossible.

One may raise a quibble about this divine descent and ask, "The Divine is here, from where will He descend?" Sri Aurobindo considers this objection in one of his letters and his answer is as follows:

But the Divine is everywhere, he is above as well as within, he has many habitats, many strings to his bow of Power, there are many levels of his dynamic Consciousness and each has its own light and force. He is not confined to his position in the heart or to the single word of the psycho-spiritual realisation. He has also his supramental station above the heart-centre and mind-centre and can descend from there if he wills to do so.⁵

In more general terms we may ask what is evolution if not a progressive manifestation or descent of the Divine? Where did Life come from in the desolate and seemingly dead wilderness of Matter? Where did the mind come from? Were not each of these stages—Matter, Life, Mind— progressive descents of the Divine? With each such descent, this manifestation, which we call the world, is growing closer to the Divine. From the Divine these powers of consciousness have already descended, and from the Divine the Supermind will also descend, according to Sri Aurobindo; and that descent will bring a spiritual perfection to this manifestation. Either we can see the human problem in its evolutionary context, following Sri Aurobindo, or we can see it in a personal context, as a problem of finding a short-cut escape route from the anguish of living in this world. Because we have decided to choose one of these alternatives, we simply cannot dismiss the other as "superfluous" or "logically impossible".

In my view, the Maharshi was the best representative of the static ideal of Divine realisation. For one completely rooted in it, Sri Aurobindo's dynamic ideal of Divine realisation would be incomprehensible. Sri Aurobindo brought into spirituality certain radically new concepts and one of them is transformation. Transformation does not mean purification of the nature under the influence of the soul or the Spirit. That is brought about in his yoga by what he calls the psychic change. The spiritual transformation is the next step and this means bringing down of the Divine consciousness, static and dynamic, into all the parts of our being, down to the subconscious. All other yogas require purification of the consciousness, enlightenment of the mind and

heart and a certain quiescence of the vital. This is enough to lead one to Jivanmukti. Transformation of the entire being requires something more; for it the descent of the new consciousness into the whole nature is needed. One can of course maintain, as some have, that once your soul has merged with the One, it cannot have any more need, either for itself or for the world; it has no need of transforming the whole nature or making the world perfect. But as we have just seen, such an argument sounds convincing only to those who seek spiritual escape from life. Sri Aurobindo's yoga does not seek such an escape; it seeks to perfect life.

For Sri Aurobindo the transformation of the nature is the central objective of his yoga. For that a release into the static Brahman is not sufficient. The static release is not, for Sri Aurobindo, the object of coming into world-existence. The static release is necessary, but it is the beginning, a first step into the Divine. If anyone is satisfied with the first step Sri Aurobindo has no objection to that. But he objects to anyone regarding the dynamic realisation as unnecessary for transformation or impossible to achieve.

Just as it is possible to survey Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings from the Maharshi's point of view, as we have done in the preceding paragraphs, it is possible to survey the Maharshi's teachings from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, and this I will now proceed to do.

From Sri Aurobindo's point of view, the Maharshi's focus on Moksha, the salvation of the individual as the sole object of yoga is too narrow an aim. Although there are certain differences between the points of view of Shankara and the Maharshi, they agree in their central teaching—oneness of the self with the Brahman.⁶ This lure of Moksha is often based on a feeling of world-weariness, one is tired of life and shrinks from the adventure of birth. This is a movement of weakness and cannot be regarded as the supreme motive of all spiritual effort. The Maharshi may not have been disgusted with life, nor was he the world-weary type. But he nevertheless seems to have accepted the illusory nature of the world as the final truth while Sri Aurobindo has shown that he himself did not. The Maharshi also thought this to be a means of creating disgust for what is impermanent in the world, thus driving you home to search for the Self, for what is permanent in you.⁷ But the practical effect in both the cases is the same. Sri Aurobindo has criticised this ideal in these words:

The desire of personal salvation, however high its form, is an outcome of ego; it rests on the idea of our own individuality and its desire for its personal good or welfare, its longing for a release from suffering or its cry for the extinction of the trouble of becoming and makes that the supreme aim of our existence. To rise beyond the desire of personal salvation is necessary for the complete rejection of this basis of ego. If we seek the Divine, it should be for the sake of the Divine and for nothing else, because that is the supreme call of our being, the deepest truth of the spirit.⁸

The Mother has also said that although union with the Divine is the first important siddhi of spiritual life, it is only an egoistic aspiration which can remain satisfied with one's own salvation without caring for the manifestation of the Divine in life.

First of all, knowledge must be conquered, that is, one must learn to know Thee, to be united with Thee, and all means are good and may be used to attain this goal. But it would be a great mistake to believe that all is done when this goal is attained. All is done in principle, the victory is gained in theory, and those whose motive is only an egoistic aspiration for their own salvation may feel satisfied and live only in and for this communion, without caring at all for Thy manifestation....

To know Thee first and before all else, yes; but once Thy knowledge is acquired there remains all the work of Thy manifestation; and then there intervene the quality, force, complexity and perfection of this manifestation. Very often those who have known Thee, dazzled and rapt in ecstasy by this knowledge, have been content to see Thee for themselves and express Thee somehow or other in their outermost being. He who wants to be perfect in Thy manifestation cannot be satisfied with that; he must manifest Thee on all the planes, in all the states of being and thus turn the knowledge he has acquired to the best account for the whole universe.⁹

This desire for personal salvation is sometimes overcome by another attraction—the desire to release other beings from suffering. The legend of the Amitabha Buddha illustrates this ideal. It is said that when he was on the threshold of Nirvana, he turned away from it and “took the vow never to cross it while a single being remained in the sorrow and the Ignorance”. This sentiment is underlined by “the sublime verse of the Bhagavata Purana, ‘I desire not the supreme state with all its eight siddhis nor the cessation of rebirth; may I assume the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief.’ It is that which inspires a remarkable passage in a letter of Swami Vivekananda, ‘I have lost all wish for my salvation,’ wrote the great Vedantin, ‘may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls...’”¹⁰

What surprises me, though, is that ordinarily those who pursue and preach the dynamic ideals of social, ethical, altruistic and humanitarian action suddenly become votaries of the quietistic ideal of personal salvation when they turn to spiritual life. They maintain that for one who has found his oneness with the Divine, there exists no world to save, and there are no creatures in sorrow and ignorance to bother about. This is tantamount to falling into the trap of Mayavada. It implies that the phenomenal world of suffering and ignorance is real as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the Self of all has not arisen, and as long as this knowledge has not arisen, the pheno-

menal world being real to us, we are justified in undertaking social, altruistic and humanitarian action. But once we are identified with the Brahman consciousness the phenomenal world exists for us no more. These two states of consciousness are described traditionally as *avidyā* (the state of ignorance) and *vidyā* (the state of knowledge). The two states, and the visions of the world they give, never interpenetrate. Shankara, the high priest of this philosophy, does not explain the connection between the two states for this reason. When the soul is liberated, the problem of connection disappears, and while the soul is yet in bondage, the Brahman is unavailable.

It is not necessary for us to examine in detail here the case Sri Aurobindo has made against Mayavada. Briefly, his case against all theories of world-negation is that unless bondage is real, salvation cannot be real, and a real bondage means a real world.¹¹ When the Mayavadin offers a way out of *avidyā*, he offers a practical way out—an escape—but that is not a solution to the philosophical problem. For the Mayavadin, individual salvation can have no real sense if existence in the cosmos is itself an illusion. In this view, the individual soul is one with the Supreme, its sense of separateness an ignorance, escape from the sense of separateness and identity with the Supreme its salvation. Sri Aurobindo raises this interesting question concerning what he regards as the untenable position of the Mayavadin:

...who then profits by this escape? Not the supreme Self, for it is supposed to be always and inalienably free, still, silent, pure. Not the world, for that remains constantly in the bondage and is not freed by the escape of any individual soul from the universal Illusion. It is the individual soul itself which effects its supreme good by escaping... But for the Illusionist the individual soul is an illusion and non-existent except in the inexplicable mystery of Maya. Therefore we arrive at the escape of an illusory non-existent soul from an illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent world as the supreme good which that non-existent soul has to pursue!¹²

Sri Aurobindo is concerned not primarily with the ontological state of the world as with the value of the world. The doctrine about the world is not our primary concern here, but an attitude towards the world is. For the questions of the reality of the world and the value of the world are interwoven. If one denies the reality of the world, one will tend to deny the value of the world and therefore be unwilling to work for the eradication of the imperfections of the world. We have already noted that although Sri Aurobindo regards the experience of Nirvana as valid, and even as the necessary first movement from Ignorance to Knowledge, he sees the great danger of stopping half-way, of resting in the experience of the passive Brahman. This half-way experience is that of the ever-pure, perfect, blissful and infinite Brahman. How then do we account for the world of impurity, falsehood, evil and suffering which also exists in Brahman? Since there is no acceptable answer, it would seem best to withdraw

into the blissful experience of the Brahman and deny the external world altogether.

The urge to escape from the external world originates from the belief that all things are fixed in their present mode of being, and man too is fixed in his weakness, sin and suffering. But escapism is destructive of the values of the intellect, of religion and of the human person. And what is more dangerous, it is also destructive of social values. Because the escapist philosophy sees this world as a hopeless manifestation, it seeks to save individuals by encouraging them towards liberation from this world. This necessarily prompts these individuals to withdraw from the social body with its obligations and temptations. In saving individuals, this philosophy deprives society of highly developed individuals who are needed to serve and elevate it. A large scale withdrawal of such individuals from social life has led to the depletion and impoverishment of life, and, as Sri Aurobindo has shown, India is a very good historical proof of this phenomenon.

He points out that for the last thousand years in India, spiritual life and material life have gone their separate ways, and the result has been a general decline and decadence. Spiritual life aimed exclusively at a release into the transcendental liberation, and took no interest in mundane life. Societal life was thus left free to indulge in conservatism and inertia. During this period spirituality meant individual liberation, and for that the only way recommended was renunciation of the world.

Thus negation of life became the most favoured path of spirituality. Even today, the Indian mind understands spirituality to mean renunciation of life. Sri Aurobindo has put it trenchantly:

...all voices are joined in one great consensus that not in this world of the dualities can there be our kingdom of heaven, but beyond, whether in the joys of the eternal Vrindavan or the high beatitude of Brahmaloaka, beyond all manifestations in some ineffable Nirvana or where all separate experience is lost in the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence. And through many centuries a great army of shining witnesses, saints and teachers, names sacred to Indian memory and dominant in Indian imagination, have borne always the same witness and swelled always the same lofty and distant appeal,—renunciation the sole path of knowledge, acceptance of physical life the act of the ignorant, cessation from birth the right use of human birth, the call of the Spirit, the recoil from Matter.¹³

I fear that we are today perpetuating this tradition by making the Maharshi the reason for ignoring Sri Aurobindo's world-affirming spirituality. This is most unfortunate for several reasons, one of which I have already mentioned, namely, that our nation once again is likely to be sucked into self-destructive world-negating propensities.¹⁴

(To be continued)

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Notes and References

1. M. P. Pandit (Editor): *The Maharshi*, p. 78.
2. Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga-1*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 50.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
5. *Ibid.*
6. As Kapali Sastry pointed out, "The passages stating the world as false, unreal or illusory do not leap to the eye in the Upanishads but are discoverable only by a close search and they are taken as affirming the illusory character of the world by some sort of interpretation; after all they do not affirm the illusoriness of the world in clear categorical terms. Maharshi holds that the statement of the illusory nature of the world is but a means of creating disgust for what is impermanent in the world, thus driving you home to search for thy self, for what is permanent in you." *The Book of Lights-3*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 3, p. 302.
7. T. V. Kapali Sastry: *The Book of Lights-3*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 3, p. 302.
8. Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 257.
9. The Mother: *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 168-69.
10. Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 257-58.
11. Beatrice Bruteau: *Worthy is the World*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rutherford, 1971.
12. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 38.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
14. I would like the reader to note that I am concerned in this paper with the implications of regarding the Maharshi as a votary of the traditional, Shankarite Monism, which had a negative attitude towards life. The Maharshi in his personal life was not negative about life, nor did he ever act like one who was world-weary. He was meticulous about things and matters pertaining to this world. He does not seem to have encouraged anyone to accept sannyas and to relinquish life.

YEARNING TO BE NEAR

O! MOTHER DIVINE, how long have I wished
 To know what my future holds:
 Is my life confined only to this barren land
 Where the soul hides behind a splendour of gold,
 Never to dwell at the sacred fount for long
 To which my heart turns many times each day?

I must assume that some good is being worked out
 Since nothing that's done by Thee can be in vain.
 But my path is not lighted, Mother, and often I cry—
 Only Thy touch comforts me as nothing else can.

Wilt thou give me the secret of the play?
 Show the hidden decree that I should bear
 The acute pain, which Thy touch alone can soothe;
 I wonder at times whether there is anything worse;
 I had no idea that things would come to this:
 No interest I find except in Thy Name.

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

13. The Name

THE Name of the Supreme has been given the highest position in the *Bhagavata* world. The mere utterance or silent chanting of the Name is said to be full of guardian-ship-potency. The Name is the saviour when we are caught in a crisis situation. Greater than the Saviour Himself, says a Srivaishanava acharya, is the Name. Though He is far, far away in the celestial regions, the Name is always close to us and gives immediate help. Pillai Lokacharya conveys this in a succinct Tamil aphorism: *Draupadikku aapathile pudavai suranthathu titunaamamire*: Was it not the Holy Name that sent forth garments to Draupadi in her moment of distress?

The Srivaishnava tradition has always given a high priority to the Saviour Name and it is never only one Name either. What is chanted is but an attempt to verbalise one's closeness to the Nameless Supreme, and this lovable Name acts without fail. The Acharyas point out that the all-pervading Supreme remains unknowable and hence beyond one's 'day-to-day' hold, like a precious, priceless block of gold. But the Name is like an ornament made of gold which you can use by wearing it to enhance your beauty.

The power of the Name has been demonstrated in innumerable ways and all the Vedic religions attribute transformational power to it. Whether uttered aloud or meditated upon in silence, its power remains peerless. There are quite a few references to the Name in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

A Voice in the heart uttered the unspoken Name...

(Book I, canto iii)

He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paean-song of the free Infinite
And the Name, foundation of eternity...

(Book II, canto viii)

When Savitri enters into the inner countries of her being, hissing serpents, trolls, gnomes and goblins scowl at her and beast-roarings seek to frighten her back to life from this subtle region. It is a terrible experience which seems to have no end and if at all there is an end, it promises to be a terrible end. She gathers all her will power to remain unafraid and she is aided in this task by the Name:

As if in a long endless tossing street
 One driven mid a trampling hurrying crowd
 Hour after hour she trod without release,
 Holding by her will the senseless meute at bay;
 Out of the dreadful press she dragged her will
 And fixed her thought upon the saviour Name;
 Then all grew still and empty; she was free.
 A large deliverance came, a vast calm space.

(Book VII, canto iii)

This is the experience of millions who have taken the Name in dire distress and the deliverance has come without fail. So much so, a whole cult called Nama-Siddhanta has grown around the act of the mere repetition of a chosen Name of the Supreme. The originator of the cult was Bodhendra. Bodhendra and his followers have drawn their strength from the *Bhagavata* legends of Prahlada, Dhruva, Ajamila.

The Ajamila episode occurs in the sixth Skandha which deals with many of the redemptive acts of the Lord. Ajamila's tale underlines the *poshana* act of the Lord which has been explained thus by Swami Tapasyananda:

“One of the important purposes of all incarnations is to save man from Samsara, and that is nothing but redemption. But *Poshana* also connotes unconditioned grace, by which even the apparently most undeserving are saved. In the sixth Skandha two such cases are discussed—the instances of Ajamila, the confirmed sinner, and of Indra in distress on account of his own sins in killing Viswarupa and Vritra.”¹

The Ajamila Upakhyana has been a favourite with the *Bhagavata* cult as it assures the listener that no one need feel hopeless and none is condemned to eternal hell in the *Bhagavata* religion. One can repent and be saved. Even if one has not had the chance to repent, some good act done by him quite unconsciously is enough for the grace to flow. For the compassion of the Lord is immeasurable. Those who perform *kathākalākshepa* on the *Bhagavata* episodes never forget to have a session of Ajamila, for the story is interesting for the common man and conveys the intended moral in a painless, natural way.

Parikshita is awaiting his death, but has actually no thought about it, so involved is he in Shuka's narration. His is no listless listening, for he keeps putting in the right questions. Sage Shuka has been giving a colourful lesson in geography and astronomy: Jambudvīpa and its nine divisions (Kuru, Hiranmaya, Rāmyaka, Ketumala, Bhadrāsya, Ilāvratā, Hari, Kimpurusha and Bharata varshas), its mountain ranges and streaming rivers, and the unique features of Bharatavarsha. It is true the other regions promise long lives and all that makes one's life comfortable. Yet it is all nothing compared to the Hari Nama heard in the Bharatavarsha:

“Far more covetable is birth in Bharata, in spite of the life-span there being short, than embodiment in those heavenly regions where life extends to eons. For,

striving with a human body, wise men overcome and abandon the bondage of Karma easily and attain to the eternal state of Hari. Where flows not the continuous narration of divine excellences, where exist not holy men devoted wholeheartedly to the Lord, where prevails not the practice of divine worship attended with grand celebrations—avoid such places, even if they be the heaven of Indra.”

Long before the *Bhagavata* was set down, the people living in Bharatavarsha had recognised the superb values of *nāma saṅkīrtana*. It was for Parikshita’s grandfather Arjuna and his brothers that the grandsire Bhishma had gifted the priceless jewel of Sri Vishnu Sahasra Nama. A thousand names for the Lord and these do not exhaust the Supreme’s facets! In a remarkable Sanskrit commentary on Sri Vishnu Sahasra Nama titled *Srimad Bhagavad Guna Darpana*, Parasara Bhattar (12th century) enumerates the reasons for the Name of the Lord being very important in Bhakti yoga. While taking up Bhakti yoga is no easy task, reciting the names of the Lord is not difficult for anyone:

Stuvan:— Praise in some way or other of His qualities will do. It need not be the same as or as perfect as bhakti yoga.

Sarvabhūtabhṛdḥbhavam:— Tides over all sorrows. The devotee reaches the cool lake of unsurpassed bliss which is the Lord, after crossing the forest-fire of the threefold torments of *samsāra*.²

Bhattar finds this path to be open to all classes (like Gajendra, Jatayu, Kakasura, Vibhishana, the gopikas, the garland-maker, Vidura and Dharmavyadha) and quotes *Vishnu Dharmottara*: “Narada! That devotee of Mine who with faith says ‘Salutation to Thee’ even if he is a dog-flesh-eater, attains the Eternal world.” One is also reminded that the Name can be sung anywhere, and at all times. However, Bhattar cautions that we should read such statements with extra care and realise that mere Nama would not give salvation. It is a preparation, a first step:

“Here what is spoken about is only the beginning of the preparation for attaining the Lord by destroying all the sins that stand in the way of the acquisition of true knowledge about Him and of bhakti by increasing one’s sattva-guna. Hence it is said: ‘By uttering the two syllables, *ha* and *ri*, one gets ready for the journey to Heaven.’”³

Taking the Name of the Lord not only readies one for the journey into the worlds beyond, but saves one from the terrors of Hell. This is why Sri Aurobindo has shown us how Savitri took the Saviour Name and the Dark could terrorise her no more. “A large deliverance came, a vast calm space.” Further on, Bhattar details how this recitation and remembrance of the Name can be done with no effort, without incurring any expenditure, performed with joy because the object is the Anandamaya, an act which gives priceless results like freedom from fear of the mortal world (*atiguru-durvaha-bhavabhaya-unmūlanamahāphalatvāt*), is free from sin even if uttered in

an irregular manner, suitable for all, remains unaffected by external disturbances nor impeded in taking the reciter to the supreme goal. Thus, for quite a few millennia, Indians have recognised the power of the Name in spiritual life.

The *Bhagavata* takes up a variety of incidents to bring to us the efficacy of devotion. The Ajamila episode in the Sixth Skandha goes further and seeks to prove that even an accidental straying onto the path without devotion in the heart can yet save our soul. For, it is the firm belief of the Vedic stream that no sentient being is debarred from redemption. We have no hells where the condemned have to remain for ever and ever. One has only to read Dante's *Inferno* to realise how hopeless is the condition of a sinful person. There is then the terrifying picture of the denizens of Hell described by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*:

So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay,
Chained on the burning lake; nor ever thence
Had risen, or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation...⁴

Ajamila's case study is to assure us that the Supreme does not give up even the worst sinner in this manner, and out of infinite compassion rather waits for the moment to redeem him. Hell and purgatory cannot be wished away, but then one can certainly get saved thanks to the oceanic mercy of the Lord. Parikshita, with no trace of anxiety that his hours are fast running out, calmly listens to Sage Shuka and puts in an occasional question to clear a doubt. So how can man save himself from sins committed that bring upon him the wrath of Hell?

Sins committed by a person can be overcome by expiation says Shuka. For such expiation, man must not wait till he becomes old and decrepit. King Parikshita counters this by saying expiation is no answer, for man proceeds to engage himself in evil activities repeatedly. The sage assures the king that expiation is not without effect for it does slowly but surely transform the person:

“By means of austerity, celibacy, control of the mind, control of the senses, charity, practice of virtues like kindness, truth etc., and of disciplines like Japa, worship etc., a man of righteousness and faith overcomes even great sins committed by body, words and mind, just as the fire destroys a grove of reeds. There are some rare persons who, endowed with intense and unadulterated devotion, resign themselves completely to Vasudeva and thereby eradicate sin utterly like the sun dissipating mist.”

The sage then tells the king that there are also people who are neither capable of austerities to expiate sins nor have they spent a lifetime immersed in Vasudeva-

consciousness. They too are not expelled from the Lord's ring of compassion. There was Ajamila, a scholarly brahmin who was corrupted by a chance encounter with a harlot leading him to a life of highway robbery, cheating, gambling and stealing. When he was eighty-eight years old he became terminally ill. Yet he continued to think of his youngest son, Narayana, all the time. Just as his life was about to close, he saw three ambassadors of Yama, fierce to look at, standing near his bed. Afraid, he called out to his son who was playing at a distance, "Narayana! Come!" Immediately the brilliant emissaries of Vishnu appeared and the two groups began to discuss the future of Ajamila. Yama's ambassadors said that while Dharma was ordained in the Vedas, Adharma was prohibited. The person who performs sinful deeds must needs go through Hell.

No doubt Ajamila was a scholar who followed dharmic ways in the beginning and lived an austere life ornamented with good qualities like friendliness and humility. But since coming in contact with the harlot he had sunk deeper and deeper in the mire of unrighteousness. Now the time had come for Ajamila to die. He had not performed any deed of expiation. So he would be taken to Hell and cleansed in purgatorial fires, for this is indeed the command of Yama, the Dandapani.

The emissaries of Vishnu countered the ambassadors of Yama, saying Ajamila had called out, "Narayana! Come!" He may have uttered the Name in ignorance of the Supreme, yet the Name has the power of purifying dross in an instant and so it is the best form of expiation:

"Besides, by uttering His name, the Lord's attention is drawn to the person seeking protection. The sinful man is not as much purified by the austere practices prescribed in the form of expiations by Vedic scholars, as he is by repeating His Names; for the former only removes the sins, but the Name not only does this but effects the positive purifications of the heart by arousing the consciousness of the Lord's attributes."

The bright beings assure Yama's people that the Name burns up the sins of man like fire, whether the man utters the Name with knowledge of the Supreme or without such knowledge:

*ajñādatvā jñānāduttamaśloka nāma yat
sankīrtitamaghāṃ puṃso dahadedho yatānalāḥ.*

They procure the release of Ajamila's life from Yama's ambassadors and vanish. Yama's people go back to him to report what had happened. Brought back to life, Ajamila now begins to meditate on the conversation of the representatives of Yama and Vishnu. Presently he feels repentant and giving up his earthly entanglements proceeds to Haridwar, spends his time meditating upon the Lord and gives up his body.

The Ajamila story as recounted by Vyasa does not end here. What was Yama's

opinion regarding the manner in which his ambassadors who were acting according to Dharma had been rendered ineffective? When the servants of Yama reported to him and wished to know whether the action of the bright beings was justified, Yama spoke to them in detail about the progressive tiers of godheads who manage this creation. At the apex of all is Narayana in whom “all this world is spread as a piece of cloth is on the warp and woof.” He, Indra, Surya and other deities like him are still in the power of the Lord’s yogamaya, while He presides over them all by remaining within their hearts as the Indwelling Universal, the Witness Spirit. Yama then speaks about the glory of the Lord’s Name realised in full only by twelve persons including himself. The others are: Brahma, Narada, Shiva, Sanatkumara, Kapila, Swayambhuva Manu, Prahlada, Janaka, Bhishma, Mahabali and Shuka. Yama then teaches them how if one remembers to call out the Lord’s Name on the deathbed he gets saved, even if he had uttered the name thinking of his own son and not the Supreme, as Ajamila seems to have done.

Yama also answers the unasked question of his minions as to the purpose of expiatory rites. These rites are of no use when there is no wholehearted devotion accompanying them. Giving the minions clear instructions as to who should be brought to his land to be chastised and transformed, Yama also commands them not to disturb the devotees of Vishnu:

“Therefore, after due deliberation, let all men practise wholehearted devotion to the worshipful Lord, the Infinite Being, the indweller in all. Such devotees do not come within the scope of our corrective punishment. Even if they have sins, they are all dispelled by taking the Name of the Lord.”

Having conveyed the episode of Ajamila in these terms, Shuka exhorts King Parikshita to take to *Nāma-smaraṇa* which is a “sure expiation for even the greatest of sins”. The Ajamila episode has not been without its critics. They feel that this approach to the divine life would be an encouragement for leading a licentious life. And yet the legend has survived millennia as a passport to achieving Moksha. This would indicate that the Name was never considered as the easy way out for a confirmed sinner. The Ajamila episode only proves that the Lord’s grace is boundless, and if the story is heard, others who are either sinners or trying to reform might come into the fold of Vaishnava bhakti and turn a new leaf even as Ajamila did. It must also be stressed here that when we take up such legends from the Puranas, we must patiently read the entire episode to the end. It is not as though the moment he uttered the Name, Ajamila ascended to the heavens in the divine car of Vishnu’s emissaries. The Name came as the first step towards Ajamila seeking to gain Mukti.

Swami Tapasyananda points out that Ajamila obtained Mukti and not Bhakti, and the *Bhagavata* Dharma considers Bhakti as of greater value than Mukti, and capable of erasing the desire to take to sinful ways. Mukti only erases the sins.

“The superiority of Bhakti over Mukti is emphasised in several places in this Text. It is said that by merely dying at Kasi one obtains Mukti. So also Mukti may be

had by uttering the Divine Name at the time of death. But Bhakti is generated only through constant practice of devotional disciplines and the attainment thereby of not merely expiation from sin but effacement of sinful tendency itself.”⁵

Again, it was not as though Ajamila was a stranger to virtuous living. His earlier life was one of scholarship and piety. At the critical juncture, when deep in the pit and on the point of losing his life, Ajamila may have remembered his earlier days and suddenly wisdom might have dawned on him. Again, because the theory of rebirth is part of an Indian’s conception of life, it could be explained that due to the good Ajamila had done in an earlier birth, the Lord’s Name leapt from his throat at the critical juncture. Ajamila himself realises this and takes a vow not to return to his shameful ways again:

“Though I am an unfortunate man, there must have been a modicum of auspicious Karma to my credit inasmuch as I had the good fortune of meeting those celestial personages. By their meeting, my mind has become peaceful.... Where am I, a shameless, sinful cheat who has no hesitation to kill even holy men—and where is the auspicious Name of the worshipful Lord Narayana! So I, who have passed through all these experiences, shall hereafter strive not to fall into this darkness of blinding ignorance, by practising the control of the senses, mind and vital energies.”

The Name has been taken by the devotees as a constant cleansing shower. The entire Bhakti Movement which rose in the 3rd century A.D., and inundated the whole of India in the course of one millennium, is based on the efficacy of the Name. Andal, the Tamil hymnologist (7th century) gives great importance to the Lord’s Name (*Uttaman per*) in her classic, *Tiruppavai*. Kabir (15th century) wonders how whole chunks of one’s life are spent in activities other than taking the Lord’s Name in the song, *Beet gaye din*:

The days have gone by without devotional singing!
 Childhood was spent in play
 When youth came there was the heavy load of pride
 Without any reason the capital has been squandered away
 Even today, the mind’s desires have not disappeared!
 Says Kabir: Listen! Good Brothers!
 The saints have crossed over to the other bank!⁶

Purandaradas (15th century) of Karnataka, again, gives the highest position to the Name and even asks the Lord what need has he for the Supreme’s presence when the Lord’s Name is there to guard him all the time! The Name ‘Narayana’ saved Ajamila; the Name ‘Narasimha’ saved Prahlada; the Name ‘Krishna’ saved Draupadi. “I do not see anything equal to your Name in this world, O Lord!” And the *Guru-bani* of the Sikhs admonishes man for having given up singing the Name (*Nām-japan*) whereas he has not given up untruth and hatred!

In any case, the beneficial act of uttering the Lord's Name to indicate the "last remembrance" (*antima-smriti*) does not come on its own, like a bolt from the blue, though it may seem to be so when one reads the episode of Ajamila. It is because devotion to the Lord has been inherent in Ajamila that his *antima-smriti* coincided with his calling out the saviour Name. Even when he was doing a wrong thing, he must have been thinking that he was going against the *Bhagavata* Dharma, the Path of the Lord's Devotee. Hence it is said that one must make it a practice to be constantly uttering the Name, either aloud or inwardly. For these holy syllables are not mere calligraphy or attractive sound-patterns. They are mantric in potency and repeating the Name transforms the person unknown to himself till one day he wakes up to find that he has been transformed in a beautiful manner. Sri Aurobindo, as he has suggested in *Savitri*, found the Name a guardian-amulet in the early stages of yoga. Of course, he did not want the dissipation of one's energies by bringing in mere emotionalism into *Nāma-smaraṇa*. One should conserve the effects of the Name on one's frame so that the hoped-for change is compelled to take place. He was for a meditative use of the Name or the Word and has a beautiful passage in *Savitri* on the manner in which the Name or Mantra works:

As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
Its message enters stirring the blind brain
And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound;
The hearer understands a form of words
And, musing on the index thought it holds,
He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth:
Then, falling silent in himself to know
He meets the deeper listening of his soul:
The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
Are seized unutterably and he endures
An ecstasy and an immortal change...

(Book IV, canto iii)

After this easy linkage of the *Bhagavata* Dharma of the Name and Aswapati's yoga, what more need be said? Sri Aurobindo has made it very clear that the Name too is a pathway in his yoga:

"I have no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there any incompatibility between Vaishnava Bhakti and my supramental yoga. There is in fact no special and exclusive form of supramental yoga: all ways can lead to the supermind, just as all ways can lead to the Divine."⁷

Blest be the Puranic literature which has conserved this pathway to the Life

Divine, so important for seekers in this disconcerting century.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

CELESTIAL PALACE

SKY-KISSING pinnacled enormous palace
 In mansion and mansion radiant Time-slaying fires.
 Wonderful Apsaras dance there day and night—
 A wreath of kisses shed on Darkness' cheek.

Evening, a bride, brings a golden ocean
 Wave on wave casts Suggestion's gesture;
 Of infinite fertility that vast Progenitress
 Delivers a nectar-radiating solitary moon.

Music-eyed that celestial palace
 Casts its hidden impression in the limitless Night;
 In a scattering of rays like a million outstretched arms
 Blossoms a blood-lotus—Creation's Bliss.
 In the colour-steeped scattered ray-fire of that lotus
 Victory's kettledrum rumbles from the distant East.

(To be continued)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

FROM the moment I saw Sri Aurobindo, I was eager to receive my *diksha* (initiation) from him. One morning I spoke to Barin-da about it. He said, "I'll inform Sej-da." That day I attended the afternoon session as usual. The talks went on for a little more than an hour. When we rose from our chairs to take his leave, Sri Aurobindo asked me to stay back.

All the others left. Sri Aurobindo then said to me, "Mirra saw you yesterday." In those days Sri Aurobindo referred to the Mother as Mirra. "But she has been seeing me everyday!"—as this thought crossed my mind, Sri Aurobindo explained, "Mirra saw your inner being. She has informed me all about you—your merits, demerits, your past, your future, your aspirations, everything about you. I had given her this task." Then Sri Aurobindo revealed my inner self to me.

When I had listened to him I realised how little I knew myself. At the same time I was filled with wonder as I thought of the Mother. I had heard that she had reached a very high stage in her sadhana, but that she possessed such occult powers was beyond my imagination. In my heart I offered my pranams to her.

A few days passed. Then one day, as we were dispersing after attending the afternoon session, Barin-da called me aside and said to me, "Sej-da wants you to stay in your room this evening. So don't go out for your walk. I think that today you'll have your initiation."

I went to my room and sat down quietly, trying to collect myself. But many thoughts came crowding in my mind. Sri Aurobindo would initiate me in sadhana! How would he do it? Would he visit me here in my room? Would there be some ritual? In the midst of all these thoughts, I did not know exactly when or how, my mind became calm and concentrated. Suddenly in the inmost part of my being a strange realisation took place. It was an indescribable experience. I was completely lost to myself.

At nine o'clock Barin-da called me for dinner. I came back to this world. Almost like a somnambulist I went to the dining room and sat down. I saw Sri Aurobindo's calm gaze fixed on me.

In those days generally nobody was allowed to go to Sri Aurobindo's room. Only if a sadhak had some new experience or realisation, he could go to him. Next morning I went to his room. He was sitting on a wooden chair without armrests. I kneeled down and touched his feet. "What did you receive?" he asked me. I described my experience in detail. Then he gave me some instructions. Once more I touched his feet and came away. I must mention here that this initiation was not the traditional *Mantra-diksha*, it was a transmission of spiritual force, for which it was not necessary for the Guru to be in close physical proximity with the disciple. For giving me this

initiation, Sri Aurobindo did not have to come to my room. Whatever had to be done he did from his room on the first floor.

*

Let alone a month, almost two months had elapsed, I was still in Pondicherry. Upen-da wrote letter after letter urging me to return to Calcutta. He wrote to Barin-da too, to send me back. But I just did not want to move away from Sri Aurobindo's presence. After two months, Upen-da removed my name as editor of the *Bijali*. But even that could not move me. I stayed on.

Around this time a letter came from Motilal Roy, the leader of the *Prabartak Sangha* in Chandernagore, that he would be visiting Pondicherry with his wife and two disciples. Already there was not enough room for us at 41, Rue François Martin. Now four more people would be added. Another house was rented. Hrishi-da, Satyen and I shifted there and when Motilal Roy's party came, they too were accommodated there. A cook and a servant were engaged. We went to the market and purchased the provisions and supervised the running of the new household. Here, under our management the variety and the taste of the food definitely improved, as Indulekha Devi would often testify, whenever she visited us.

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One afternoon in the course of our conversation, Sri Aurobindo announced that he would teach us the Rigveda. Next day, at the appointed hour, he came with a bound copy of the book in his hand. Opening the book, he read out the first *sukta* of the first *mandala*: *Agnimeele purohitam, yajnyasya devamritwijam, hotaram ratnadhatamam*. His sonorous voice, perfect enunciation and beautiful chanting of the mantra created a heavenly atmosphere. The creator of this mantra, the poet-seer Madhuchhanda, did he too recite the Vedas in this manner? I knew that Sri Aurobindo was a great scholar of the European languages, such as, Greek, Latin, English, French, German etc. I also knew that he had mastered many Indian tongues, starting with Sanskrit and going on to Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and even a little Tamil. But in spite of knowing of his great learning of the Sanskrit language and literature, I did not expect that he would recite the Veda Mantra in so sublime a manner.

Sri Aurobindo did not merely recite the Veda Mantra, he used to analyse it, explain its spiritual significance and point out the faults in Sayanacharya's exposition. In this manner, for quite a few days, he read the Rigveda to us and spell-bound, we listened to him.

One evening he told us, "Tomorrow a sannyasin will come here from Tanjore. He wants to talk to me privately. So we shall not have our afternoon session."

In those days there was a beautiful pier in Pondicherry. From the shore it jutted

out about half a mile into the sea. On the pier there were comfortable benches with backrests, and at the outer limit there was a wide open space. When we sat there we felt as though we were floating in the middle of the sea. After our evening session, we went there everyday and spent a very pleasant hour or two. That afternoon, because our usual session had been cancelled, we had gathered on the pier quite early. We were sitting at our favourite spot and chatting, when somebody came running to us and quite out of breath announced, “Moti-da wants all of you to come back at once. He told me to tell you that Gobin had come.” We did not know who Gobin was, but we hurried home.

There we learnt that the person who had come to see Sri Aurobindo, in the guise of a sannyasin, was none other than Amarendranath Chattopadhyay, whom Sri Aurobindo knew in the early days of the *Bande Mataram*, the first *Agniyuga*, the fire years. Amarendranath had escaped arrest in the Alipore Bomb Case. In the next phase of the revolution, he was closely associated with Jatindranath Mukherjee (better known as Bagha Jatin) and Rashbehari Bose. When the India Defence Act came into force, he went underground. There was a reward of a few thousand rupees on his head. But nobody knew where he was. After Barindra Kumar and the other revolutionaries returned from the Andamans, by virtue of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919, they worked very hard to get the British Government to withdraw all the outstanding cases against their absconding colleagues. At last the government capitulated and on receiving that news, Amarendranath surfaced in Pondicherry to pay his respects to Sri Aurobindo.

Soon after we returned from the pier, Amarendranath came down from Sri Aurobindo’s room. We saw a tall, very fair person with an imposing physique. A thick beard and moustache covered much of his face. His long, matted hair reached his thighs. Added to all this, his sannyasin’s garb gave him the appearance of a great yogi. We were quite wonder-struck.

Amarendranath spent some time with Barin-da and Motilal Roy and learnt all the details about the present situation vis-à-vis the ex-revolutionaries. Later I heard that he had come out in the open soon after his visit to Pondicherry.

All this while, Upen-da had been bombarding us with his letters. Almost five months had passed since I came to Pondicherry. In the month of July, he gave an ultimatum to Barin-da, “If Nolini does not return immediately, I shall stop the publication of *Bijali* from the first of August.”

Barin-da consulted Sri Aurobindo and said to me, “Sej-da does not want the *Bijali* to down shutters. It is better for you to go back to Calcutta.”

Very sadly and reluctantly, I returned. I saw a new face in our house, somebody who was helping Upen-da with the publication of the *Bijali*. The newcomer was Sachindranath Sengupta who later made his mark in the theatrical world as a famous dramatist.

After spending five peaceful months at the feet of Sri Aurobindo in the French

colony of Pondicherry, I found myself in the midst of the restless political whirlwind that was then raging in Calcutta.

On March 31 and April 1, in its Bejwada [Vijayawada] session, the Congress Working Committee had passed the resolution that the Tilak Swarajya Fund was to be mobilised to collect one crore of rupees and hand it over to Mahatma Gandhi. In return he would, in nine months' time, give us self-government. The entire city of Calcutta was throbbing with excitement. Men and women, young and old, were rushing about asking for alms for the Motherland. In the aristocratic localities of Baligunj and Bhowanipore, upper-class ladies were out in the streets collecting money. Even the women of the red-light districts responded to the call and made their contribution. All over Calcutta it was a sight unparalleled in history: not only were people giving money freely, women were removing their prized gold ornaments from their body and donating them smilingly.

Everyday there were meetings in parks asking people to boycott schools, colleges and courts. Chittaranjan Das himself had set the shining example of renunciation by giving up his lucrative law practice. His appreciative countrymen had honoured him with the title *Deshbandhu*.

All over Calcutta—in gatherings and get-togethers, on the roads, in the homes, on the lips of the people, on the pages of the newspapers,—only one tune was being played on a high scale: the Coming of Swaraj. One Bengali daily began counting the days in big bold type—one hundred days more for Swaraj, ninety-nine days and so on. Only our *Bijali* struck a discordant note. Upen-da commented in his *Unapanchashi*, "...when the gestation period for a human baby is more than nine months, how can a nation be born in less time?"

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On July 16, 1921 Subhash Chandra Bose returned to India. His father had sent him to England to do his I.C.S. Subhash passed his exams successfully, securing the fourth position, but he refused to accept the prestigious post of an I.C.S. officer, for that would mean serving under the British government. On landing in Bombay, he went directly to meet Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi advised him to contact Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and work with him. Chittaranjan was glad to have such a worthy assistant.

Subhash Chandra began by assessing the political situation of the country. He studied the newspapers minutely to judge the trend. One day he paid a most unexpected visit to our *Bijali* office. With him was his intimate friend, Hemantakumar Sarkar, who used to write regularly for the *Bijali* under the pseudonym of Parthasarathi. Having learnt from his friend that all the anti-Gandhi articles of the *Bijali* were penned by Upendranath Bandopadhyay, Subhash was curious to meet him. We too were eager to participate in this meeting which promised to be interesting. Subhash bowed

to the senior revolutionary leader. The discussion began. There was no secrecy, no pulling the punch. Both were plainspoken. Their ultimate goal was the same, only they differed in their ideology. Subhash had infinite faith in Gandhi-ji and his plan of action. Upen-da was equally vehement in his opposition to non-violence. Non-cooperation was perfectly all right but non-violence was meaningless. Upen-da's arguments were irrefutable; they gave Subhash much food for thought.

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Around the month of September, Barin-da returned from Pondicherry. He was keen on buying a printing press. His eye was on the most well-known one in those days—The Cherry Press, owned by Kumar Arunkumar Sinha. After some negotiation we managed to acquire it. The Cherry Press was in a huge three-storey building in Bowbazar Street. We left Mohanlal Street and shifted the offices of the *Narayan* and the *Bijali* as well as ourselves to the new premises. The second floor was used for our residence. The first floor held the two offices and the main press with its printing machine and other accessories occupied the ground floor. The first issue of the second year of the *Bijali* appeared from the new address. Now the editor was Barindra Kumar Ghose.

But Barin-da did not stay long in Calcutta. He went back to Pondicherry. Upen-da too left us and started a new weekly magazine of his own—*Atmashakti*. Now Sachindranath Sengupta and I had to shoulder the entire responsibility of the publication of the *Bijali*. Fortunately, there was no dearth of good material. Every week Barin-da posted his articles from Pondicherry. Nolini Kanto Gupta and Suresh Chandra Chakraborty too sent their contributions. From April 1922 onwards Pramathanath Chaudhury's very popular *Birbaler Chithi* made its regular appearance in the *Bijali*. Many other well-known authors of that period were keen to publish their works in our magazine.

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It was a Sunday morning. Two young men, complete strangers, came to my house. One of them said, "We have come to invite you to our Ashram in Baranagar. Our gurudev wants to hear you sing. I told him about you."

"What is the name of your Ashram?" I asked, "And who is your gurudev?"

"It is Sadhan-Samar Ashram. Our gurudev's name is Satyadev."

"But how do you know that I can sing? Have you heard me?"

"Oh, yes," came his prompt reply. "I have heard you many times in Kankurgachi Yogodyan."

I agreed to sing before their gurudev the next Sunday in the evening.

When they came to pick me up at the appointed hour, my young friend, well-

known writer Nripendrkrishna Chattopadhyay was with me. He too came along with us. On reaching the Ashram we found Sri Satyadev waiting for me. He was a middle-aged man, very fair, with a striking face and a calm air about him. He was sitting very still. We knew at once that he was no ordinary man. We made our obeisance by touching his feet and sat down. There was a small gathering of about thirty people. I sang devotional songs for more than an hour. The whole atmosphere was beautiful and very solemn. The audience was silent but appreciative. Even after I stopped singing, everybody kept very quiet. I saw that gurudev was in deep meditation. He opened his eyes and blessed me.

On the way back, Nripendrkrishna said, "I don't know how to thank you for letting me come with you. I feel that I have received a new life."

Nripendrkrishna was always a little effusive, in his talk as well as in his writing. But now I felt that this was no emotional outburst. The words came directly from his heart. The seed that was sown that evening, bore fruit in his later life when he became the disciple of Srimad Pratyagatmananda.

In this context I would like to mention an event that occurred some twenty-five years later in Pondicherry. I was not yet a permanent member of the Ashram at that time. I had come for the Darshan and was staying in the house of my friend, Dilip Kumar Roy. News reached us that a sadhu, accompanied by many of his disciples, had come for the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. They were living in a rented two-storey house in the centre of the town, near the bazaar. Dilip said to me, "Why don't you go and see this sadhu?" I made some enquiries and located the place. On the first floor, I found a large number of Bengali gentlemen sitting and chatting together. But where was the sadhu? I asked one of them, "I hear that all of you have come with a sadhu, where is he?" He pointed him out to me, saying, "There he is. He is Gopal Thakur." I saw a plump gentleman, simply clad in dhoti and kurta, talking to somebody. Now my informant asked me, "Do you live in the Ashram? How far away is it from here? Thakur wants to go to the Ashram now." After giving him the necessary direction, I went back to report to Dilip.

That evening there was a singing programme in Dilip's house. To my surprise I saw that Gopal Thakur had come with his disciples. I went forward and introduced him to Dilip. Dilip gave them a warm welcome and made a place for Gopal Thakur to sit near him. Whenever Dilip sang, there was always a big audience, especially during the Darshan days. For at this time, apart from the ashramites, the visitors who had come for the Darshan, Bengalis as well as non-Bengalis, would also gather in Dilip's house to listen to his songs. It was a rare opportunity for most people to be able to hear from such close proximity the famous Dilip Kumar Roy sing. That evening too Dilip's ethereal music cast its usual spell on the audience. I saw Gopal Thakur was listening entranced.

After the singing was over and most of the people were gone, Dilip invited Gopal Thakur to stay on and participate in a small informal gathering. As our talk

progressed, we found that Gopal Thakur was a very eloquent and persuasive speaker. He did have the power of speech. Dilip requested him to meet some more ashramites after the Darshan in another such gathering and have a chat with them. He readily agreed.

Gradually we learnt many things about him from his disciples. He was from Allahabad, a very learned man. He had passed his M.A. from the Calcutta University. He had attained realisation in his sadhana. He had lived a long time without any money, depending entirely on God for his survival. The Durga Puja that is performed in his house in Allahabad, attracts devotees from all over India and abroad. He himself chants the Mantra and infuses life into the clay image. One of the disciples told me, “Request Gopal Thakur to give an exposition of the Gita in Dilip Kumar Roy’s house. It is a memorable experience to hear him speak on the Gita. His commentaries are very original.”

Next day we had Sri Aurobindo’s long awaited Darshan. In the evening Dilip sang in his house. Gopal Thakur came again to hear him. It was then decided that the next evening Gopal Thakur would give his celebrated exposition of the Gita, after which he would have an informal chat and discussion with the ashramites.

At the appointed hour Gopal Thakur addressed the gathering. He did not read from the Gita, rather he gave a beautiful talk based on it. Although Dilip had kept a copy of the Gita before him he did not even pick it up. He did not have to, for he knew the whole of the Gita by heart. As the situation demanded, he recited sloka after sloka, explained them and interpreted them in a most enlightening manner. He mainly spoke of self-surrender and quoted extensively from the ninth chapter to illustrate his points. Many of his ideas were well known, but they took on a new meaning in the way he presented them.

During the discussion many were the questions put to him and he answered them all expertly. Then somebody asked him, “We hear that you had observed *akasha-vritti* for a time. Please explain exactly what is *akasha-vritti*.”

He said, “Following my guru’s command, I had observed the discipline of *akasha-vritti* for some time. Just now, you heard about the concept of self-surrender in the Gita. This too is a kind of self-surrender, a total dependence on God. But there is a slight difference between the two. The Gita tells you to regard yourself merely as the instrument in the hands of God. You act as He directs you. This is the self-surrender of a karmayogi. But in the *akasha-vritti* there is no action, no occupation, no vocation—no, not even begging. There is only God. Put yourself entirely in his hands and sit back in total inaction with the certainty that He will look after you. This is *akasha-vritti*.”

The questioner asked, “But then what did you do for your food and other necessities?”

Gopal Thakur smiled, “Only mine? When I took to *akasha-vritti*, I had already been married and had small children. I dissociated myself completely from my

responsibilities towards them. Neither mine nor their welfare was my concern—it was God's. He had to provide if He thought fit.”

The questioner was not satisfied. He asked, “All right, granted that you had placed the entire responsibility of providing for you and your family on God. But how did the foodstuff and other necessities reach you?”

Gopal Thakur said, “If I tell you all that happened, it will sound like a tall story. Nobody will believe me. So let me leave that question unanswered. But if there is some other question, I shall try to answer it.”

Somebody from the audience spoke, “Mine is a very common one, something that arises in everybody's mind. The question is—if the Divine is Sat-Chit-Ananda, if He has created this world out of His Delight, why is there so much sadness in his creation?”

Gopal Thakur asked very mildly, “Do you see nothing but sadness in this world?”

“What else is there? Sickness, grief, sorrow, suffering, quarrel, deceit, war—these are the things that make up our world. Where do you find delight, Sir?”

Gopal Thakur smiled and retorted, “If the world is that bad, why don't you leave such an evil place and go away. It is not all that difficult to leave this world—swallow just one rupee worth of opium. Yet you don't do it. And why not? It is because this *is* a world of Delight.”

After the meeting was over I went to him and said, “I enjoyed your talk. I shall always remember you.”

Gopal Thakur looked at me quizzically, then drawing me aside, said, “You have not recognised me, Nolinibabu. I had been to your house twice—the first time I had come with a friend to invite you and the second time to escort you to the Sadhan-Samar Ashram of my guru, Satyadev.”

*

One day, a letter was delivered to me at the *Bijali* office. I was invited to an institution called Sangeet Sangha by its director Ashwini Chaudhuri. He requested me to go to Gaya with his group and sing at the Congress Session to be held during Christmas. I accepted the invitation and began attending all the rehearsals at the Sangeet Sangha. We formed a big group, consisting of twelve men and sixteen women, and were trained by, among others, the famous singer Brojen Ganguli. Microphones and loudspeakers had not yet come into vogue, hence the need for so many singers.

We went to Gaya. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das was to preside over the Congress General Session. A huge pavilion had been erected. For the delegates, tents had been pitched in a field. Our group was allotted two tents.

Next morning the Session was inaugurated. Two young ladies with the most mellifluous voices sang *Vande Mataram*. They were Sahana Devi and Sati Devi. Both of them had come from Calcutta with Chittaranjan Das. After them we sang in

chorus: *Ota gourababahini momo bani gaho aji Hindusthan...* (Sing my words, O India, which evoke our past glory...). Two other singers sang in this Session—they were Vishnudigambar from Bombay and Dilip Kumar Roy who had just returned from England.

On the dais sat the leaders of India. Among them was Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. So far I had seen her only in photographs, now at last I saw her in person. What impressed me most was her superb voice delivering a moving speech in a telling manner.

Deshbandhu Chittaranjan's presidential address created a furore among many Congress delegates, because he dared to oppose one of the policies laid down by Gandhi-ji who was then serving his six-year prison sentence in the Yeravda Jail. Chittaranjan did not say anything against boycotting the British educational institutions and the British Law Courts, but he vehemently opposed the boycotting of the Legislative Council. He reasoned, "The way the Council is functioning at present, it has become imperative for the non-cooperators to participate in it. The Reformed Council has strengthened the Bureaucracy and the councillors exercise control over it. Taxes are bound to go up, affecting everybody, especially the poor. At this stage if we show our indifference by boycotting the Council, we shall lose the support of the common masses."

The Gandhi-ites were not amenable to this kind of reasoning. There was an immediate rift in the Congress Party. After much propaganda by both sides, the matter was put to vote. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das' resolution was defeated. Chittaranjan resigned his position in the Congress Party and formed a new party with like-minded people—the Swarajya Party. Pandit Motilal Nehru, Vitthalbhai Patel, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Mr. Kelkar, Srinivas Iyengar and others joined him.

*

From Gaya, our group returned to Calcutta. When Ashwinibabu learnt that I had hardly received formal training in music, he very kindly arranged for me to join the Sangeet Sangha and learn singing systematically from a well-known singer, Gopeshwar Bandopadhyay, free of charge. Needless to say, I seized this god-sent opportunity and until circumstances obliged me to leave the Sangeet Sangha, I trained under the tutelage of Gopeshwar Bandopadhyay.

*

One day, out of nowhere, Nolini-da (Nolini Kanta Gupta of Pondicherry) paid me a visit in our *Bijali* office. He had left Pondicherry with his wife soon after me and was living in his ancestral home in Nilfamari. Some business had brought him down to Calcutta. The purpose of this visit was to invite me to sing in the house of his friend, Narendranath Sengupta, professor of experimental psychology at the Calcutta University.

On the appointed evening, Nolini-da took me to his friend's house. There was a small gathering of fifteen or sixteen men and women. I sang for about an hour and a half. Some of the songs were composed by a very talented but little-known poet named Sharadendunath Roy. After hearing the songs everybody was keen to know about him and read his works. I told them that I knew the poet-composer personally. His was a multi-faceted genius. He had composed both serious and comic songs. He had written a few dramas and was himself a talented actor. But unfortunately, except in a few magazines, such as Sabitriprasanna Chattopadhyay's *Upasana* and our *Bijali*, his works had not seen the light of day. Maharaja Shrishchandra Nandi of Kasimbazar was said to have made a collection of his poems, intending to publish them, but so far it had not been done.

A few days later, I accompanied Nolini-da to Jadavpur Engineering College, to sing at a gathering of former students. This College was the erstwhile National College founded on August 15, 1906. Nolini-da was a student here when Sri Aurobindo was its principal. The famous economist, Professor Benoykumar Sarkar, who taught here at that time, presided over this gathering. Here too I sang a few songs composed by Sharadendunath Roy.

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It was the year 1923. Sharadendunath Roy, our dear Indu-da, collared me at the *Bijali* office and asked me, "It seems that a few days back you sang in the house of Professor Narendranath Sengupta?"

"Yes, I did. But who told you about that?"

"One of my acquaintances, a lady, was present at that soiree. She told me that you had mentioned my name and sung three of my songs. One of her daughters sings very well, although she has not had any formal training. She has learnt from her friends and relatives, whoever could teach her something. I myself have taught her some of my songs. I know that family well, a very cultured family. Raj Narayan Bose (Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather) was this girl's great uncle. You were in the revolutionary group. You must know of Kanailal Dutta and Satyen Bose who killed Naren Gosain in the Alipore Jail. Well, this girl is Satyen Bose's niece. She is unmarried. Her mother wants you to teach her singing. What do you say?"

I agreed.

After a few days Indu-da took me to the house of my future student. Theirs was an upper middle-class Brahmo family. They were expecting me. They gave me a warm welcome and introduced me to Shanti. I saw a shy young girl. When Indu-da asked her to sing, she sang one of his songs in a sweet tuneful voice. I too sang a few of his songs. It was decided that I would go to their house at least once a week after office hours and teach her.

Shanti's maternal uncle was of my age. He was a Hindu. As Shanti's father was

dead, this uncle lived in his sister's Brahmo family as a sort of a guardian. He was a simple, steady person. We became quite friendly. Every week I went to Shanti's house, sometimes twice a week, and taught her quite a few songs. After about two months, Shanti's uncle informed me that Indu-da was very ill and that Shanti had gone to Behrampore to look after him. He would inform me when Shanti returned.

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At the beginning of September 1923, our *Bijali* office was shifted to the Arya Publishing House in College Street Market. Our place in the Cherry Press Building was taken by a new daily, *Swadesh*, edited by my colleague, Sachindranath Sengupta. The daily *Swadesh* was established by the famous revolutionary, Amarendranath Chattopadhyay whom I had met just two years earlier in Pondicherry. The writers who contributed to this daily were mostly ex-revolutionaries. The first issue was published on September 9, 1923.

We continued living on the second floor of the Cherry Press Building. Amarendranath became my room-mate. There was only one bed. I surrendered it to Amarendranath. I slept on the floor.

Our new lifestyle did not last long. On September 28, I woke up hearing a thunderous, "Who are you?" I saw Amarendranath sitting up in bed, and glaring at an English policeman, accompanied by another man in plain clothes. They had an arrest warrant. After questioning us for a while, they arrested Amarendranath under Section 3 of some Act passed in 1818. Later on in the day we learnt that Upendranath Bandopadhyay, Bhupati Majumdar, Jadugopal Mukherjee (brother of the famous America-based writer, Dhanagopal Mukherjee who was instrumental in President Wilson's daughter, Nishtha's coming to Sri Aurobindo Ashram), Bhupendranath Dutta, had all been arrested at the same time under the same Act.

The auspicious journey of the daily *Swadesh* was impeded right from the start.

(To be continued)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane*)

TARRY NOT, MY HEART

You are the beloved of the Beloved, my Heart.
So tarry not.
Take up your staff.
He is waiting to unveil His self.
You too are pining.
Then when you take the road to Him
And someone hails you
Give him your blessing and walk on.
Your road he cannot walk.
His tongue you cannot talk.

In going sow no regret which would you bind, my Heart.
If you cannot put him out of mind
It's by your side you'll find him.

You are the master of your highway
Let nothing your heart's desire sway.
Do not look back to explain.
Nothing can you make plain.
Nothing would he gain.
Your tongue he cannot talk
His prey you cannot stalk.
If piteously again he call
Make eager your stride.
Let the berth you give him, my yearning Heart, be very wide,
Lest false compassion make you fall
Walk on. Walk on. Walk tall.

Never for a moment halt
Turn not your face to the past
Remember Lot's wife
Who was turned into a pillar of salt.
When the old city must needs be destroyed
Gird up your loins with speed.
All hesitations avoid.
To caressing voices give no heed.

He is waiting for you, my Heart
Quicken yet further your eager pace

For He waits to clasp you in His embrace.
 The Beloved is waiting to reveal the Sovereign Beauty of His face.
 Walk on. Walk on. Walk tall.

Now He is very near.
 No longer need you anyone outpace.
 Leave go your staff.
 You have nothing more to fear
 For He is here.
 With tear-moistened eyes
 You find that you are face to face.
 And now... you recognise...
 Your own true face and it is everywhere.
 With overbrimming eyes you lose yourself in that embrace
 Those arms and eyes of love the universe efface.

MAGGI

On Poetry

...it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Future Poetry*, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 13)

IDEALS OF OPTIMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

[*This talk was delivered at the Third International Conference on Integral Psychology at San Francisco, in June 2003.*]

“IDEALS,” said Sri Aurobindo, “are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation.” (*Ideals and Progress*, p. 1) Ideals are not simply imaginations, constructions of the mind, or potentialities of the future. They are closer to the ultimate Reality than the actual fact. Indeed, the actual fact is really only a distorted reflection of the ideal, which is itself a particular aspect of the Real thrown out into consciousness. They derive their power for actualisation from the Reality of the higher planes from which they come, and carry this power with them into this lower plane. The greater the ideal, the higher the plane of consciousness from which it descends, the greater its power for realisation. To reveal to humanity a great ideal of spiritual and psychological perfection is to unloose a great power for its uplifting and transformation. There is no greater ideal of spiritual and psychological perfection to which humanity can aspire than that of a divine life in a divine body here on earth as put forward by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This notion that the ideal of our optimal psychological functioning already exists on a higher plane of existence may itself seem rather abstract, a principle which we can perhaps accept, but hardly a living truth or concrete experience. When we get glimpses of our inner or higher being in dream-experiences, when there is an inrush of a more powerful personality overtaking for a moment our own, or when we experience a deep layer of peace or light or bliss associated with our greater reality, we can better appreciate the significance and import of this truth. We begin to understand the meaning of that philosophical duality of being and becoming. We are here in the process of becoming what we already are in the secret truth of our being. We don't need to create our ideal selves from the material of our thoughts and life-experiences. Rather, we need to open up to it, coax our ordinary mental and vital activities to turn to it, and call it down into us. We need to materialise a truth which already exists deep within us, embody it, give it form and substance in our outer life.

Given the intellectual sophistication of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, it is easy to lose sight of the motivational component of the teaching in its metaphysics, cosmology, and epistemology. While these latter aspects are important to an integral psychology, they lose much of their value if stripped of their uplifting impetus to human endeavour. Integral psychology should emphasise its ramifications for life and development, for health, for spiritual growth and transformation. I would argue that an important avenue for achieving its potential for promoting human growth

and development is to describe, explain, and to the degree possible, embody and model, its ideals of psychological perfection. Of course, personally striving towards and embodying these ideals will have the greatest uplifting effect on others, and description and explanation will be powerless without them.

The ideals of optimal psychological functioning in Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's teachings are integral. They encompass the perfection and divinisation of mind, life, and body as well as the realisation of the inner psychic and higher spiritual dimensions of existence. They address each of the many layers and strands of the being. All the outer and inner nature must be purified, elevated, woven round the psychic centre of the being, spiritualised, and transformed. The achievement of this task is impossible by human strength alone; it requires the Divine guidance and grace. It will not do to leave out the Divine from the formula of an integral psychology. Nevertheless, effort is an indispensable component of the realisation, especially in the earlier stages until the inner contact with the Divine is made, grows strong, and eventually supercedes the individual effort.

An integral psychology should provide a roadmap for people to traverse in their efforts towards psychological and spiritual perfection. It is not enough simply to paint a detailed picture of the supermind or the cosmic consciousness—people need to understand how to get there. Since people are at different levels of development, it will be useful for an integral psychology to trace the entire trajectory of development from the rudimentary to the heights of consciousness where the inner guidance can take over. And since development must occur on many fronts, in many different aspects of the nature, the ideals of optimal psychological functioning should be both multiform and specific. That is, they should address each of the important aspects of life and the inner and outer being and nature. Not only should the ideal functioning in each of these important dimensions be described, but the signposts of progress and the pitfalls of error should be located.

Although it is necessary to gauge one's communication of such ideals to particular individuals and the immediate circumstances, for an integral psychology as a whole, as a body of knowledge, I think it is best to put forth the full height and breadth of the ideals while acknowledging that they can only be realised progressively over time, possibly over lifetimes. I know that as a young adult of 20 years, I became enamoured by Sri Aurobindo's teachings in large part because they put forth the highest, greatest ideal of any spiritual or other philosophy or psychology I had found. I did not dismiss the teaching because it was greater than me or because it was going to be a long, long journey. I threw myself into it precisely because it showed me what seemed the summit of what it was possible to become. Unlike other spiritual teachings, it gave a meaning and aim to all the parts of my nature. Unlike other psychologies, it didn't just analyse what I was composed of, it gave a meaning and direction to my life. It gave me something to do, the highest and greatest work possible. I then knew what I had to do, not for the next few months or years, but for my whole life.

Nevertheless, the issue of how to communicate these ideals to particular individuals in particular contexts is an important one. In one sense, it is always possible to communicate the full ideal in one way, silently, through the simple presence of one's own being and the expression of one's inmost nature. And in truth, if one is centred within one's own psychic being, if one has realised the ideal within oneself, there would be no question of what to say or what not to say. The proper communication would flow out naturally and spontaneously. But still, as we ourselves are traversing the path and may not have arrived, and yet for one reason or another we have the responsibility for assisting others on their path towards psychological health and growth, some mental guidelines may be useful. And for this, an important guideline may be to try to put ourselves in the other's place, to identify with them, and from that vantage point consider what might be useful for them to hear at that moment and be able to utilise in their own growth. For one individual the ideal towards which he may best strive may be a full and sincere surrender of his whole being to the Divine Consciousness and Force, for another, it may simply be to get out of bed and to take a short walk. The ultimate ideal for all may be the same, a divine life, but how that ideal may be most effectively communicated, in what dose, at what time, differs from one individual to the next.

Psychological ideals are not something that one can impose on someone, they are an image of something lying within waiting to emerge. The surface of our nature, like the shell of a seed, is often hard and brittle. It protects the inner reality from emerging too soon, while at the same time resisting it. And here we are referring to a deep and multiform inner reality that takes a long time to emerge in its fullness—many lifetimes. There are many layers of its emergence, many different kinds of powers and potentialities—physical, vital, emotional, mental, psychic, and spiritual. They don't emerge in a single consecutive line, but in a complex swirling action involving all simultaneously in differing degrees and aspects, involving sudden outbursts and regressions. There is no mental rule that can describe the process of this emergence precisely.

When the facility with abstract thought is well-developed, it may be possible for the individual to conceptualise the high psychological ideals we have here in view and gradually through the mental will to align the various parts of the nature with its aims of perfection. It is in this case that a fuller communication of the larger ideal may be effective. Of course, there may be other parts of the nature unwilling to accept the ideal, unwilling to lend themselves to an effort towards its realisation. The acceptance of the ideal by the mental will is important, but it is not sufficient. A strong embrace of the ideal by something deeper within in the heart centre is needed to turn the being fully in its direction. Parts of the nature are likely to resist the ideal for a long or short time, and a period of tension and conflict in the nature is usual. It is difficult to know from a mental vantage-point the likely outcome of such a conflict.

For those in whom abstract thought is relatively undeveloped, it may be more

effective to communicate more proximate ideals, things that are less deep below the surface, that may be more easily grasped by the mind and imagination. In other natures that are more emotional and perhaps more closely attuned to the psychic centre of the being, the communication of the ideal might be more effectively directed towards the fulfilment of this part of the nature, towards goodness, sweetness, love, refinement of the emotions, purification and uplifting of love towards the Divine. This part of the being may have an even more direct and powerful access to the soul or psychic being, the source from which the ideal of our psychological functioning springs. For those in whom the vital is very strong, in which there is strength but also upheaval and conflict, the communication of the ideal might better be tailored towards action and work in service of the ideal. Here there may be a need for the harnessing of the energies of the nature, a redirecting and focusing of these forces towards a greater aim. Rather than directing these forces entirely inward, it may be useful to direct them outward towards the up-building of the ideal in the world, towards one or several of the many projects and works aimed at the expression of the ideal in the human collectivity. Through dedicated work, gradually the various parts of the being may become coalesced around the ideal. Generally, individuals will have some unique combination of these various tendencies, and an intuitive synthesis of their present abilities and receptivities will be needed in assessing how best to communicate ideals of psychological growth.

Let us consider now the main ingredients of an integral psychological perfection. A central basis will be the realisation of the psychic being, the soul of the individual. In Sri Aurobindo's teaching, the Divine is simultaneously both One and Many. The Divine is the One Being, the Absolute, and at the same time, it is all these individual existences we see manifested in the universe. Viewed in a personal rather than impersonal perspective, it is as if the unique, infinite, undivided Self put forth in front of itself, in front of its undifferentiated consciousness, an infinite number of differentiated centres of its being and consciousness, various personalities we could say, that yet hold within themselves, standing behind, the undivided Being one and unique. Some of these individual faces of the Divine, in turn, have put forth a representative of themselves to descend into this world of matter, this divided and ignorant world in which we dwell, in order to experience this particular adventure, the possibility of gradually awakening through the process of evolution in a world of material forms. This representative of the Divine within each of us initially identifies itself completely with the outer nature, with the evolving body, life and mind through its recurring births and rebirths. Through long experience, gradually the soul develops and shapes the outer ignorant nature to more faithfully express its inherent divinity, its individual Truth and Nature. At some point, the outer nature acknowledges and recognises the divine soul standing behind its multitude of confusing forces and tendencies, opens itself to, and aligns itself with, the soul's guidance and rule. The divine soul previously identified with its instruments of mind, life, and body, involved in their evolution and

gradually opening to divinity, recovers its conscious identity with the Divine in the context of its earthly life. This is the realisation of the psychic being.

We can see from this how the realisation of the psychic being is central to our psychological perfection, and how our ideal of psychological perfection is a revelation here in our earthly life of the truth of our being on a higher plane of existence. Our true Self that stands above the evolution is already divine and perfect. We must recover the consciousness of our true Self here within the evolution. We must open the soul's instruments of mind, life, and body to the divinity within so that it may harmonise their movements, uplift their powers and possibilities, and express itself purely and divinely through them. This unification of the divided and conflicting parts of our nature around the true divine Self within is the necessary condition for their own uplifting and perfection.

But what is the process of realising the psychic being? Is there anything we can do to bring it about, or is it simply a natural unfolding that must take place according to its own time and inner development? Both are true, it unveils itself when it is ready; but we can assist this unfolding because to the extent we align ourselves with our soul within, it becomes manifest in the outer life. Love, devotion, and gratitude to the Divine for the wonderful opportunity we have been given are direct paths to the psychic realisation. As Sri Aurobindo described in his book, *The Mother*, our mental will, our heart's aspiration, our vital effort and collaboration are all useful and indeed necessary concomitants of the soul's expression in the outer life. As an adjunct to this positive effort, we must also reject the ignorant movements of our lower nature. This is because most of us will readily embrace the prospect of living a divine life—just so long as it does not require us to change. However, to become divine, we must also relinquish our mental ideas, constructions, preferences, and habits so that our minds may become silent and express the divine Truth from above; we must reject our vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, and selfishness so that the divine power and joy of the soul may manifest unimpeded through a consecrated vital nature; we must reject our physical nature's obscurity, obstinacy, laziness and unwillingness to change so that the Light and Force and Bliss from above may establish themselves in the body. Finally, and in summary, we must surrender all ourselves into the hands of the Divine so that the Divine Force may work in us unhindered and liberate the divine from the undivine elements within us, and transform those parts of our ordinary nature that can be made part of a divinised life.

To seek the Divine, to find the Truth of our being is the first necessity, and should be our first priority, our primary preoccupation and constant endeavour. And yet this may take time. There are likely to be many aspects of our nature that resist, or if not actively resistant, are not yet open to the higher Truth of our being. There are many parts of our nature that seek their own fulfilment and are in conflict with this highest motivation which affects only a portion of our external nature. Perhaps a part of our mind understands that the spiritual path is our true path in life, understands

that deep within, in our essence, we are one with the Divine, and that to experience this deepest part of ourselves in its fullness and to express this divinity in our outer life is the true aim of our existence. This mental understanding is essential. We should further understand that to unify ourselves around the deepest truth of ourselves is not only a great and lofty ideal that we can with great difficulty and great sacrifice pursue; this unification is the most effective and practical solution to all our difficulties, sufferings, and limitations. And even if we are quite happy and content as we are, this unification of our being will bring the fullest amplitude and intensity to our happiness and to the scope of our life. This is because the Divine is Sat-Chit-Ananda, an infinite existence, consciousness and bliss. This is an ideal that brings with it, even in the first steps towards it, greater freedom, happiness, strength, and wisdom. This mental understanding, however, after a time is likely to be clouded over by competing interests, by other practical necessities, by other desires or ambitions. It may not go away completely, we may be able to bring it back, but it is not likely to hold the whole field of our consciousness for long. We are complex beings with complex lives and all this is not going to disappear overnight because we have hit upon a great philosophical truth or mental realisation.

In fact, in order to make this Truth of our Being effective and dynamic in our outer life, our whole outer life will need to be reorganised, purified, reshaped, and perfected. Actually, all the parts of our nature, the various levels of the mind, the various levels of the vital, even the physical consciousness, must grasp in their own way the problem, the falsity of their own way of being, and must consent to undergo a profound change. It is a long and difficult process, but is made palatable by the fact that the alternative of continuing to live in the ignorance and confusion of our unrefined outer nature is even more painful and interminable. Actually, there is no real alternative, it will have to be faced one day or another, in one life or another. It would be better to do it now when we have been shown the possibility and the way and have been promised the help needed to achieve it. If we shirk the possibility in this life, we do not know what will be the circumstances of our next life and whether we shall be given again the same opportunity.

Along with our mental understanding of the ideal and the power of our will to turn our life towards it, the higher vital being's embrace of the ideal is essential, as it holds within it a deeper and stronger well-spring of power and drive that is needed to turn the disparate activities of our ordinary nature towards this higher and difficult aim. It brings the force, courage, determination, and uplifting impetus to our endeavour. While normally this part of our nature works in pursuit of other aims and ideals that are more or less limited in scope, these energies must be turned and focused on the total self-giving and surrender of all the being to the Divine. Normally the higher vital carries with it an egoistic motive, works for an egoistic return for the energies it expends, expects a return for all its achievements. But as a part of the ideal of an integral perfection, it must learn to give itself unselfishly to the Divine, for the sake

of the Divine and not for any egoistic return. It must begin to understand and see that its forces come from the Divine, that in truth it is an instrument of the Divine and not really an original power, it is not our own personal force. It must learn to look back towards its divine fount of Force, lean on that, open itself up to the One Divine Force, the Mahashakti, and transmit that power without interference, without egoistic claim or for egoistic purposes. To the degree that it is able to focus the greater efforts of the life on the central spiritual ideal rather than on other disparate, competing egoistic aims, to the degree it can open itself and feel itself a channel of the Divine Shakti, the greater and more rapid will become the progress towards the ideal.

One of the most effective ways for this part of the nature to give itself up into the hands of the Divine is through doing work or action not for the sake of the ego, but as an offering to the Divine. Whatever work or action we feel we should do, guided by either our mental reason and will, or if possible by a growing psychic inner guidance, is to be offered to the Divine. The Divine is the absolute, he is in all beings and all things, he can accept our offering through whatever object our work is directed. This inner discipline of our attitude in action helps us to wake to the Divine Presence in the world of form and activity, and at the same time helps in the development of the concentration and reorienting of our dynamic life-energies on the Divine. In addition, it helps in the growth of love and service and surrender, which are effective in the psychic transformation.

As the higher vital nature grows in surrender and openness to the Divine Force, the higher Force can begin to act in the whole nature with greater freedom and effectiveness. It can work in many directions, in many ways, both within us for the liberation of our personal nature, and without us for the liberation of others and for the establishment of a Divine life in the world. This action of this higher Force may work concealed from our own awareness, or it may reveal its workings to us. It acts according to its own greater knowledge and wisdom, and is not limited to act according to our narrow conceptions or sensibilities. It releases powers and abilities that were latent, it shapes and perfects other facilities or skills that are partially developed. As we begin to feel the Divine Force working in and through us, our scope of action increases. The work of the Divine in us and in the world is endless. As we grow in this ideal we become a conscious and effective and subtle instrument in this work.

Not only must the higher vital with its relatively conscious drive, determination, and dynamic life motive turn exclusively to the divine, but also the lower vital energies in us must be disciplined, must be converted, must be redirected and purified. These are the forces that move in the circles of small desires, cravings, instincts; they include the forces of greed, anger, fear, lust, disappointment, and despair. Naturally, this is an obscure and difficult part of our nature, and is often a considerably large part. Normally it takes up much too large a place; its upheaval, drama, and insistence crowd out the higher and deeper spiritual experiences from settling in. We spend the greater part of our day trying to satisfy its insatiable desires and demands. And when

they are not satisfied, then we lash out in fury or sink into despair. To a great degree, with patience and a determined effort, our mental will can and should exert a considerable control over this part of the nature, and it is of course best to learn this control while still young. But by itself, this mental control is likely to be partial. The lower vital is clever in convincing the mind that its movements are proper and justified. Its own obscure consciousness must also gradually wake up to the fact that it is not the master of the being, that it must learn to be an obedient instrument for the expression of the inner and higher truth in the outer life. It must become calm, quiet, receptive to the true inner direction, must put its energies in the service of the greater ideal, must express in the outer life the love and sweetness and joy of the inner.

There is still another layer of our being which is still more obscure and obstinate than the lower vital, and that is the physical consciousness. Its very character is to be inert, conservative, slow, unresponsive, to cling to its round of mechanical habit, and is unwilling or unable to receive the higher Light and Force from above. This also has to change and open to the Divine Forces from above. It is primarily through its progressive opening to the Divine that it can change, and since it is resistant to this opening, it normally takes time to achieve as more and more of it gradually becomes receptive and is changed. Exerting one's will for this change to occur, placing a pressure on the physical nature to respond and obey is helpful. Also, aspiring to the Divine, to the higher Force above to descend and penetrate into the obscurity of the physical nature also is needed and effective. In addition, the cultivation of one's physical body and energies through exercise, through training of the body in various physical skills also helps. All of this goes a long way in training the physical consciousness to become responsive and plastic to a higher consciousness, and is one reason that Sri Aurobindo and Mother placed so much stress on the training of the physical body in the Ashram.

An important aid in gaining freedom from the hold of the movements of the ignorant lower nature is the separation of the witness consciousness, the Purusha, from the movements of the nature, the Prakriti. It is possible for a part of the consciousness to draw back from the movements of our nature—from our thoughts and emotions and activities—into the poise of a pure awareness that observes all that occurs but does not itself act. To enter into this consciousness of the Purusha and stand back uninvolved in the activities of the nature is an important step in the liberation of the true Self from the ignorant lower nature. It brings with it a sense of deepening peace and freedom and wideness, even as the lower nature continues its normal activity. Sri Aurobindo says that as we gain more experience in this subjective consciousness, we find that this seeing of the Purusha is in effect a command. Sri Aurobindo says that "Whatever Prakriti perceives it to be the pleasure of the Purusha to see, she tends to preserve in his subjective experience or to establish; whatever she perceives it to be his pleasure to cease to see, she tends to renounce and abolish." (Quoted in *A Greater Psychology*, edited by A. S. Dalal, p. 98.) Therefore, the discipline of standing

back from one's inner and outer activities in the poise of the witness consciousness is to enter an inner domain from where it begins to be possible to exert a greater control and mastery over the whole psychological nature.

One can develop this ability to stand back from one's thoughts and inner movements in one of the forms of meditation that Sri Aurobindo recommended. When we sit to meditate, often we are confronted with a flow of thoughts. Sri Aurobindo said that we must realise that this thought-flow is not ourselves, but simply thought-energy of Prakriti imposing it on the Purusha. We must learn to stand back from it, refusing to identify ourselves with it. Sometimes by the very act of gaining a detachment from the thoughts, they diminish or even fall away. But we can also from this poise exercise a quiet rejection of the thoughts. There should be no struggle or wrestling with them, but simply a quiet self-separation and refusal. Sri Aurobindo said that the result often takes time, but if we persistently refuse our consent to the mechanical activity, it eventually begins to die away. While gaining experience in this practice in meditation, we can also begin to cultivate this practice in the midst of our daily life in regard to our emotional and vital reactions as well as our mental and even physical activities. With time this practice prepares the ground for the realisation of the spiritual Self spread out in its infinite wideness and peace above our embodied existence.

As the being grows in quietude and concentrated receptivity to the Divine, the individual may begin to enter into the reaches of the higher mind. Above the intellect is a higher mind, which is steeped in a deep calm and peace and receptive to the higher knowledge from above. Sri Aurobindo called it "a luminous thought-mind, a mind of Spirit-born conceptual knowledge". (*Ibid.*, p. 144) Unlike the rational mind, it does not progress in a step-like motion towards a conclusion, no deduction or inference, no building of ideas into a larger ordered system. Its knowledge arises out of its oneness and identity with the Spirit, a seeing of the truth that is pre-existent within itself. Sri Aurobindo said, it is "a Knowledge formulating itself on a basis of self-existent all-awareness and manifesting some part of its integrality, a harmony of its significances put into thought-form". (*Ibid.*, pp. 144-145) He said it can "express itself in single ideas, but its most characteristic movement is a mass ideation, a system or totality of truth-seeing at a single view". (*Ibid.*, p. 145) Sri Aurobindo indicated that in addition to knowledge, the higher mind also has a powerfully effective will that works on the rest of the being through the power of its innate knowledge. The ordinary mental will, the emotions, the vital nature, even the body consciousness all become in their own way conscious of the higher knowledge put into them and gradually work out and respond to its will, are modified by its vibrations, and charged by its greater wisdom and power.

Two still higher levels of the mind into which we can open are the illumined mind and the intuition. The illumined mind is a mind of spiritual light. Sri Aurobindo said that a downpour of inwardly visible Light very usually envelops this action. (*Ibid.*, p. 146) It works primarily by vision rather than thought. It is a more direct

knowledge, a perception of the inner significance and Truth of things, it penetrates more deeply and rapidly. It carries with it also a greater dynamic power, as Sri Aurobindo put it, “a swift, sometimes a vehement, almost a violent impetus of rapid transformation”. (*Ibid.*, p. 147) The intuition is a still higher power of consciousness nearer to the knowledge by identity. It is a meeting of the consciousness in the subject with the consciousness in the object, a penetration, a commingling of vibrations. It is a revealing touch of the consciousness upon the object, and brings with it an overwhelming and automatic certitude. Sri Aurobindo said that it carries within it four great powers: a revelatory truth-seeing, a truth-hearing or inspiration, a truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance, and an automatic discrimination.

The integral perfection envisioned by Sri Aurobindo requires an even higher ascent as the knowledge and powers of these higher mind planes still cannot utterly penetrate and transform matter. Above the intuition is the overmind, a power of the cosmic consciousness. Sri Aurobindo said that when the overmind descends, the centralising ego-sense is abolished and replaced by a wide cosmic perception and the feeling of a boundless universality. He said that the overmind change is the final consummation of the dynamic spiritual transformation. It takes up the powers of the higher mind, illumined mind, and intuition and raises them to their highest and greatest power, and adds to them a universal wideness of consciousness and force.

But a still higher knowledge and power is needed for the fullest perfection, the power of the supermind. The supermind is an altogether different type of consciousness than mind and so is difficult to describe. Sri Aurobindo said that “In the supermind all is self-known self-luminously, there are no divisions, oppositions or separated aspects”. (*Ibid.*, p. 159) He said that on its summits it possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence, and that even in its gradual evolutionary unveiling of its powers it would be free from ignorance and error, and would be flawless in the execution of its will and self-expression.

This gives us a brief glimpse of the great ideal of psychological functioning that Sri Aurobindo has given to mankind. Never before has such an aim been placed before the mind of humanity. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have not only presented a great ideal for us to gaze at in wide-eyed but helpless astonishment, but they have also given us a roadmap for its realisation. And even more than this, they have realised this perfection in themselves, and have promised to give their tireless help and force and grace to all who would turn towards it. It is a vast ideal, but there are many small steps one can take immediately. One can learn through reading and study about the ideal and about the discipline of yoga required for its realisation, about the methods and practices that gradually lead towards a greater and more harmonious and luminous consciousness. One can learn to discipline one’s vital nature, one’s ambitions and desires. One can practise meditation with the aim of standing back from the movements of the mind and emotions and desires. One can learn to offer one’s work, one’s food, one’s activities to the Divine. One can begin to acknowledge the One Divine Being

behind the appearances of the world, behind the forces that move in the world, behind the joy and suffering of the world. One can begin to sur-render and give oneself to the Divine, to the Absolute, to one's highest Self, one's highest ideal.

These things we can do, and yet it seems often we do not do them, or do them too little. There is a great resistance to our effort. It is important to be cognizant of it. At the base of our existence is the inconscient, it is almost the very opposite of the Divine. It has almost as great a force of resistance as the Divine has force for uplifting. The stark inanimate matter from which this universe began is stone blindness, its cold refusal still survives in our bones. It really is necessary to counteract it with a strong, determined, sincere effort and aspiration or we will languish. We must push ahead towards the ideal wherever and whenever we see an opportunity. It is so easy to fall asleep, to drift, to get distracted. But every effort brings an advance, every effort makes further advance easier and more inevitable. We do not need to achieve this great ideal by our own unaided effort. The Divine will do the work for us, but we must collaborate, we must open ourselves to the Divine, surrender ourselves into the hands of the Divine. This is our part.

I want to close by considering again the people with whom we come into contact: our patients, clients, students, children. How can these ideals relate to them? How can these ideals uplift their lives? How can they be communicated to them? How can they become a force for their growth, their spiritual uplifting? It seems to me the most important and effective way is to embody these ideals within one's own life. When we become centred in our true being and grow spiritually towards our own full potentiality, the force and light and delight of our true being flows out from us in all we do, towards all we meet, all we love. We do not need to ask them to do yoga or seek the supermind. We need to recognise the Divine in them, and we can help them to recognise the Divine in themselves. We do not need to use the term Divine, but we can help them to recognise and express their own inherent divine qualities, their strength and ability, their goodness, their knowledge and wisdom, their love and beauty, their joy and delight. The growing expression of these powers in ourselves will be the greatest aid in the unfolding of these powers in others.

LARRY SEIDLITZ

PARICHAND: THE GARDENER OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

(On the Occasion of Parichand's Centenary: 30th October 2004)

TALL and dignified, Parichand-da, as we called him, walked with a kingly gait. He had a majestic personality which was the result of a total disregard for himself. He arranged his life in such a way that beyond what the Mother gave him—the same as she gave to all her children—he had no personal possessions. His life was bare and austere.

And yet there was an opulence in his atmosphere. There were flowers and fruits, seeds and plants, which he gave to all Ashramites. That he served the Mother like a humble servant is natural for a sadhak but, along with the Mother, he served the children of the Mother with a true humility. Every day many people went to him to ask for flowers for their birthdays, for seeds, plants and pots, for fruits and herbs, for tools and labourers and other such things. His help exceeded his allotted work, there was no end to his self-giving. And even for the humblest person he had a benevolent smile and hands full of the gift of smiling flowers.

Again and again I observed that even when engrossed in reading Sri Aurobindo, he would get up with the alacrity of a teenager, even up to his eighties, and attend to each visitor with a gracious smile and generous heart. People left him with lighter steps and happier hearts, as if being with him lessened their burden and cares and put them in touch with the Mother's consciousness. Thus, he became a benefactor to scores of people in the Ashram.

People of all ages and types found in him a ready refuge. Day after day, year after year, decade after decade, Parichand listened with patience and love to the woes of those who were drawn to him. He was absolutely discreet. Whatever was told to him remained forever in the depth of his heart. He never betrayed the confidence of anyone, he never provoked personal disagreements and he never spoke against anybody. If he had to warn somebody he did so in a very light and subdued manner and just mentioned, without emphasising, the unpleasant things that had to be told. His was the approach of a loving father and brother.

It is a testimonial to his greatness that this great scholar who knew seven languages and who loved to immerse himself in Sri Aurobindo's works, never resented the time given to others; whether intellectuals or simple folk. He would explain to me with alacrity whenever I had any difficulty in understanding a passage or a word from the works of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother and with the same willingness he would listen to my problems. I always wondered at the generosity of his self-giving.

After the passing of the Mother, the task of steering, guiding and buoying up those who were floundering in the early reaches of yoga, fell upon great souls like

Nolini Kanta Gupta, Champaklal, Pranab, Parichand, Nirodbaran and many others. Time, that most scarce commodity in our Ashram life, stretched itself out unendingly in Parichand's accommodating heart, so that he could shelter many of us acolytes. I remember with wonder the restraint with which he listened to the unpleasant things people had to say about others and the great yogic finesse with which he put people on the right track.

His was the suggestive mode, not the evangelistic. He showed us by example what true renunciation is, because he felt that since the broad sweeps of the Integral Yoga are exhaustively detailed in the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, there was no need to tell people about them. The urge to change had to come from within. He didn't like to preach, nay, even to suggest. His devotion and dedication, his life of ceaseless service, his spartan surroundings and his austerity were there for all to see, and if they so chose, to follow.

From his early youth, Parichand had had a desire for a higher life. In his early youth, he came in contact with some sadhus but was wary of them since sannyasa did not attract him. For many years he could not find any ideal worth living for. Meanwhile nature took its course and he married his friend Udai Singh's sister, breaking many rigid taboos of the Jain community code.

Ten days after his marriage, his close friend and business partner, Rishabhchand, a great and pure soul who would later become a luminary of the Ashram, gave him a book written by Sri Aurobindo. That book revealed to Parichand his path. He had found his Guru. But alas, he was married. He used to say that had he received that book ten days earlier he would not have married and wasted ten years living a householder's life.

From the day Parichand read that book of Sri Aurobindo, he belonged no more to the world. Though, with his friend and partner Rishabhchand, he carried on a thriving business, the hearts of both men were at the feet of the Avatars of the Supermind.

Soon after reading that first book, he wrote a letter of self-surrender to Sri Aurobindo. Thus started a ten-year long correspondence. In his letters Parichand laid bare his outer and inner feelings. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother guided his sadhana through their letters. His sister-in-law, our Kiran Kumari, herself a great sadhika, told me later, how after her marriage in the twenties, one day she peeped through the window of Parichand's room to see what he was doing. She saw that he was seated cross-legged, with eyes closed and was lost in deep meditation. There was a beatific expression on his face. She was filled with awe and admiration and later entered his room and there, for the first time, saw that early photograph of the Mother, wearing a veil, taken in Algeria. Kiran Kumari was enraptured and involuntarily, her heart chose the Mother as her *Aradhya Devi*, her chosen deity. She would later follow in the hallowed footsteps of Parichand and her husband Umichand to take up yoga, leaving behind her three year old son. For decades she has served the Mother with all

her heart and all her being and is still serving her.

At last, in 1934, Parichand came to the Ashram on his first visit. He had an interview with the Mother. He has told me that when he went to see the Mother he wondered how much he should tell her about himself and whether she remembered what he had written in his letters during the preceding ten years to Sri Aurobindo as well as the answers given by Sri Aurobindo and herself. The Mother could read thoughts like an open book and, as if to reveal to him her omniscience and to clear forever all his doubts, before he could say anything, she recounted all that he had written in his first letter and Sri Aurobindo's answer to it, and then went on to describe chronologically all his letters and Sri Aurobindo's and her own answers to them, up to the last letter before his leaving Calcutta. Parichand was overwhelmed and could only lay down his head at her feet in utter adoration and humility. He joined the Ashram and never went back, leaving his three children and wife behind.

He once told me that one day Umichand, his elder brother who had also joined the Ashram, came to his office accompanied by a young man and asked, "Do you know who he is?" Parichand replied in the negative. Umichand said, "He is your son." Parichand had left home when his only son was eight months old. After three decades this was to be the first and the last meeting of father and son.

This meeting didn't cause any emotional upsurge in Parichand because his heart was so impersonal that there was no place left for family feeling. This I can say with certainty. In 1980 when I was hospitalised for a long period, Parichand used to visit me twice a week. One day a fellow sadhika who had come to visit me and knew of my reverence for Parichand told me that some days earlier his son had passed away of a heart attack. Parichand had visited me after this untimely death of his son and yet he had been his usual smiling self and had not even mentioned the death. When I heard of the death, I was aghast and on his next visit, brought up the subject in a rather emotional way. He remarked lightly, "Oh, that was some days back." It was as if the whole thing was nothing. He didn't concern himself in the least with the trials and tribulations of the young widow, left to bring up three young children. For years he didn't let any of his numerous friends and admirers know about the very hard time his daughter-in-law and grandchildren were facing. Help would certainly have been forthcoming had he given even a small hint.

The same unconcern, yogic Samata or equality, was there when his wife died. One morning while I was going to see him, somebody at the Ashram gate asked me to deliver a telegram to him which had just arrived. I handed it to him and sat down. He opened and read it and then kept it on one side and with a smile began to discuss the point which I had come to discuss with him.

Many days later, when I came to know about his wife's death from others, I asked him about it and he replied, "The telegram you had brought that day was to inform me about her death and cremation. Had they kept the body and insisted that I should come for the last rites then there would have been some problem. Since they

didn't ask me to come, I had no problem."

His was a generation of true yogis. Here I give a few examples. We in the Ashram are given a pair of leather chappals each year. Parichand didn't take even that one pair. On each Darshan day, many pairs of chappals are left or forgotten in the Ashram main building, in the Ashram Dining Hall or on the pavements of the Ashram. These are collected and kept so that the owners may claim them. Some of them remain unclaimed. Parichand always took an ordinary pair from those left-over chappals so that the Ashram didn't have to buy a new pair for him. Sometimes, the chappals he found would be a size too large or too small, but he would ignore the discomfort.

Those were days of great austerity because of World War II and the Ashram had to face many hardships. So complete was Parichand's identification with the well-being of the Ashram that he even lessened the quantity of his food. One day he fainted due to weakness. The Mother came to know of it. She made him tell her, in detail, about his diet and food-intake at Calcutta before joining the Ashram. After listening to him she sanctioned an extra cup of milk for each of his three meals. He never cooked and unless invited by some Ashramite, ate all his food in the Ashram Dining Room, and for years, before the second counter was opened at the Dining Room, he stood, sometimes for half an hour, in the long queue, without any complaint, without jumping the queue, even though nobody would have objected had he done so.

Very few people know that, in the beginning, the room given to him had hardly any ventilation. Once, in a reminiscent mood, he told me that for a long period, at night, his room became so unbearably stifling that he felt as if he would die. But he bore it all stoically. A long time passed before a window was put in the southern wall for cross-ventilation. Sadhaks such as he never asked for anything for themselves. When his brother-in-law and friend Udai Singh died, his family insisted that Parichand use his friend's bed and a ceiling fan. He could not hurt their feelings and was forced to accept some comfort.

He had to handle a lot of money because of his garden work. But he never used a single paisa from the garden money for his personal use. It was very difficult to offer him anything. Once my sister Ila of whom he was fond sent a woollen shawl for him. He used it rarely. He loved the simple clothes given by the Mother and always wore them.

Even if he had a fever, he bathed in cold water and in the last years of his life, it took some persuasion to make him accept a small electric heater and an aluminium vessel for heating water. Once I pleaded with him to accept some money for his grandchildren. Very reluctantly, only once, did he accept a hundred rupees to send them some books by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The plaster on the walls of his room kept peeling. Each year he would remove the cupboards for some patches to be re-plastered never minding the labour. I offered to get the walls replastered but he firmly refused, even as he refused offers of a

motorcycle and used to carry overloaded baskets of flowers and fruits on the handlebars of his bicycle for nearly half a century, until he was taken to the Ashram Nursing Home after a stroke.

Throughout his Ashram life Parichand washed his own clothes, fetched his drinking water and swept his own room. He had to employ many labourers for garden work and the Ashram would have gladly given him a servant, but he chose to do all his personal work himself.

Parichand has told me something about his sadhana and his contact with the Mother. He said that in his early life he was somewhat self-centred and wanted to make up for this fault by selfless service to fellow-Ashramites. Once a sadhak living in the same house fell ill. Parichand nursed him. In the thirties and forties the sadhaks were supposed to take the Mother's permission before deviating from their routine, even in small matters. Parichand had thought that there would be nothing wrong in nursing a fellow sadhak. But after two days of nursing he felt somewhat uneasy and wrote to the Mother in detail about the whole affair. The Mother told him words to the effect, "It was a wrong movement. You should have informed me. I would have arranged for his nursing. Diseases come from wrong movements. You should concentrate on your own sadhana."

Parichand used to emphasise that on the path of Integral Yoga the disciple has to be totally dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He narrated an important incident. Once, after a sadhak died, Amrita was sent to sort out his possessions. He reported to the Mother that in addition to Sri Aurobindo's and her own photographs, this sadhak had kept a photograph of another spiritual person in his room. The Mother exclaimed, "Oh! now I know why he suffered so much."

Parichand had a heavy work schedule. He worked from early morning till late at night with hardly a break. In the evening there were about two hours of exercise in the Ashram Playground. After exercising Parichand had no energy left to study Sri Aurobindo's works. He asked the Mother whether he could give up his exercises and read Sri Aurobindo's books instead. The Mother replied that he must continue to exercise even if afterwards he had no time or energy left for study. In his later years Parichand used to say that he had realised that it was only due to half a century of regular exercise that he was fit even in his eighties and could walk and work for long hours without getting exhausted.

Before coming to the Ashram I was a keen gardener, and that is how I came to know Parichand. Over the years he told me many anecdotes about the Mother's love for flowers, plants and trees.

One day a visitor asked him for a nice rose which he wanted to offer to the Mother in the afternoon. It was about two o'clock on the first day of the month. The Mother, after finishing the Prosperity Distribution, was to come through the room where Bansidhar now gives permission cards for a visit to Sri Aurobindo's room and then she was to proceed across the open terrace and Pavitra's room to her own room.

She was usually followed by Pavitra, Nolini and Amrita. Everyone in the Ashram knew that the Mother loved roses, but half a century back the hot climate of Pondicherry was not at all congenial to growing them. To make them bloom they had to be coaxed with special love and care. Parichand, along with other gardeners, made every effort to grow roses. That afternoon when the visitor asked him for a rose, Parichand had kept some rose plants with a few blooms, in flowerpots, on the terrace outside Bansidhar's office, so that while returning from the distribution the Mother could enjoy their beauty. After looking appreciatively at the roses she crossed the terrace and entered Pavitra's room. Now Parichand went up the stairs, took out a pair of garden scissors from his pocket and stretched out his hand to cut a nice rose for the visitor.

The Mother was then passing along the corridor on the northern side of the Ashram building and there was no way she could see the terrace with the plants. Suddenly she started running and reached the open terrace above Dyuman's room and from there, just in time, called out to Parichand across the courtyard, "Don't cut. Don't cut." Nolini, Pavitra and Amrita were bewildered. Parichand was taken aback and withdrew his outstretched hand holding the scissors. Later, the Mother explained to Parichand, "The soul of that flower came to me to be saved." She said to him that flowers should be cut only in the morning or evening. If they are cut or plucked during the hot hours they suffer.

He also told me how one morning the Mother called a sadhak and asked him to go to a particular garden of the Ashram. She said to this man that something was wrong in that garden and the souls of the trees had come to her crying for help. The sadhak found that a new labourer had been employed and he had started to cut banana trees which had not yet flowered and fruited. Their anguished souls had rushed to the Mother. The new man was told to cut only those trees that had already borne fruit.

Flowers, birds and animals were equally dear to the Mother who is the Mother of all beings. As the head-gardener of the Ashram, Parichand looked after the plants, trees and flowers in the main Ashram building. Once a small bird had made a nest in a croton bush growing there. The nest had three chicks. Mridu, a sadhika famous for her cantankerousness, asked Parichand to give her a chick to keep as a pet. Parichand didn't agree. But Mridu kept pestering him. So, after two or three days Parichand gave her one of the chicks. Pujalal, who lived in the main Ashram building heard of the incident and reported it to the Mother. Later on he told Parichand that the Mother was displeased. Though the Mother didn't say anything to Parichand he felt very uneasy and reported to her all that had happened. The Mother scolded him saying, "They were under my protection. It was a nasty thing to do." Parichand told me that his heart and body were afire with guilt and regret and he asked the Mother, "Should I put the chick back in the nest?" The Mother replied, "It won't do. The bird will not feed the chick." Then sensing his anguish at displeasing her, she consoled him.

He has told me about the Mother's love for a particular squirrel which became

her pet. The Mother used to caress it. After some years the squirrel population of the Ashram increased and became a nuisance. They nibbled at carpets and overturned flower vases. The Mother asked Parichand and Jyotin to trap the squirrels and to show them first to the Mother so that she could ascertain that her pet squirrel was not amongst the trapped ones. So each time that the two gardeners trapped a squirrel they showed it to the Mother. Being all compassion, for all beings, she instructed them to take each squirrel to the Botanical Garden and release it there and observe how it reacted. Twice or thrice they reported to her that at first the squirrels were a little bewildered but later climbed the tall stately trees. Thus reassured that the squirrels would be happy in their new surroundings, the Mother allowed them to keep on trapping and releasing them. Alas, in spite of the precautions the Mother's squirrel either got trapped or escaped somewhere.

Parichand narrated many stories about the stately Copper Pod tree, named "Service" by the Mother. It was planted on Tuesday, January 4, 1930, in the very centre of the Ashram Courtyard. The Mother loved this tree and said many wonderful things about it. The gardeners protected it so that the Ashram cats did not disturb it. They watered it abundantly. And under the loving gaze of the Mother, who would always look at it as she passed by, the tree flourished. By 1940 it was very well-grown, with its branches resting on tiled roofs of three connected rooms, then known collectively as the "Flower Room".

The Service tree went on extending its roots and branches. Some of the boughs hung so low that people would injure their eyes when going to the Meditation Hall for the midnight meditation. When Jyotin told the Mother that people were complaining she remarked, "How gracefully the boughs came down to the earth." She told Parichand, "They protest! They must learn to bow their heads." And she herself gave a demonstration of how to do it. Some of this tree's roots grew above the surface. The Mother would not step upon those roots. She would rather take a long stride over them. Parichand proposed to cover them, but the Mother replied that it could have been done earlier, but by then the roots had thickened and become like branches and it would not be proper to cover them.

In 1943, a cyclone uprooted many trees in the town, and a large branch of the Service tree too broke. When the Mother saw the damage she said something to this effect, "Had a roof (in the Ashram) given way, I would not feel so deeply as at the loss of this branch of the Service tree."

In December 1950, when the Mother decided that Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi would be constructed at the foot of the Service tree, she asked Jyotin and Parichand to make sure that no thick root of the tree was damaged during the digging work. Fortunately there was no thick root at the site of the Samadhi.

Once during the sixties it was decided, with the sanction of the Mother, that the vegetable van should unload at the south-facing "Cartonnerie" gate, and from there the vegetables and fruits would be taken upstairs through the Samadhi courtyard.

One day some workmen started digging near the tree to widen the passage. As Parichand saw that there was danger of damage to the thick roots of the tree, he at once informed the Mother through Amrita. The Mother immediately came out on the terrace of Pavitra's room and asked that the work be stopped. After an hour she came down and scolded the workers for damaging the roots. Then she stopped the work altogether, declaring, "It is absurd." A new arrangement was made for the delivery of the vegetables and fruits.

From the Mother to the Master. Once I said to Parichand, "Parichand-da since you came to the Ashram after Sri Aurobindo had retired to his room you could not have had the opportunity for the Lord's darshan for a long time." Parichand revealed that on Darshan days he and his brother Umichand, were granted the privilege of being on duty in the middle chamber of the Lord's room and thus both of them could have the darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo throughout the duration of the Darshan.

He once narrated an incident highlighting Sri Aurobindo's humour. In the late thirties he and other sadhaks of the Ashram observed a fellow-sadhak, while on gate duty, sitting with closed eyes for hours at a time. They were impressed by his capacity for long meditations and took him for an advanced soul. They brought this fact to Sri Aurobindo's notice who remarked with wry humour, "Yes, he meditates, but upon his wife."

Parichand told me of an incident of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Grace. The old family silk shop was still being run in Calcutta by the son of Rishabhchand. The sari-shop had become famous. They had put the Mother's symbol on the shopfront. Once terrible communal riots engulfed the metropolis. The mayhem was so terrible that the army had to be called out. Entire localities were burnt down and shops looted. The family could not go to visit their shop for one whole week without grave risk to their lives. From the reports they had heard, Rishabhchand's family had expected to find their shop in ruins, looted and gutted. When the situation was brought under control they went to the shop. All the shops on one side of their shop were destroyed. But the destruction had stopped at their shop which stood untouched and undamaged with all the goods safe.

Because I neither had the privilege of Sri Aurobindo's darshan, nor possessed anything written by the Lord, Parichand gave me a priceless gift; a letter which he had written to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's answers to it. While I was reading Sri Aurobindo's famous poem *Rose of God* with him, he showed me another letter in which he had put some questions to Sri Aurobindo regarding this poem and Sri Aurobindo's answer. I reproduce both these letters:

Mother,

I am herewith sending the photograph of a friend. He is well known to us but still enigmatical. What he says of himself, suggesting the heights of spiritual

realisation he has attained, seems preposterous to me. A true statement of his present position which I took down almost verbatim a few days before my departure for Pondicherry will give you an exact idea of what he thinks of himself. He refuses to be shaken in the least from this belief. Yet he has given ample evidence to us of a sincere aspiration, profound devotion, a steadfast dedication to the cause. Will you please let me know your opinion about him and permit me to inform him about it? He may then be certain of his real position as it is only in Sri Aurobindo that he has the truest confidence. He, of course, does not hold himself to belong to this path though he admits that his yoga started with Sri Aurobindo's guidance but now he gets direct guidance from the Divine.

4.2.1935

The Mother replied:

The man is suffering from an incurable disease—vanity.

Sri Aurobindo replied:

So it is no use sending him my opinion as the disease is incurable. It is possible that he has experiences for he has probably some mental force and through that can build up mental realisations of what he reads, but he lives in the vital and whatever he experiences or receives the vital takes it and makes it a 100 times bigger in its own estimation than it really is. His claims are preposterous. It is evident that like most people he has no idea what the supramental is or he would never talk like that. People who live in the vital and have much vanity (there have been several examples here too) easily get the idea that they have attained everything, are without ego, all they receive is from the Divine (even when a magnified ego is driving them) etc., etc., for the vital ego is eager to assert, to be big, to be siddha, and it persuades itself very easily that it is all these things. Let him however go on his own way; it is no use disturbing his self-content, as probably it is the only kind of self-expansion he can do.

The second letter:

Two questions have arisen in the mind in connection with Sri Aurobindo's poem Rose of God.

1) Does the rose, of all flowers, most perfectly and aptly express the divine ecstasies or has it got any symbolic allusion in the Veda or the Upanishad?

Sri Aurobindo answered:

There were no roses in those times in India—roses came in with the Mahomedans from Persia. The rose is usually taken by us as the symbol of surrender, love etc. But here it is not used in that sense, but as the most intense of all flowers it is used as symbolic of the divine intensities—Bliss, Light, Love etc.

2) *Are the seven ecstasies referred to there the following: Bliss, Light, Power, Immortality, Life, Love and Grace?*

No, it is not seven kinds, but seven levels of Ananda that are meant by the seven ecstasies.

2 January 1935

To some people one can never be grateful enough. Parichand was like a father to me and gave me constant moral support in the intense struggle I underwent in my early years in the Ashram. He also gave me so many flowers, that some people began to call me “The lady with flowers.”

Parichand enjoyed writing letters and many of us, who were close to him, have letters written in his beautiful handwriting and impeccable English. Some of these letters are being brought out in a brochure by his family for his centenary.*

With gratitude to him I end my homage.

SHYAM KUMARI

(From the forthcoming book *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Vol. 5, by Shyam Kumari)

* Parichand was born on 30th October, 1904.

In June 1989 he suffered a stroke and was taken to the Ashram Nursing Home. Loved, cared for and cherished by scores of Ashramites, he left his body on 27th August, 1991.

UTOPIA

IN the heart of the sombre mountain
Is a world of mist and fog
And snow that lies thick-carpeted
Upon the rock and log.

Cradled in this bosom
Lies a place that's another world:
Virgin land of nature,
Asleep and curled.

Whilst civilisation's rude breath
Spreads flying on the blast,
It hides among nature's folds
And waits until it's past.

Not yet has man polluted
Its holy hallowed air,
Nor ever penetrated
To that concealed lair.

But there it lies, a dream,
So ethereal, so pure,
Lofty in exquisiteness,
Though innocent, without allure.

Yet all so frail that it'd vanish
Into void with the softest sigh
And the world would be the poorer
Without it under its sky.

But when I sit alone, at times,
I glimpse with my inward eye
An idyllic world of sunshine
Serene under the sky!

SUJAY JAUHAR
(A student)

MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

VII

CONCLUSION: A POINT OF VIEW

FRANÇOIS MARTIN'S vision of co-ordinating the different elements of the total set-up of the Pondicherry of his time was far ahead of other people's thinking. He knew that the French traders were new settlers, whereas the others had always lived here continually. Each community Hindu, Muslim or Christian, the merchants, the farmers or the fishermen had their own place in the whole. He let himself be guided by the natural light of his conscience, and his wife by her faith in God, her love for her husband and the openness of her heart. Both could thus influence the human side of the problem around them in different ways. The French gradually evolved a solidarity which was non-existent among the other colonial groups around them.

This was a delicate and complex work which could not be done in a day. It was impossible to go about it by the established hard and fast rules that everyone had to follow. Not seek for oneself a place of one's own in the community, this was their motto. Interferences there were in plenty both at the administrative and the personal level. They had therefore to rely on their own forbearance in the face of extreme odds and dangerous situations. Their strength lay in their extraordinary faith that they were treading the path of Truth beyond human limitations and prejudices. The basic principle of action was to avoid any injustice to anyone. Throughout their lives here in Pondicherry they proved what human wisdom and understanding could achieve.

We shall cite just two or three examples to show the validity of this point of view:

1. The first is an incident connected with the great Marattha King, Sivaji. Around 1678 he marched towards Pondicherry with the intention of taking hold of the French traders there. As soon as François Martin came to know about this, he quickly sent away all the goods by boat to Madras and arranged for an interpreter to explain in their language to Sivaji's people that the French did not mean to harm them in any way. Sivaji accepted the proposal on condition that the French would not fight the Marathas on any pretext, but help them in case of Mughal aggression. However, before these negotiations were finalised Sivaji was called away to the North, to the front, and the French came back to their earlier positions in Pondicherry.

2. The second is a much later incident. In 1687 there was a theft in a French factory. Two miscreants were caught but François Martin refused to punish them in any way. He referred the case to the authorities in Gingee, for, those concerned were subjects of the kingdom of the Marathas. Any type of reprisal on the foreigners residing here at that time was thus avoided.

This clear demarkation between where to stop in terms of political and social human judgement is a type of self-control where the work to be done is viewed from an impersonal angle.

By 1687 Martin had been working in India for already over twenty years, at first in Surat and then in Pondicherry. He had explained once to his wife that it was an attitude that grew upon him out of long experience. He was used to the intelligent arguments that the Governors in Gingee could put forward in their own defence and take the offensive approach—for, sometimes offence is the best defence, they say.

3. Eleven years later, in 1698, the final construction of the Fort was taken up after the Dutch had occupied it for four years. Martin had to stay back at the Governor's residence within the fortress and to entrust the responsibility of the work at the site to a young engineer who had married a "créole", wife of another man in Madras. As we have already said, the Jesuit and the Capuchin missionaries in Pondicherry could not approve of such an alliance. The arguments went on and on in spite of Martin's illness. Eventually, they understood his point and the work went on. For, everyone knew that both Madame and Monsieur Martin had always been true to their own religious background. Their attitude towards the missionaries was always respectful, but their personal recognition of those priests who believed in real human values was usually very clearly perceptible. They had full confidence, for example, in Father Zenon, Fathers Felix, de Britto and Tachard. Which country of Europe or the religious sect they belonged to was of little importance. They sought advice from such persons and followed without any hesitation what was indicated.

A sensitive and open-minded European who had gone through many types of hardships in life, François Martin had evolved a balanced judgement regarding the place of trade and money on the one hand, and religions on the other. He was a practical person for whom efficiency in work came first and the qualities or drawbacks of character afterwards. He seems therefore to have been in "pursuit of" a certain "consciously proposed social and political ideal". We could speak of it as a "bold experiment with the communal life which opens a field of possibility for the realisation of a more and more ideal society".¹

Martin's attitude as Governor of a collectivity seems also to have reflected an approach to which the following comment could well apply—"to govern his collective

life neither primarily by the needs, instincts, intuitions welling up out of the vital self, nor secondarily by the constructions of the reasoning mind, but first, foremost and always by the power of unity, sympathy, spontaneous liberty, supple and living order...”²

At the common man’s level the principle on which François Martin acted seems to have had a twofold approach:

First, and foremost, as a representative of his country here in India he had to ensure that the presence of the French group of traders enriched the existing communities of Pondicherry. Secondly, as a person, he had to show that work for the business was the most important thing. But duty never came in the way of his understanding the difficulties that the local people had to face. Famine or drought found François Martin going out of his way to provide for the natives who worked for the French. Religion, food habits, customs, and superstitions were not to interfere directly with the job to be done. Each aspect of life had to be seen from a separate standpoint, so to say, never losing sight of the general aim in view—that of a harmonious co-existence. The dedicated work of Monsieur and Madame Martin in Pondicherry was a natural consequence of their patriotism—17th century France, in another country had to be worthy of the fame and cultural height she enjoyed in Europe.

He certainly was one of those who “represent the ascending element in humanity” and with his wife may be counted among those who had lived in their time to build a better future. As G. B. Malleason puts it in his *History of French India*: “The solid foundation upon which to build up a French India was the work of that Martin whom the latest French account of French India dismisses in half a dozen lines.” None of his successors could build on that foundation the type of French colony that Martin would have liked to see—something that he had “secured with so much care, with so much energy, with so much prudence!” Malleason speaks of him as “single-minded, liberal, large-hearted without any thought of envy or jealousy and a true patriot. Such are the men who found empires, and who are the true glory of their country!” Colbert had certainly chosen the right person for the French East India Company in 1667.

(To be concluded)

AMITA SEN

Addendum

HUMAN SOCIETY: THREE STAGES OF ITS EVOLUTION

Human society has in its growth to pass through three stages of evolution before it can arrive at the completeness of its possibilities. The first is a condition in which the forms and activities of the communal existence are those of the spontaneous play of the powers and principles of its life. [...]

A second stage of the society is that in which the communal mind becomes more and more intellectually self-conscious... [An] outcome of this stage of social evolution is the emergence of high and luminous ideals which promise to raise man beyond the limits of the vital being, beyond his first social, economic and political needs and desires and out of their customary moulds and inspire an impulse of bold experiment with the communal life which opens a field of possibility for the realisation of a more and more ideal society. This application of the scientific mind to life with the strict, well-finished, armoured efficiency which is its normal highest result, this pursuit of great consciously proposed social and political ideals and the progress which is the index of the ground covered in the endeavour, have been, with whatever limits and drawbacks, the distinguishing advantages of the political and social effort of Europe.

...It is only by reaching a third stage of the evolution... that the ideals first seized and cherished by the thought of man can discover their own real source and character and their true means and conditions of effectuation or the perfect society be anything more than a vision on a shining cloud constantly run after in a circle and constantly deceiving the hope and escaping the embrace. That will be when man in the collectivity begins to live more deeply and to govern his collective life neither primarily by the needs, instincts, intuitions welling up out of the vital self, not secondarily by the constructions of the reasoning mind, but first, foremost and always by the power of unity, sympathy, spontaneous liberty, supple and living order of his discovered greater self and spirit in which the individual and the communal existence have their law of freedom, perfection and oneness.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 398-400)

GETTING THE CHERISHED PRICE

(Free English rendering of Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali poem, "Mulyaprapti")

ALL the lotuses died under the cruel onslaught
Of the winter-dews of the Agrahayan nights!
But in the lake-garden of the gardener, Sudas,
Only one bloom somehow survived!

Plucking that lone flower, seeking a buyer,
He went towards the palace-gate
And humbly sought to meet the king.
Just then a passer-by, greatly thrilled
Seeing the flower, said, "Your lotus
Is an untimely one, I shall buy it.
Name your price.
The Lord Buddha has come to the city today.
I shall lay this as an offering at his feet."
The gardener replied, "At least a grain of gold
I hope to get." The passer-by to the sum agreed.

The king emerged from the palace then,
And gorgeous worship-offerings his men did bear:
The emperor Pransanjit, chanting sacred hymns,
Was on his way for a darshan of the Buddha.
He saw the off-season flower and asked,
"What is its price? This would I buy
To offer as my gift at the feet of the Lord."
The gardener replied, "O King, this man here
Has bought it for one grain of gold."
"Ten grains I'll pay," offered the master of the world.
"Twenty grains I'll give," countered the passer-by.
And both clamoured, "Give it to me, give it to me..."
For neither was willing to accept defeat.
Meanwhile the price alarmingly soared.

The gardener thought, "The one for whom these two contend,
If I myself offer the bloom to him,
How much more shall my reward be!"
With folded hands he entreated the two, "Excuse me,
Sirs, please, but this flower I no longer wish to sell."

So saying, he rushed towards the place
 Where Buddhadev was seated—
 Around that figure the garden gleamed!
 In the lotus pose he sat, with happy benignant mind,
 The image of untainted bliss,
 Peace poured from his eyes,
 On his lips, shone a compassionate smile!

Sudas gazed and gazed with unblinking eyes
 And no words came to his lips...
 Abruptly he prostrated himself on the ground
 And placed the lotus at the lotus feet of the Lord!

A rain of nectar was Buddha's smile.
 "Tell me, my child, what is your prayer?" he asked.

Yearningly Sudas replied, "Only this, my Lord,
 A speck of dust from Thy feet."

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

Know that evil things are difficult to master. Let not cravings and wickedness subject you to endless suffering.

*

There is no fire like the fire of craving, no grip like that of hatred. There is no snare like that of delusion, no torrent like desire.

It is easy to see the faults of others, but difficult to perceive our own shortcomings. We winnow the faults of others like chaff, but we hide our own like the wily gambler concealing his foul throw.

One who always criticises the faults of others and is irritated by them, far from becoming free of faults, increases his own vices.

'The Dhammapada'

(Questions and Answers 1929-31, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 262-63)

RETROSPECTION

2nd DECEMBER 2003, the Sixtieth Anniversary of our school; and one is tempted to look back on those early days which always look golden at this stage of life. But when one was passing through those stages, did they seem golden then? Those were the years that went by like lightning and those were the days of dreams. Our school was always dear in the past, it is dear presently, and it will ever remain dear in future too. Why not look back to those days and assess oneself, take stock of one's self, as they do stocktaking in Accounts, on closure of the financial year? Of course in life, where "The old sure memories are its capital stock", the accounts are never closed—it is a running account, sometimes all jumbled up, muddy, and sometimes all clear, smooth, so transparent and lighted that one can see, or if not see, at least feel the golden light in the atmosphere—a golden path ahead and the beckoning of a Divine Life on earth.

The first day was a Sunday, the school was closed. In the Play Ground, the band played during the March Past. The trumpet announced a new life: a quivering in the heart, gooseflesh on the arms, the limbs a-tremble, one is in the grip of an unknown force, caught in a luminous net. What were the commands given by the person standing in front of the mike? This was the first awakening of the heart to know. The next day in the Dining Room—curiosity. The notebooks carried by students had something printed on the cover. Trying hard to read. Impossible. "Il y a une grande beauté dans la simplicité." Not that the knowledge of English was anything remarkable, but still the word "beauté" conveyed "beauty". That struck a chord and the curiosity gave rise to an eagerness to know the meaning of the sentence. There was another prayer printed on the notebooks too. But that was too big a hurdle to be attempted: it was the Students' Prayer. But then to come back to 'BEAUTY'—that was the KEY to a newcomer. One saw, felt and breathed it everywhere. The Mother of course was the personification of beauty. One who had beheld her would not be charmed by anything else. I repeat, anything. As the centenarian poet, Nirod-da wrote:

No risen sun, no pearly aureoled moon
Can conquer my uplifted gaze
That has dwelt on the heaven of thy face
Caught into depths as in a luminous swoon.

But most of the time she was occupied with her many activities. How to behold her all the time? The samadhi solved that problem. One enters the Ashram, turns the corner and the eyes get drawn to the samadhi. Quiet, cool, clean, flowers and fragrance—a serenity pervades the courtyard. The flowers were few on the samadhi—one could glimpse the green banana leaves peering through the decoration. But that enhanced the beauty and did not in the least diminish it. The grace, the beauty, the

charm and the fragrance of those few flowers immersed one's being in a splendour supreme.

The first glimpse of the Dining Room from a distance was spellbinding. It gave the impression of a temple. From the main gate it looked like a "Durga Mandapam". One could feel the presence of Durga standing on a lion, surveying one and all. One went inside not for food but with devotion and humility to partake of the *prasadam*. Once inside, it was so quiet—one could hear only the tinkling sound of spoon and dish and bowl. Each one did his work quietly—the low dining tables had spotless white cotton tablecloths—cleanliness immaculate—beauty in the arrangement, in the serving, in the dealing with people. One could feel the Mother's presence in every nook and corner. No wonder that a visitor, a devotee, who was given the work of cleaning dishes when he came during the holidays, saw the Mother's *charan* on the water of the tub where the vessels were being cleaned. The food was simple, sometimes one got only brinjal curry or ladies' finger curry. But did that matter? One ate what was served and relished it. Any wrong thought or movement would send bad vibrations which would disturb the ethereal presence of the Mother.

The Play Ground was always vibrant with young and old gathered together to salute the Mother daily: a strange scene for a newcomer. How did the mike work so perfectly? One was well aware of mike hazards during the pujas in one's own native place. Someone would go on counting "one, two, three" umpteen times till we lost count! The mikes always made funny sounds as if they were supposed to do so. How unbelievable it appeared in the Play Ground: someone just clicked the fingers in front of the mike, it did not emanate any funny sound and it worked perfectly every day for 365 days of the year! A miracle to the teenage-mind. And one began to understand the sentence, "Not to take care of material things is a sign of inconscience." To be CONSCIOUS is another KEY to this place. One saw the Mother every day there. One heard her voice when she took classes, one could approach her when she distributed toffees or groundnuts which were given in small bags and one was expected to put the bag back in a fixed place after emptying it. DISCIPLINE—that was another KEY. But did she distribute only toffees and groundnuts? She poured in her love, her grace, her protection to each and every one of us. The opportunity to sit in meditation, with her sitting in front of the map, was, needless to say, unique. When the full moon was up and the southern breeze blew—in the quietness of the night one saw her brighter than the shining moon, and the southern breeze carried her fragrance to you and carried your being up, up to the moon and beyond, to worlds unknown. The Play Ground vibrated with aspirant souls.

During the months when the competitions were held, the results of the day and the next day's programme were announced in the Play Ground every evening after the order of "Rassemblement" for March Past was given. Oh! how one felt the urge to participate in all this. The aspiration and the urge vibrated with energy and the beams of the Light House went round and round, carrying one's aspiration and

urge all around.

One decided to stay. Yes, at that time one thought it was one's own decision. What made one choose it? No one knows—not even the person himself. One felt within oneself a bond so strong that to leave this place, to sever the bond; would be like making one's heart bleed. The Mother knew and answered one's prayer. But now, nearly fifty years later, it all looks predetermined, pre-arranged:

A wisdom read their mind to themselves unknown,
 Their anarchy rammed into a formula
 And from their giant randomness of Force,
 Following the habit of their million paths,
 Distinguishing each faintest line and stroke
 Of a concealed unalterable design,
 Out of the chaos of the Invisible's moods
 Derived the calculus of Destiny.

(Savitri [1993 ed.], pp. 269-70)

One became a student and joined the group. From 1943 to 1951 it was simply called the “Ashram School”. After the Convocation of 1951, presided over by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, it was called “Sri Aurobindo International University Centre”. The name was subsequently changed to “Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education” in 1959. One was given that notebook which attracted one so much on the day of one's arrival. What an opportunity to know the meaning of those words, “Il y a une grande beauté dans la simplicité.” But then, the annual holidays started and one missed the opportunity. PATIENCE—that is another KEY. From the moment one is accepted—the growth of one's entire being is taken over. A special class is arranged for a few students for coaching in English during the vacation. The first contact with a teacher of the Centre of Education was soothing, charming and amiable — Aster. One was put in Group E (now G)—white group—with the elderly ladies. Did it matter? And why should it? They played better, were better in gymnastics and even defeated the younger ones in running. Such an energetic and young-at-heart lot. And one had the added advantage of hearing stories from them, when the Marching went on in the Play Ground. They treated the young newcomer with love, consideration and care. But then the elderly ladies' Group was not going out for the annual picnic. They were mostly Department workers. How could they leave work and go for an outing? And one understood that WORK is the most important KEY to the Ashram life. But then a dozen of us were not even in our teens or had just stepped into our teens and other group members older than us were going. So the Mother was informed about it by our group captain, Chitra-di. All of a sudden we heard that our group, including the elderly ladies, would be going for picnic! They were to complete their work by eight in the morning and come back before noon and rejoin the work. So we

went picnicking to “Le Faucheur”—the first ever picnic of white group, in 1956. What did it matter if it was only for a few hours and we had only water and potato chips arranged by Manoranjan-da for our tiffin? Does the distance or the number of hours spent or the number of items on the menu give more enjoyment? It does not. We enjoyed every bit of it. From the year 1957 our group also went to the Lake for a full day; we did our own cooking there, we went round the lake, hungry, thirsty, tired but all smiles to have completed the round. If by chance the picnic day happened to fall on the same day as one’s birthday, one was in a fix. How could one miss going to the Mother on one’s birthday? But then, the picnic too came only once a year, and one was still a teenager, too young to miss the fun. So? Why worry? Everything is taken care of. As the mother of the house takes care of all the small problems, here too the Mother takes care. A transport had to be arranged to carry some food items to the picnic spot later that day and one got a lift! After getting the Mother’s Blessings on one’s birthday one finds the car waiting to take one to the picnic spot. She took care of every one of us, and that too in the minutest detail: the loving care and affection of the Mother!

The then group E—white group—went through many changes as the difference in age was enormous between the members. So there was “white dress with blue-collar-shirts with blue symbol” for younger and more active members and “pink-collar-shirts with pink symbol” for others. Later on, in 1961, there was a rearrangement of groups according to age and some of us went down to group C with girls of our own age group. Then, we climbed back to group E, and then to G—the “white group” of the early years. That was fun indeed. New Groups were introduced in that year and also the Captains’ Group, with uniforms of a different colour.

The Play Ground was not only a place for physical education but was also meant for entertainment. There were cinema shows, magic shows, muscle shows and dramas. The Mother watched each and every item with us. The playlets that were mostly enacted on the Mother’s birthday were written by the teachers and the participants were the students. She would sit in her chair, graceful and majestic, the performance was done in front of her. The spectators were all behind or on the sides, watching the back or the sides of the performers! Did it matter? Not at all. They enjoyed the plays, clapped and laughed and appreciated. Such was the magic of her presence. The last play she watched was on her birthday, 21st February 1962.

Before the purchase of Corner House, the afternoon tiffin was served in the Play Ground by Vishwajit-da. Each one had to wash his own vessels. And who could forget the Sunday washing of Play Ground tiffin dishes! Every Sunday those vessels used to be cleaned by some students with hot water and soap. Cleanliness and care of things being the rules of our life here.

The prizes for the annual competitions were also distributed by the Mother in the Play Ground. She distributed Bulletins too.

Christmas was all fairyland in the Play Ground. She would sit among the presents,

the Christmas tree all decorated and lighted. To each one she gave the presents, the gift unknown and the surprise, the merriment, the laughter mingling in the fairyland—even the elderly sadhaks opened their packets in all eagerness—age was pushed away, only the young spirit mattered. It was not what one got that was important but the spirit in which one received these small gifts. Another KEY to the place: not the age, but the SPIRIT, and not the material things but the spirit in which it is accepted that is more important.

The Sports Ground where the Mother would be present during the athletic competitions was a beehive of activities. Games tournaments, swimming competitions and athletics competitions were held there every year. Members of all the groups participated in these events together. This was a valuable binding force for all of us—students and Ashramites—the sense of belonging to a single family. Usha and Tara posed a tough challenge to the men as they equalled and even surpassed them in sports. The annual demonstration of the Physical Education Department on 2nd of December has always been a special occasion for the participants.

The swimming pool was constructed during our school days. On Sunday mornings we went there to polish the swimming pool floor with stones. It was a tough job, but no one would miss that opportunity to work. We felt proud of it. The pool was inaugurated by the Mother by dropping a key in the pool and a swimmer dived in and fetched it.

The Tennis Ground is another holy place for old-timers. The Mother used to play tennis everyday in the afternoon. In the early years, even sports and games used to be held there. It had no plants, no greenery at all, it was barren, sandy, washed by the blue sea and the white foam. How could anything grow on salty sand? But then, the first bloom of the “Courage” flowers and soon after of the “Progress” flowers proved that with courage, progress is possible even in arid lands. Those two are the very requisites of our life here: courage and progress in all circumstances.

Our day would start with the Balcony Darshan of the Mother early in the morning. Thereafter each one would start his or her work. Breakfast in the Dining Room, then to school from 7.45 to 11.30, home for lunch, rest and back to school for the afternoon classes, tiffin and after that proceed to Group activities in any of the grounds. After playing tennis the Mother would proceed to the Play Ground if there were no competitions in any of the other grounds. After our Group activities we would all gather in the Play Ground for March Past to salute the Mother. During the Marching for those who could not take part in regular Group activities, the Mother would be in her room in the Play Ground, where she sometimes gave interviews, while we would sit in the classroom nearby for our studies. After Marching, there would be either the class taken by the Mother or meditation. Then the activities would be over and we would go back home for dinner and sleep and be ready for the next day’s schedule. Those were the days of dreams! On 8th December 1958, the Mother’s daily activities suddenly stopped. She did not come for the daily morning Balcony

Darshan, neither did she come to the Play Ground in the evening. All the daily activities of the Ashram life went on with a feeling of emptiness. And if it happened to be your birthday, a numbness and sadness engulfed you to have missed her Blessings. Later on, the Balcony Darshan started again and she resumed her work but the Mother came out of the Ashram premises only on Darshan days and on some special occasions. On 21st February 1962, her birthday, she came to the Play Ground, took the salute of the Group members, watched the playlet performed by the students. She never came out of the Ashram premises after that. The daily early morning Balcony Darshan continued till 18th March 1962. Thereafter she retired to her 2nd floor room and did all her work from there. The Ashramites and devotees would go to her on their birthdays or on special occasions. On Darshan days she would give the Terrace Darshan from her 2nd floor terrace.

The school was a revelation in one subject from another. The new session started and at last the opportunity to know the meaning of “Il y a une grande beauté dans la simplicité”. A few days of French lessons and one gulped and savoured to one’s heart’s content the meaning of that line. “Nous n’irons plus aux bois” was the first French poem that Paru-di, our main teacher, taught us. Her soft and dulcet recitation of the poem still rings in the ears and the feeling, the love for the French language that it evoked. In the English class, the poem “Who” was another revelation. Sati-di, our English teacher, read it out in the class without any intonation, a simple reading. That was the first contact with Sri Aurobindo’s writing, and the teacher’s simple reading gave scope to the imagination. The blue heavens manifested in our minds and the greenery of the earth. Our school was unique in the sense that one could be in different standards for different subjects—depending on each one’s capacity. Hence the classrooms had to be changed after each period and one had different classmates each time. There were only two periods in the afternoons. The annual prizes were given by the Mother. In the school, the teachers were ready to give their all, to explain, provided one was interested. They were gentle but strict, and were patience personified. The bond that bound us all together, the teachers and the students, still remains as strong, even after nearly fifty years, though we seldom meet or greet each other. Each one is busy with his or her programme but occasions sometime arise and if we happen to meet, it is the old bond coming back and binding us still more strongly. That is indeed amazing. Age is never able to catch up with our spirit. That is the KEY to our education here—THE SPIRIT. Not to be bound by the material aspect, but to go beyond or behind and find the spirit.

But those rosy days came to an end with a bang when the quarterly tests were introduced. For one who, it seems, stayed on here to avoid the exams of the outside world, it was a nightmare. Just when one reached class six, the quarterly tests were introduced (from that year 1959) from class six onwards. Three-hour tests for each subject, with no holidays in between for preparation. Oh! the agony, and also the ecstasy after the exams were over! Later on, of course, the New System was introduced

from the class one year junior to us; for them, no class tests let alone quarterly tests. Our class went through all these tests till the end of the Higher Course. All of eight years of agony and ecstasy. The last exam was for philosophy and we crossed the educational field uttering the philosophical expression, “liberated souls”, passing out. That was 1966. The tests stopped after 1967. To think of it now, that training of retaining the concentration for three hours, was indeed a necessary part, a preparation for the work given by the Mother later. A most desirable and indispensable training.

The Saturday programmes were introduced in our school days by Amita-di, to give us an opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities like plays, speeches, dance, etc. so that we could develop into more complete human beings. Soon followed the year-end programmes. Each class put up its own programme, or some classes came together for the performance. Prizes were distributed based on the subject and the performance. That was fun indeed and each class tried to present something that would be of a high standard. Humour there was, but no vulgarity—that was unthinkable in those days.

Our school had a very unique feature in those early years. TRUST. Every month a peon would visit all the classes carrying a tray full of items—like pens, pencils etc. lost by students during the previous month. The tray would be shown to each student and if one happened to locate one’s lost item, one simply picked it up from the tray. The peon then would carry the tray to other students. What a beautiful way to teach us honesty and integrity!

The school had its annual holiday from 1st November to 9th December in the early days. Later it was extended to 15th December. But we used to wait eagerly for the 1st of every month which was a holiday. That day, in the afternoon we would go to the Mother in the Prosperity room to receive her Blessings. Often we got “New Birth”. The Ashramites would be given their monthly requirements of soap and other essential needs. We also waited eagerly for the Darshan days which were holidays. A few days before the Darshan, the Mother would come to the Meditation Hall downstairs to distribute saris and dresses to the Ashramites, students and the visitors. That would set us in the Darshan mood at once—a joy unknown, an expectation indiscernible, a vibration ethereal. The day would start with the Balcony Darshan like every day, and there would be meditation at 10 in the morning; but children below the age of 14 were made to sit near the Prosperity garden and not come close to the filter area at all. After the meditation we would be taken in a line to get the messages from the Mother. In the evenings there would be March Past and meditation in front of the Mother, unless there was some other programme. The green group children would be made to sit in the Guest House. We waited eagerly for the Puja days too, those being taken by the students as a holiday. The Mother would come down for distribution. The school children were given the third period off. The general queue for distribution would stop and we would be taken in a line to the Mother for distribution. We felt proud, being treated as VIPs. The inmates would look at us from

the general queue and murmur—we have to wait, these are students! Some elderly ones would surely have wished to be born as students of our school in their next birth! We were a proud lot and a pampered lot too. And who would feel like studying in the fourth period? We asked our teachers to tell us stories. Oh! How we waited for the Durga Puja and Laxmi Puja as they approached and then we could have a long story which would continue for three days.

Though pampered we were, we had our share of scolding too. Once, some students of a class got together and wrote to the Mother asking for a Maths teacher of their choice for the next year's class, instead of the regular strict teacher. The new session started and the Maths class was taken by the strict teacher. A few days later the Mother informed the students through Pavitra-da that if they wanted to continue studying Maths, it would have to be with the regular teacher, otherwise they could leave the subject. And she passed on the letter written by the students to that very teacher! It taught us that OBEDIENCE is another KEY to this place. Years later we realised how important it was to have a teacher who kept us under strict discipline. We learnt that strictness is not a punishment but a blessing.

The annual cultural programme of our school on 1st December was held in the Theatre from 1956 instead of in the Play Ground. The Mother herself directed the plays and watched them enacted on 1st December. Her 80th Birth Anniversary in 1958 was also celebrated in the Theatre for three days, with March Past being held in the Theatre. There were programmes and other cultural activities. There were also sweets in beautifully decorated boxes—these were distributed, and the food was prepared in Parc-à-Charbon under Manorajan-da's supervision. All the elderly persons went there to help in the preparation. It was as if the whole Ashram had shifted to the Theatre.

29th February 1960 was the first leap-year day after the one in 1956, the day of the manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness in the subtle physical. The Meditation Hall, where the Mother distributed gold-coated symbols in the afternoon, was deco-rated with golden satin curtains and the lights on the ceiling spread a golden hue. We were engulfed in a golden aura and felt timorous. At night the coloured lamps on the Service tree, the magical charm, the fairyland-like feeling, the unexpectedness of it all, made our hearts leap beyond to worlds unknown.

The anti-Hindi agitation of 1965 was a blow to our peaceful life. There was an agitation which turned violent. All the Ashramites, from every nook and corner of the city, were brought to the Ashram main building or the school or the Play Ground. Practically all the activities came to a standstill. Only the Dining Room worked on, providing food for everyone three times a day. Some of us slept in the Ashram main building. But the early morning activities of decorating the Samadhi disturbed our sleep. But why worry. Rina and Sunita looked for a cosy corner and found one. The Meditation Hall was cosy, less noisy, dark and cool. So they slept all through the night and a big portion of the morning too—no school, no hurry for breakfast either. Some Ashramites who wanted to meditate, complained to Nolini-da about it. His

stern reply was, “Let them sleep, don’t disturb them.” Thus were we treated with sympathy and affection by our elders. Soon order was established and we went back to our regular activities.

Those sunny days came to an end very quickly, it seems now. The “liberated souls” crossed the threshold of the school; from the “mental” world, we stepped into the “Depart-Mental” world. We were given work in the various Ashram Departments, some rejoined the school as teachers.

The school’s 60th anniversary and years of Departmental work—that was the occasion for this retrospection. But for what? Just to assess one’s own self. Was it retirement age? But there is no retirement here. Can there be any retirement from self-development or inner growth? Or for that matter, is there an end to study? We are still students and will ever remain students, till the last day. The quotation on the note book “Il y a une grande beauté dans la simplicité” has long since receded somewhere into the background. The students’ prayer, “Make of us the hero warriors” is the need of the hour. The fight with one’s nature, the fight for the new things to manifest, this is still the motto. Whenever one faces a difficulty, one uses the keys discovered on the way and there open in front new paths and vistas. In the last prayer recited by the students to the Mother in the Play Ground, the Mother says:

*Sincérité! Sincérité! voici Ma force toute puissante.
Sincérité! Sincérité! voici Ma joie la plus pure.
Sincérité! Sincérité! voici Ma Victoire Certaine.*

That is the primary and most essential key—SINCERITY.
It opens the Golden Door.

This then is the Balance Sheet of the beginning of the life here, with its many liabilities—the shortcomings of one’s nature—and also its one valuable asset—the aspiration for this life. What does the Balance Sheet look like now? But Lo! What a surprise! It shows not the past achievements or failures at all. No reflection of income or deficit! It shows a march forward towards the light—more light and self discovery. It shows glimpses of bright avenues, the sunlit path.

Should not the title be changed to “Marcher En Avant”, instead of “Retrospection”!

AN X-STUDENT

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON died on August 3, 2004, at his home in Paris, France. He was 95 years old. Widely respected as one of the founding fathers of photojournalism and a pioneer in the art of photography, his pictures are admired for their spontaneity and mastery of form. A painter both at the beginning and end of his career, Cartier-Bresson took up photography in 1930 and went on to shoot some of the most memorable photos of the 20th century.

Cartier-Bresson always said his aim was to capture “the decisive moment”, that is, the essence of a situation or event that was unfolding before his eyes. Using a small hand-held Leica camera, and as little artificial light as possible, for four decades he roamed the globe catching human beings in the midst of action. From historic events, such as the funeral of Mahatma Gandhi and the rise of China’s Mao Zedong, to the smaller moments of workers relaxing or a family picnicking by the river Marne, he had a knack for being in the right place at the right time, and seizing the spirit of the moment.¹

There was certainly a yogic element to Cartier-Bresson’s art. He loved perfection, and his quest as a photographer was to glimpse eternity in the fleeting instant. Inspired by the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, he once said that his photographic method was to use his open eye to look through the viewfinder upon the outer scene, while with his other, closed eye he looked within.² It was, perhaps, this inward gaze that caught the Mother’s attention and led her to grant him permission to photograph the Ashram in 1950.

When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry on April 23, in time for Darshan on the 24th, he was in the midst of an extraordinary series of events. He had just come from Tiruvannamalai, where he had photographed Sri Ramana Maharshi leaving his body, and borne witness to the fireball that streaked slowly over Arunachala at 8.47 p.m., the exact minute of the sage’s absorption into the Self. On the 24th, Cartier-Bresson was to obtain the only photographs ever made of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo together at Darshan, and on the 25th he was destined to shoot the last living photograph of Sri Aurobindo, thus completing a remarkable trinity of final statements—Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo.

By what Grace or hidden design the Divine chose Cartier-Bresson to record India’s three greatest leaders/spiritual figures of the 20th century as they stood on the threshold of life and death, we can only speculate. But clearly the phenomenon has a profound inner meaning. When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry in April 1950, Sri Aurobindo had been in retirement for over 20 years, and had repeatedly declined requests to be photographed. In retrospect, we also know that Sri Aurobindo had already decided to leave the body, and was deeply engaged in two Herculean tasks: completing *Savitri*, and preparing for the first *fully conscious* descent into Death in the history of life.³ In a very real sense then, Sri Aurobindo was poised on

the edge of his own decisive moment.

Initially, the Mother only gave Cartier-Bresson permission to photograph the premises of the Ashram, as well as ashramites engaged in their usual activities. However, soon she allowed him to take shots with the Mother in the background, and as the trust grew, the Mother even let Cartier-Bresson take portraits of herself. Cartier-Bresson's diary shows that he felt the Mother's sweetness and kindness, and his photos of her distributing flowers certainly express this quality.⁴

Yet the greatest photos were still to come. On the morning of April 25, 1950, the day after Darshan, Cartier-Bresson went to thank the Mother for the favours granted, and to ask for one more—permission to photograph Sri Aurobindo in his private quarters. According to Cartier-Bresson, he finally persuaded her with the statement, "I am only photographing the female aspect of the Divine. What about the male aspect?" In any case, the Mother consulted with Sri Aurobindo and—surprisingly—consent was given.⁵

From the mechanical perspective, the session was quick and quiet. Cartier-Bresson took about 10 minutes, during which time Sri Aurobindo impressed the photographer with his complete immobility. In his diary from the time, Cartier-Bresson wrote, "The room was so neat and tidy and impersonal. Sri Aurobindo did not wink an eye during the entire ten minutes I was watching him, he did not seem to belong to that impersonal setting." During an interview in Paris, 40 years later to the day (25 April 1990), Cartier-Bresson recollected thus: "My impressions of the Mother—a power woman. Sri Aurobindo was very remote. I had 'a tremendous meditation' far away."⁶

From the spiritual perspective, on the other hand, Cartier-Bresson's portraits of Sri Aurobindo sitting in his armchair are among the most substantial documents in human history. The side shots, in which Sri Aurobindo's face is less prominent, are unproblematic, so we shall review these quickly. What one sees in these photos is a meditating sage who seems to have materialised on the film from the future. Sri Aurobindo barely appears to belong to this time and place: in the inner eye, one sees him as a bolt of frozen lightning on the verge of striking, or perhaps striking so continuously that one can no longer distinguish rest and motion; outwardly, it seems as if the chair itself is about to launch forward and fly. Time has ceased, and the Timeless is radiating out of Sri Aurobindo's figure with diamond intensity....

However, the frontal compositions are more perplexing, especially the head-on portrait, so we shall dwell on it further. The first and most obvious feature of Sri Aurobindo's last portrait is that he is not smiling. Also, he gives no revealing gesture or motion of note, and the composition seems rather static. There is nothing here to suggest transcendent bliss, not even that distantly tender smile from the Beyond that Welling captured in his famous bust of Sri Ramana Maharshi, shot only a few years earlier.⁷ On the surface, at least, Sri Aurobindo seems almost the antithesis of the *jivanmukta* that he was: his face is lined, his expression serious, and the atmosphere

grave. This is not the delightful face of Krishna, rather the physiognomy of a warrior who has marched a thousand miles on foot and has yet, to borrow Frost's famous line, miles to go before he sleeps. Even the Mother later commented that she was surprised by Sri Aurobindo's look, for it was not the ever-patient and sweet visage she had come to know and love. "He... he let go..." she said poignantly.⁸

And yet, I feel, there is a deeper message and a divine purpose behind Sri Aurobindo's solemnity, and artistically the inner dynamism of this photo is only accentuated by the composition's seemingly static weight. For what we do see in Sri Aurobindo's bare, frank look is the face of the supramental Avatar preparing to confront Death, to plunge into the very heart of Darkness and sow there the first seeds of the Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo looks grave here because the moment literally is *grave*. Make no mistake, this is no light *lila* of a God who does not feel the pain of human clay, it is the full conscious surrender of the Godhead who has *become* the death-bound suffering that we are. Truly, this last photograph of Sri Aurobindo is the modern expression of Christ on the Cross, only the passion is inner not outer, and the Lord is dying in order to secure for us life everlasting *on earth*, not in some hereafter.

Speaking for myself, I feel that Sri Aurobindo's last portrait has a unique power of spiritual healing. It is not an easy photograph to live with, granted, and during my lighter moods and in the midst of my quotidian concerns I cannot bear to contemplate it deeply, for it is a profoundly serious testament. But when I am down, when I am feeling defeated, when I have reached the utmost limit of my endurance, then this photograph comes to me. Especially it speaks to me in my absolutely darkest passages, during those dire and decisive inner moments when it feels my very soul is on the verge of relinquishing the battle because the world's burden is too great, and my own failings even greater.

When I look at Sri Aurobindo's last portrait in such times of critical need, then suddenly he looks different: I see that his face is my face, is every human face, is the Divine who has taken birth on earthly soil. I feel that his fatigue is my fatigue, is all human fatigue, is the Divine who has assumed the burden of human toil. I look into Sri Aurobindo's left eye, and am taken in by the soft, receptive compassion of the divine Friend who understands my pains and errors because he shares them, whose sympathy is boundless because he walks right at my side and knows intimately every rock and pitfall on the Path. I look into his right eye, and am met by the steady gaze of Wisdom that looks dispassionately upon the labour of ages and fills me with a calm knowledge that the final fruits of evolution are as certain as the failures of the moment now seem. I look again upon the lined visage of the great Warrior who has fought so much, endured so much, and a new resolve enters my soul. I think, "Well, since He has borne so much for me, I must give something small in return. I will go one more step forward on the path—in honour of Him." And so my heart warms again, and my will returns. I feel the arm of the great Protector around me, and the grim predator of darkness that was stalking my soul recedes, banished by a diamond

Light that shines out from behind one human face.

This, for me, is the significance of Cartier-Bresson's final portrait of Sri Aurobindo. It extends to struggling mortals the helping hand of an Avatar who otherwise might have remained forever impersonal and distant to us. For though *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* bring us glowing intimations from a brighter future, the weaker parts of us needed something else, too—this visual reminder that the supramental Avatar was also *human like us*. He is not only above and beyond us, He is also with and inside us, feeling our feelings, fighting our battles, facing the same mortality we face. Evidently, Sri Aurobindo knew exactly what he was getting in Cartier-Bresson, and he decided the French photographer was the right instrument to convey the Avatar's parting gift to a suffering humanity—a gift made all the greater by its very humanity.

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I always saw him with a perfectly peaceful and smiling face, and above all, the dominant expression was compassion. That was what predominated in his appearance. An expression of compassion so... so peaceful, so tranquil, oh, magnificent.

The Mother