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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE INDWELLING UNIVERSAL

[Sri Aurobindo's *Last Poems*, p. 2; first published in August 1952]

The Indwelling Universal

I have shaped the whole world on my soul's embrace:
In me Prometheus and Belphegor burn.
In the whatever being form I turn
I see my own body with another face.

All eyes that look on me are my soul's eyes;
The one heart that beats within all breasts is mine.
The world's happiness flows through me like wine,
My nation's sorrows are my agonies.

Yet all its acts are only forms that pass
Upon my surface; I am for ever still,
Whom I do, thinkers, intangibles;
All things are shadows in my tranquil glass.
My vast transcendence holds the cosmic wheel;
I am hid in it as in the sea a pearl.

1938 July

(Transcription overleaf)

THE INDWELLING UNIVERSAL

I contain the whole world in my soul's embrace:
 In me Arcturus and Belphegor burn.
 To whatsoever living form I turn
I see my own body with another face.

All eyes that look on me are my sole eyes;
 The one heart that beats within all breasts is mine.
 The world's happiness flows through me like wine,
Its million sorrows are my agonies.

Yet all its acts are only waves that pass
 Upon my surface; inly for ever still,
 Unborn I sit, timeless, intangible:
All things are shadows in my tranquil glass.

My vast transcendence holds the cosmic whirl;
I am hid in it as in the sea a pearl.

1938 July

THE HOUR OF GOD

THERE are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty.

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force or misuse the moment; for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction.

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Hour of God, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 1)

...When one has the real thing in oneself, one goes through and finally takes the full way of sadhana, but it is only a minority that does so. It is better to receive only people who come of themselves and of these only those in whom the call is genuinely their own and persistent.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1616)

BANDE MATARAM

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

WHEN things violent or fearful take place let no one be alarmed or discouraged—they also are “His goings forth”. That there will be only the piping time of peace and we shall sing of the cuckoo and the spring is expecting something unnatural. An individual or a nation cannot rise to its full height except through trouble and stress. The stone block patiently submits to hammering, cutting and chiselling to be made into the statue which pleases the eye and gladdens the soul. If it could feel, it certainly would say, “How dearly I have to pay for the beautiful transformation.” This is the inexorable law of nature. Nature has not yet been known to relent in this respect. If you want to get anything grand and beautiful out of her, you must go through the process through which a piece of stone passes before it is endowed with shape, beauty and meaning. The fertilising river rolls down stones, breaks through the impediments, rends asunder the surface of the earth before it bears on its bosom the argosies and crowns the bordering lands with plenty. Those who cannot look this sternness of nature in the face are not destined for things good, noble and high. If you want to grovel in the dust, indolence, ease and ignoble peace may do, but if climbing up the heights of glory is your ambition learn to encounter difficulties and dangers manfully. This is apt to be ignored and ridiculed as a copybook maxim. But it bears repetition times without number and when either an individual or a nation sets about anything earnestly it should start fully impressed with the truth of this copybook commonplace. The truth cannot be confirmed enough and thus the threats of the Anglo-Indian Press have hardly any terror for us.

Calcutta, April 8th, 1907

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, Vol. 1, p. 241)

You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana—progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, Part 4, p. 1632)

CALL TO RETURN TO INDIAN POLITICS

[About ten years after Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the Indian political scene and settled in Pondicherry, a prominent nationalist leader, Joseph Baptista, wrote to him appealing to him to come back to British India and to resume leadership of Indian politics.

He requested Sri Aurobindo to return to British India to take up the editorship of an English daily paper which was proposed to be brought out from Bombay as the organ of a new political party which Tilak and others were intending to form at that time.

Sri Aurobindo's reply to this appeal is reproduced here.]

Pondicherry
Jan. 5, 1920

Dear Baptista,

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and cooperation. I do not suppose other Governments would be any more delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain since, as I read it, it does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary Government guest. But even if I were assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquillity for a fixed object having nothing to do with present politics—in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done,—and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next in the matter of the work itself, I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great. But my line and intention of

political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms, the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of the times,—some might say, out of time altogether into the world of the ideal. Your party, you say, is going to be a social democratic party. Now I believe in something which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind. No doubt people talk of India developing on her own lines, but nobody seems to have very clear or sufficient ideas as to what those lines are to be. In this matter I have formed ideals and certain definite ideas of my own, in which at present very few are likely to follow me,—since they are governed by an uncompromising spiritual idealism of an unconventional kind and would be unintelligible to many and an offence and stumbling-block to a great number. But I have not as yet any clear and full idea of the practical lines; I have no formed programme. In a word, I am feeling my way in my mind and am not ready for either propaganda or action. Even if I were, it would mean for some time ploughing my lonely furrow or at least freedom to take my own way. As the editor of your paper, I should be bound to voice the opinion of others and reserve my own, and while I have full sympathy with the general ideas of the advanced parties so far as concerns the action of the present moment and, if I were in the field, would do all I could to help them, I am almost incapable by nature of limiting myself in that way, at least to the extent that would be requisite.

Excuse the length of this screed. I thought it necessary to explain fully so as to avoid giving you the impression that I declined your request from any affectation or reality of spiritual aloofness or wish to shirk the call of the country or want of sympathy with the work you and others are so admirably doing. I repeat my regret that I am compelled to disappoint you.

Yours sincerely,
AUROBINDO GHOSE

(*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, pp. 429-31)

A PRAYER

January 1, 1914

TO THEE, supreme Dispenser of all boons, to Thee who givest life its justification, by making it pure, beautiful and good, to Thee, Master of our destinies and goal of all our aspirations, was consecrated the first minute of this new year.

May it be completely glorified by this consecration; may those who hope for Thee, seek Thee in the right path; may those who seek Thee find Thee, and those who suffer, not knowing where the remedy lies, feel Thy life gradually piercing the hard crust of their obscure consciousness.

I bow down in deep devotion and in boundless gratitude before Thy beneficent splendour; in the name of the earth I give Thee thanks for manifesting Thyself; in its name I implore Thee to manifest Thyself ever more fully, in an uninterrupted growth of Light and Love.

Be the sovereign Master of our thoughts, our feelings, our actions.

Thou art our reality, the only Reality.

Without Thee all is falsehood and illusion, all is dismal obscurity.

In Thee are life and light and joy.

In Thee is supreme Peace.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 43)

...Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much so that it is simply impossible for you to do without it? Do you feel that your very *raison d'être* is the Divine and without it there is no meaning in your existence? If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path.

This is the first thing necessary—aspiration for the Divine.

The Mother

(Conversations with the Mother, CWM, Vol. 3, p. 1)

TALK OF 1 JANUARY 1958

*O Nature, material Mother,
Thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate
and there is no limit
to the splendour of this collaboration.*

New Year Message, 1 January 1958

Sweet Mother, will you explain the message for this year?

It is already written! The explanation has already been written, it is ready for the *Bulletin* of February 21.¹

There is nothing to explain. It is an experience, something that happened, and when it happened I noted it down, and as it turned out, it occurred just at the moment when I remembered that I had to write something for the year—which was next year at that time, that is, the year which begins today. When I remembered that I had to write something—not because of that, but simultaneously—this experience came, and when I noted it down, I realised that it was... it was the message for this year!

(Silence)

I will tell you only one thing: you should not misinterpret the meaning of this experience and imagine that from now on everything is going to take place without any difficulties and always in a manner that favours our personal desires. It is not on this plane. It does not mean that when we do not want it to rain, it will not rain! that when we want something to happen in the world, it will happen immediately; that all difficulties will be done away with and everything will be as it is in fairy-tales. It is not that. It is something much deeper: Nature, in her play of forces, has accepted the new Force which has manifested and included it in her movements. And as always, the movements of Nature are on a scale which is infinitely beyond the human scale and not visible to an ordinary human consciousness. It is an inner, psychological possibility which has come into the world rather than a spectacular change in earthly events.

I am saying this because you might be tempted to believe that fairy-tales were going to be realised on earth. It is not yet time for that.

(Silence)

One must have much patience and a very wide and very complex vision to understand how things happen.

(Silence)

1. The text of this explanation is given in an appendix to this talk.

The miracles which take place are not what could be called story-book miracles, in the sense that they don't happen as in stories. They are visible only to a very deep vision of things—very deep, very comprehensive, very vast.

(Silence)

One must already be capable of following the methods and ways of the Grace in order to recognise its action. One must already be capable of not being blinded by appearances in order to see the deeper truth of things.

We could usefully, this evening, just take this resolution: to try throughout the year to do our best, so that the time may not pass in vain.

Appendix

Explanation of the New Year Message of 1 January 1958

In the course of one of our classes² I spoke of the limitless abundance of Nature, the inexhaustible creatrix who takes the multitude of forms and mixes them together, separates them again and remoulds them, unmakes and destroys them, to move on to ever new combinations. It is a huge cauldron, I said: she stirs things inside and brings out something; it's no good, she throws it in again and takes something else.... One or two forms or a hundred have no importance for her, there are thousands and thousands of forms, and then as for years, a hundred years, a thousand, millions of years, it is of no importance, you have eternity before you! It is quite obvious that Nature enjoys all this and that she is not in a hurry. If she is told to rush rapidly through and finish this or that part of her work quickly, the reply is always the same: "But why should I do so, why? Doesn't it amuse you?"

The evening I told you about these things, I identified myself totally with Nature, I joined in her game. And this movement of identification provoked a response, a sort of new intimacy between Nature and myself, a long movement of a growing closeness which culminated in an experience which came on the eighth of November.

Suddenly Nature understood. She understood that this new Consciousness which has just been born does not seek to reject her but wants to embrace her entirely, she understood that this new spirituality does not turn away from life, does not recoil in fear before the formidable amplitude of her movement, but wants on the contrary to integrate all its facets. She understood that the supramental consciousness is here not to diminish but to complete her.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers, CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 245-48)

2. 30 October 1957.

FIRST GLIMPSE

SPLENDOUR in the penury of night;
All this everlastingness of light;
A dole of leaven hid within the meal;
The vivid disarray that woodlands feel
As trim dead Winter steals away
On the first warm springful day.
All outward heaviness of Death
Made nought by one sweet cowslip's breath,—
Though love be the glint of a cowslip-flame
That on the heels of winter came,
No time can from these ears drive out
Its golden-clamoured fairy shout,
No swathing custom reave these eyes
Of that sun-miracled surprise
When on an elfin ridge of earth
They saw Love's fire-bloom spring to birth.

May 24, 1935

ARJAVA

Questions by Arjava and Sri Aurobindo's answers:

Arjava: I am afraid this is lacking in unity—not only in the non-uniformity of metre. And the rhythm does not seem to be handled very well,—e.g. “Made nought by one sweet cowslip's breath”. I feel as if the theme had been imperfectly mastered and there is some uncertainty in the handling.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't find any lack of unity or uncertainty in handling. Perhaps what you mean is that there is not the clear building or structure of thought which there had been latterly in your poems; but there is another kind of development more subtle if less explicit and in its kind, which is a very beautiful one—a series of suggestive images culminating in one which is chosen to develop the theme—it seems to me a great success. There is a great beauty in the poem throughout.

Arjava: In the last line but one is it not a mistake to have “sun-lit” after “sun-miracled” of the line before?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, that I think might be altered. It is a little difficult, for one cannot touch the “sun-miracled surprise”, while “sunlit” is obviously the right epithet for the “ridge”; but perhaps something as good can be found for the “sun-lit ridge”.

The rhythm does not seem to me to be at fault—the line you speak of is a little slow and perhaps at one place difficult in its stepping; but it is too good in its language and feeling to change.

THE MOTHER

SOME GENERAL TRUTHS AND PERSONAL FACTS*

THE One whom we call the Supreme is the utter Unmanifest. The creative Conscious Force of the Supreme is the Divine Mother in Her transcendent poise, *Aditi*, holding the Truths that have to be manifested out of the absolute Mystery. Through the transcendent Mother and by Her creativity the whole universe has taken birth. And when the Supreme manifests in the world His own personal being, He does it also through Her transcendence. In Her universal aspect She is *Mahāśakti*. All the Gods and Goddesses are of Her making—they are but powers that express Her.

There are many powers of the universal Mother which are not yet made manifest to us, and many universes too which are still in the Unmanifest and which the Divine Mother can create. What has been created is just one system of possibilities out of the innumerable that She and the Supreme can realise.

Time and again this Divine Creatrix takes a direct hand in the workings of the world. Through individual forms She manifests some ray of Herself: being Supernature, the truth of all that Nature here strives to express, She makes one aspect or another of Her light descend in all the ages of history and, when the hour is ripe, even a full individual embodiment can come forth.

It is such an embodiment, amidst a world of human beings, that Sri Aurobindo set before us when, on November 24, 1926, he charged with the care of his Ashram the radiant personality whom he called the Mother and into whose shaping hands he asked us to put ourselves as children.

For forty-seven years she played her mighty part to perfection. Now she is no more in her body: she passed away on November 17, 1973. And her ninety-sixth birthday falls on February 21 this year without her bodily presence. But no! we should only say “bodily existence”. For, if ever there was a bodily presence which could never be effaced, it was the Mother’s. Timeless was she not only in her inmost being but also in all the expressions of it in her outermost activity. During the last few years she was not up and about in the same way as before, but we must remember what she said to some disciples gathered in her room on April 2, 1972: “The body has some difficulty, so I can’t be active, alas. It is not because I am old—I am not old... I am younger than most of you. If I am here inactive, it is because the body has given itself definitively to prepare the transformation. But the consciousness is clear and we are here to work—rest and enjoyment will come afterwards. Let us do our work here.” That is the typical Mother. And even in her last days, when her body had become exceedingly weak, she would say: “Make me walk.” As late as November 14 she made her attendants lift her out of her bed. She tried to walk but staggered and almost collapsed. She took about 20 minutes to recover. But the moment she felt better she started saying: “Lift me up again, I shall walk.” The constant urge

*Reprinted from *Mother India*, February 21, 1974.

towards activity of such an indomitable spirit could not help rendering her bodily presence a perennial part of our awareness. Naturally, therefore, she is in our memory most as we knew her before an acute form was taken by the difficulties of the body which she attributed to the exacting incalculable experiment of what she and Sri Aurobindo called “supra-mentalisation”—that is, the total “divinisation” of the physical being.

Right up to her ninety-third year the Mother was visibly true to her role of Divine Shakti on earth, but her best manifestation as the Ageless One was round about her eightieth year. For, contrary to expectation, it would have been the extreme of ineptitude to say on her eightieth birthday that she was eighty years old. Few of her disciples were up in the morning as early as she, few turned to repose as late. And it was hardly four or five years before this time that she used to be on her feet, without a moment’s respite, from five in the morning to nearly two in the afternoon—meeting people, ministering to their spiritual needs, considering their physical requirements, attending to the reports of numerous departments, giving flowers charged with the soul’s secrets, making those secrets breathe out more sweetly with that flower of flowers, her smile. In the evening again, from four she would be active, with a little recreation by way of tennis for an hour and then with a large amount of re-creation of lost joy or clouded light in the thousand disciples who would move past her for a couple of hours to receive from her hands a nut or a sweet through which their very bodies could absorb grace. Even after eighty, her manifold activity was of one young, and at the day’s end there was none who left the Ashram Playground with a fresher face and a brisker step.

Watching her, day after day, we realised that more than mere words were what she had once spoken on old age. She had said, in effect: “The coming of old age is due to two suggestions. First, the general collective suggestion—people telling you that you are getting old and can’t do one thing or another. There is also the individual suggestion which keeps repeating, ‘I am getting old, I mustn’t attempt this or that.’ The truth is quite different. Before thirty, the energy goes out in a spendthrift way because of the play of impulses. After thirty, there is a settling down and one is expected to have a plenitude of energy. At fifty, blossoming begins. At eighty, one becomes capable of full production.”

Marvellously full indeed has been the Mother’s productiveness, for it is rich with the power of a consciousness more than human. Even at the age of five she was aware that she did not belong to this world, that she did not have a merely human consciousness. Her Yoga may be said to have begun in that early period. Her parents had a small chair, with a little back, made for her—she would sit in it and meditate. She used to see a column of light above her head. As her brain was yet a child’s and therefore insufficiently developed, she could not make out what it was, however much she tried. But the general sense of a high and vast mission accompanied always that experience.

Neither of her parents knew anything about this or who she was. And she did not tell them anything. On rare occasions, at a little later period, she tried to give some hint, but they failed to understand; nor, if they had caught its meaning, would they have believed her. Her mother was a positivist and materialist, in keeping with the tendency of those days, and wanted her and her brother to be ideal children according to her own notions.

As for her father, he did not care one way or the other: he was a businessman.

All during her girlhood she was conscious of a more than human force behind her and often entering her body and working there in a supernormal way. This force she knew to be her own secret being. A few instances of its working may be given. She was about seven. There was a boy of nearly thirteen, a bully who always used to mock at girls, saying that they were good for nothing. One day she asked him, "Will you shut up?" He kept mocking. Suddenly she took hold of him, lifted him up from the ground and threw him down with a thump though she was so much smaller than he. The force that had come down into her and made her tremendously strong was recognised by her later in life as Mahakali.

Another instance. She had gone to play in a forest near Fontainebleau. She was climbing a steep hill, when her foot slipped and she began to fall down. The road below was strewn with sharp black stones. As she was falling, she felt somebody supporting her in a lap, as it were, and slowly bringing her down. When she reached the ground she was standing safely on her two feet, to the glad astonishment of all her companions.

In her sixteenth year she joined a Studio to learn painting. It was one of the biggest studios in Paris. She happened to be the youngest there. All the other people used to talk and quarrel among themselves, but she never took part in these things—she was always grave and busy with her work. They called her the Sphinx. Whenever they had any trouble or wrangle, they would come to her to settle their affairs. She could read their thoughts and, as she replied more often to their thoughts than to their words, they felt very uncomfortable. She would also make her decisions without the least fear, even if the authorities were concerned. Once a girl who had been appointed monitress of the Studio got into the bad books of the elderly lady who was the Head of the place. This lady wanted to send away the monitress. So the Sphinx was sought out by the young for help. She felt sympathy for the girl, knowing how poor she was and that if she left the place it would be the end of her painting career. The Head of the Studio had now to confront a determined little champion. Sensible pleading was first tried, but when it fell on deaf ears the champion took another line. With a bit of anger she caught the elderly woman's hand and held it in a firm grip as if the very bones would be crushed. It was soon agreed that the monitress would be allowed to stay on. Mahakali had been at work again.

The Sphinx of the Studio was also the same serious self at home. She rarely smiled or laughed. And for this, once when she was about twenty, she got a scolding from her mother. She simply replied that she had to bear all the sorrows of the world. Her mother thought she had gone crazy. On another occasion she was scolded by her for not listening to what she had been ordered to do. Then she answered that no earthly power could command her obedience.

We must not imagine that the Sphinx was morose or rebellious in general. She had enough of true joy and consideration. She was just weighted with the secret of the great work she had to do, and she could let nothing out of tune with it shape her actions.

Before this time, she had already arrived at a fairly precise idea of her mission. Between the ages of eleven and twelve, a series of psychic and spiritual experiences

revealed to her not only the existence of God but man's possibility of uniting with Him, of realising Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine. And during her body's sleep occult instructions were given to her by several teachers, some of whom she met afterwards on the physical plane. Later on, as the inner and outer development proceeded, a psychic and spiritual relation with one of these beings became more and more clear and frequent and, although she knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time, she was led to call him Krishna and henceforth she was aware that it was with him, whom she knew she would meet some day, that the divine work was to be done.

A number of years she spent in Algeria, learning the higher occultism from a Polish adept, Théon by name, and his still more profoundly experienced English wife. Under them she would put her physical body into a trance and awake progressively in her subtle sheaths: putting to sleep the subtle sheath next to the physical, she would grow aware in the one on a deeper level: she thus climbed the whole grade of what occultists have charted out as supraphysical planes, and became acquainted with their laws and powers and operations, so that she might place all available means at the disposal of her spiritual ideal. On more than one occasion, so complete was her withdrawal from the body that the latter lay in a condition of temporary death. But the release, which could have absorbed her in the Divine Existence for good and plunged the embodied being into its Supreme Origin, was refused by her. She saw the world in its long travail and returned to the body by sheer force, a painful process when the connecting link between the subtle and the gross has been snapped.

In 1910 she came to hear of Sri Aurobindo who had settled in Pondicherry a year earlier. From then onwards her one desire was to visit India, the land which she had always cherished as her true mother country. And in 1914 the joy of seeing India was granted her—and the very heart of that joy was the meeting with Sri Aurobindo. But even before she caught sight of him she knew the touch of his presence at Pondicherry. For, as she drew closer to the town, she had the occult experience of a great light shining from some centre in it. In the town itself, she was more intensely aware of the light. Soon she was face to face with its centre. And when she saw Sri Aurobindo she recognised the original of her visionary sketch. This was enough to convince her fully that her place and her work were near him in India.

Here we may remark that the whole truth about her choice to reside in India is not told when we have noted this meeting with Sri Aurobindo. The whole truth is compassed only when we realise why Sri Aurobindo himself, who had a wide Western education in England and wrote creatively in English and could have easily made his mark in Europe in whose culture he had been steeped, took India for his field, not only politically but also culturally and spiritually, assimilated the whole genius of this country and made it the central fount of his own future. India holds within her a supreme potentiality of spiritual response and development because of an extraordinary history of soul-culture: a vibrant psychological atmosphere is there, breathing life and vigour into all formations of the soul and rendering possible new evolutions of the Spirit's power. That is why Sri Aurobindo

came an Indian and went to the West to bring the West to India for a novel world-wide synthesis of spiritual aspiration; that is also why the Mother came a Westerner but with the eternal Indian within her, the born God-seeker and God-realiser, and joined forces with Sri Aurobindo to complete by her Indianised West his Westernised India, so that all mankind might grow to supermanhood with secret sustenance drawn from the soil where the wonderful seed of Avatarhood had often been sown.

The Mother saw the all-consummating Avatar in Sri Aurobindo, and Sri Aurobindo saw in her the Shakti that would make his Yoga an organised starting-point of a new chapter of earth's history. In the meeting on March 29, 1914, the true relationship between her and him, which she later expressed in a pithy sentence, must have flashed into awareness: "Without him, I exist not; without me, he is unmanifest."

But the master-means of manifestation, no less than the One who was to be manifested, was directly approached only on that day. Before meeting Sri Aurobindo the Mother used to find for her various spiritual experiences and realisations a poise for life-work by giving them a mould with the enlightened mind. All kinds of powerful ideas she had for world-upliftment—ideas artistic, social, religious. At sight of Sri Aurobindo she aspired to a total cessation of all mental moulds. She did not speak a word nor did he: she just sat at his feet and closed her eyes, keeping her mind open to him. After a while there came, from above, an infinite silence that settled in her mind. Everything was gone, all those fine and great ideas vanished and there was only a vacant imperturbable waiting for what was beyond mind. For days and days she carefully guarded her absolute silence and then slowly the Truth began to flow down from above. The Truth alone grew the substance of consciousness. No mental activity was left. And from that day in 1914 she never lived in the mind. Ideas got formed not on a mental initiative but in response to the Truth and in order to make the Truth mentally comprehensible and in order to transmit some experience of the Truth to the ordinary world.

Sri Aurobindo had known in 1908 the cessation of all mental activity in an utter Nirvana which became the basis on which the dynamic and creative side of his Yoga proceeded. Although he experienced this cessation six years before the Mother, both of them soon found on comparing notes that they had worked essentially on the same lines of an integral development, seeking to gather together all the movements of the spiritual life and carry them to a new goal. Only, a question that had haunted her from humanity's past had remained unanswered till she met Sri Aurobindo: Must always the attempt to establish a Kingdom of Heaven on earth fall tragically short of fruition? When she put the question to Sri Aurobindo he looked tranquilly at her and said, "This time it will not be so."

The secret of averting failure was what he called the Supermind, the Divine's own self-dynamism that had never before been brought into action in the world—the Supermind not only reached in its free and sovereign height but also carried down from there into Matter's depths to release in them its own hidden counterpart which is the buried source of all evolutionary striving towards divinity.

In those first few months of the Mother's stay in India, the mission of which she

had been aware since childhood grew increasingly clear. She has hinted at this in the entry dated June 26, 1914, of her *Prayers and Meditations*:

“O Lord, grant that we may rise above the ordinary forms of manifestation, so that Thou mayst find the instruments necessary for Thy new manifestation.

“Let us not lose sight of the goal; grant that we may be always in union with Thy force, the force which the earth does not yet know and which Thou hast given us the mission to reveal to her.”

An idea of the intensity with which the Mother devoted herself, from 1914 onwards, to her work for the world can be faintly formed if we remember what Sri Aurobindo remarked later to a disciple. He said that he had never known what spiritual self-surrender could be until she had thrown her whole being at his feet.

It was in 1914 too that she experienced an identification of even her most outer consciousness with the Universal Mother. She has written about this in her *Prayers and Meditations*. She has described there two successive identifications. Of course, she had known, long before, that she was the Mother: only the complete identification took place now, after her coming to India. This was but natural, since no other country has felt and known the universal aspect so intensely.

Her diary which comprised the *Prayers and Meditations* was started two years earlier. Every day at 5 a.m. she used to sit down to meditate near her window with a Kashmiri shawl wrapped round her. The meditation being over, she would note down her thoughts and experiences; but they were meant only for herself and she always used to lock up her diary. In 1916 she stopped writing, but on her final arrival at Pondicherry in 1920 she took it up again. Later, it was only occasionally that she wrote. What she wrote covered five big volumes. The first to see them was Sri Aurobindo and it was he who asked her to get them published as they were sure to be of immense help to others and would at the same time show what the physical consciousness is capable of achieving. So he made a selection and she got it printed. She had the rest burnt in a boiler which is still in use at the Ashram.

The utter absence of self-attachment which is in this act impresses us in all the acts of the Mother. She never seemed to think of her own ends or comfort or satisfaction. For many years she did not have a regular bed to rest in. There was hardly even any privacy. Then some disciples pleaded with her to let them build a room of her own. Her constant gesture was to give and give, and there was no regret if the giving bore no palpable fruit. Nor did her vision admit failure. Once she indicated how Sri Aurobindo and she worked. She said that even when they saw that a disciple was acting under wrong forces or was about to revolt and leave the Ashram they would not envisage a dark end for him but set the delicate balance so that the other side, the spiritually receptive part, might not go down. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo never saw things in small blocks of time and space: a boundless vista was ever in their eyes. And even beyond time and space their sense of being extended. Vividly does one of her disciples remember what she spoke apropos of her own paintings. Himself an amateur with the brush, he was acutely concerned about the almost thoughtless scatter of her best work over many countries. She mentioned

a decade in which she had done her finest pieces and said that most of them had been given away to various people at different times and in different places. The disciple said: “Should we not do something to collect them again?” The Mother calmly replied: “Why? Is it so important?” “Surely, such masterpieces deserve to be found and kept safely. You took so much pains over them.” “It does not matter.” “But, Mother, don’t you think there will be a loss if they are not preserved?” Then the Mother, with eyes far away yet full of tenderness for the agitated disciple, said in a quiet half-whisper: “You know, we live in eternity.”

Suddenly the disciple woke up to the truth of the Mother’s being. “Of course, of course,” he broke out, realising how often, seeing her walk our little ways, we forgot the ineffable Plenitude that was she behind and beyond her dealings with us, the Plenitude which yet took on itself the difficulties and limitations that were ours, so that passing through them she might be the exemplar of not only a divine victory but also a human fulfilment.

An open reminder of the truth of her being came most emphatically in 1926 when Sri Aurobindo put the Ashram in her charge. To be precise, there was on November 24 of that year a descent of what Sri Aurobindo terms the Overmind, the highest dynamic divine consciousness that had been realised so far in the world: he brought it down into the very material being, thus carrying one step forward the work done by the previous Avatar Sri Krishna who had brought down its influence into earth-life. With the descent of this consciousness into Sri Aurobindo the ground was prepared for the future descent of the Supermind, the integral Truth-Consciousness of the Divine in which lies the secret power of a complete transformation of earth-existence, even to the very cells of the body. When the Overmind was brought down, Sri Aurobindo summoned all those who were staying near him and told them that the time had come for him to withdraw into seclusion for concentrated work towards the Supermind’s descent and that henceforth the Mother would be in the forefront, his Shakti and their Guru.

The nine or ten months after the Overmind’s descent were a history of spectacular spiritual events. All who were present have testified that miracles were the order of the day. What can be called miracles happen every day even now in the Ashram—wherever a great spiritual Force is at work the miraculous is inevitable—but many such events occur without any *éclat* and often wear even the appearance of natural phenomena. Those which were common occurrences in those ten months were most strikingly miraculous and, if they had continued, a new religion could have been established with the whole world’s eyes focussed in wonder on Pondicherry. But the spectacular period terminated with an incident of profound significance. The Mother received one day what she has called the Word of Creation. Just as the God Brahma is said to have brought forth the world with his Word of Creation, the fiat of a new world that could be marvellously built lay ready with the Mother. A superhuman world was on the verge of being materialised.

With this power the Mother went to Sri Aurobindo’s room and told him: “I have got the Word of Creation.” Sri Aurobindo sat silent for a while and then said: “This Creation is from the Overmind. And we do not want that. We have to build the Supermind’s world.”

The Mother went back to her own room. She concentrated intensely for two hours and at the end of them she had completely dissolved the whole new Creation that had been on the brink of precipitation on earth. The greatest power in any hands during human history was set aside as if it were a trifle—and all because Sri Aurobindo had said that nothing short of the highest divine Truth was the ideal of manifestation for him and her. Miraculously grand though the manifestation would have been of the Overmind deities, it would not have been an utter transformation of life and would have stood in the way of a still greater glory. The very grandeur of it would have filled the aspiring gaze of mankind and checked it from straining for anything beyond it—at least for millennia.

With that unparalleled act of obedience and surrender by the Mother at one gesture from Sri Aurobindo the long laborious period of gradual preparation for the Supermind's world started—on the one hand the drawing down of the supreme Truth-Consciousness from above and on the other the digging into what Sri Aurobindo designates the Inconscient, the apparent origin of evolution on earth, the seeming negation of the Divine within which the integral Divinity has to be manifested, converting all the painful terms of the Ignorance into the terms of Knowledge and Bliss.

Twelve years after the descent of the Overmind into the physical being of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the greater aim seemed on the point of achievement. The Mother remarked in 1954 that even as far back as 1938 she used to see the Supermind descending into Sri Aurobindo's body but what could not be done at that time was to fix it in the physical being. The first fixing took place in circumstances mind-bafflingly dramatic. Twelve more years elapsed, and then Sri Aurobindo gave up his body, went through what appeared to be a disease with a fatal ending but what, in consideration of the extraordinary concomitants of that illness and that death, can only be regarded as a supreme strategic sacrifice. Sri Aurobindo, in view of the lack of preparedness in the world to receive and hold the descending Supermind, gathered as it were the whole force of mortal fate into his semi-divinised body and in the act of giving up this body exhausted that force in essence and principle and drew down to earth and fixed there the supramental Light. He took a drastic short cut towards a goal which otherwise would have taken decades to approach. As soon as he withdrew from his physical envelope the supramental Light made its permanent base in the Mother's body, beginning with the brain-mind. This is what is known as "the Mind of Light".

From then onward a deeper and deeper digging-in by the Light continued. In reaction against the invasion by the Truth-Consciousness the powers of the Ignorance attempted a desperate obstruction again and again. But Sri Aurobindo's sacrifice had already delivered the first of the finishing strokes to them. And with the Supramental Manifestation on February 29, 1956, when the Consciousness and Power of the Supermind became part of the earth's atmosphere, as it were—a power subtly yet directly at work on a universal scale in the midst of the old forces—the complete victory was assured, whose ultimate outer sign would be what the Mother called in her New Year Message of 1957 "the glorified body" which can conquer all Evil.

The process of the "glorified body" went on in the Mother—visible to a few whose

sight, piercing through the outer eyes' blindness, could catch the descended *kāraṇa śarīra*, the causal sheath, at work within the Mother, a white glory into which the outer substance was gradually being absorbed or, rather, which slowly projected itself into that substance to transform it. The Light played about in the limbs, coming forward, drawing back, now a soft beauty enshrined in the flesh, now a great power possessing bone and tissue till one beheld no longer the familiar shape we adored but a perfect Goddess suffusing it and for a while blotting it from the gaze. But not rapidly enough could the supramental sheath exteriorise itself, for the Mother stood in no immune isolation, she took hundreds of imperfect consciousnesses into herself, worked out their defects, repaired in her own body the constant damage which this comprehensive compassion inevitably brought: her aim was to carry the world with her and to prepare it for the full manifestation which it would scarcely have been able to bear if she had sought her own perfection to the neglect of humanity's cry for inner help and divinity's call to live for a collective triumph instead of an individual achievement.

A farther step towards the conquest of all Evil was disclosed in the Message of January 1, 1958, in which she spoke of the consent of material Nature to the demand for transformation. Nature has always been rejected by spiritual seekers and left to her own devices of slow circuitous development and aeonic travail with ill-lit forces. Nature, by being thrown back on herself, has avenged the rejection by obstructing with those forces the occasional pull on her for collaboration by seekers of the Spirit. The Mother's mission was to take Nature into herself, for indeed she was in essence all that is here in the very stone of material existence: a saviour love has been hers that shirks nothing, uplifts everything and makes even dust divine without annulling it, since even dust has its counterpart in the Supreme and a destiny of fulfilment here and now.

Nearly ninety-six years has the saviour love been the earth's companion. A blessed day is February 21 in its reminder to us of the long labour and of the fateful moment which saw its beginning. May our hearts beat in tune with that moment and be re-born from the sweetness and strength of this day that is effulgent with the Spirit's own sun—the Mother's face.

*

Perhaps the intensest impetus towards the required re-birth has come from the moment that saw what looked like a catastrophic cutting-short of the Mother's long labour: 7.25 p.m. of November 17 last year. Mind-bewildering as well as heart-shattering though it seemed at first, an understanding has grown steadily that the Mother did something tremendous when she left her body—an act comparable to the *grande finale* of Sri Aurobindo's life on December 5, 1950.

She has said time and again that he gave up his individual supramentalisation, abandoned the process of divinising completely his body, for the sake of hastening the hour of the earth's collective supramental realisation. And repeatedly too she has said that Sri Aurobindo had asked her to complete his Yoga of Transformation. Her "death",

therefore, must be Aurobindonian in its own way. It can only be seen as simultaneously one more push to the mighty project of divinising the human race and a further step towards materialising the supramental sheath which was waiting on the plane closest to the earth, the plane known in Sri Aurobindo's system of spiritual experience as the subtle-physical.

The plan so far was to fuse with that sheath the gross-physical envelope whose cells had been fast opening up to the Supermind's luminous force. Lately the Supermind itself had once possessed the Mother's most external consciousness for a few seconds. Her physical being was proceeding rapidly to absorb the causal body's influence, but the shock of the master-power was also immense and the physical being came on more than one occasion to the verge of literally dying so as to make room for the new life. In spite of all dangers she never stopped her fight for transformation. But she declared too that the final Will of the Supreme had not yet been disclosed to the body—whether her fight would be directly crowned with success or the fighting instrument would have to be given up in order to serve the Lord who always knows best how to accomplish His work. Evidently, the Divine Will was found by her to go against a direct triumph. Without a moment's hesitation she exercised the Supramental Avatar's right consciously to decide her own departure. She took her station in the waiting causal body, in which during the last few months of tranced inner withdrawal she must have stayed continually. Staying there, while still keeping her physical sheath alive, she must have assimilated the essence of the latter's achievement into the causal body and thus rendered that body denser and brought its subtle substance nearer to gross matter. Now, in place of matter becoming supramentalised in the Mother, the Supermind stands ready to be materialised as the Mother.

From that dynamic poise it carries on the long labour of terrestrial evolution which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo undertook. As the material form of the Mother, no less than that of Sri Aurobindo, has gone, the phenomenon of matter becoming supramentalised, which is the central insight of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, has to occur first in material forms other than theirs. Neither the Master nor the Mother was attached to their own forms being the prime exemplars of supramentalisation: if they sought to supramentalise these, it was in order to take the perilous pioneer adventure upon their own selves and facilitate the spiritual task of their children. Their true concern is simply to actualise, in whoever is available, the phenomenon they have visioned as the fulfilment of evolutionary earth.

The desired actualisation would certainly come sooner if the Supermind attained the new Mother-manifestation for which it now waits. But for the Supermind's swift success, we have to prove our little world of sadhana here worthy. Already the sacrificial fall the Mother has allowed of her wonderful body has given us a sense as if not only we but the whole earth had obtained a secret uplift. We should ensure that the intense impetus received by us to be re-born does not run to waste. Concentratedly we should lend our entire selves to it. Just as the Mother's constant cry was "As You will, as You will", so also our hearts should quicken, every moment, with a radiant feeling of the destiny she

paradoxically compassed when, according to medical reports, her heart failed—the destiny for which she had taken birth. Let us never forget those lines of Sri Aurobindo’s about Savitri:

Even though all falters and falls and sees an end
And the heart fails and only are death and night,
God-given her strength can battle against doom...¹

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

1. *Savitri* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 29, 1972), p. 462.

FIND THE PSYCHIC

WHEN all the mental structures fall
And fails the vital self’s appeal,
A void appears, the nought of all
And only emptiness we feel.

If somehow we could find within
The stillness and the glowing fire
Free from error, free from sin
Free of all our dark desire,

Then might we touch the sacred heart
Residing as the psychic being
Never again would we depart
From the clarity of that inner seeing.

All God’s labour, all His care
To transform our lives is hidden there.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of January 2004)

(11)

Mother Divine,

I wrote to You yesterday.

This morning I received a letter from my brother, Rathindra, asking me to go there immediately for property-matters. My father who wants to come here as soon as possible also wants me to go there. Now this is a fact that those who call me when I am here do not mean business at all when I am actually with them. I am tired of thus coming and going uselessly again and again. About Sri Aurobindo Nilaya I have to say the same thing.

And yet if You ask me to go I shall have to go although I do not know to what purpose.

Pray let me know Your will.

With pranams,

6-11-69

Your child
Abani

*If it is truly indispensable
you will have to go -
with my love and blessings*

If it is truly indispensable you will have to go—
With my love and blessings

The Mother

(To be continued)

THE SAVITRI PROOFS

(Continued from the issue of January 2004)

SOME of Sri Aurobindo's last revision of *Savitri*, we have seen, is inferred by comparing what was sent to the press with what appeared in print. In this way we know that he lightly revised many passages at the final stage before they were published. We also know that some lines remained with alterations that had been made unintentionally by his assistants who copied and typed the text. There have been conflicting views about whether, when Sri Aurobindo did not correct these, it means that he chose to accept the versions accidentally substituted by others in place of what he himself had written or dictated.

But the subject that immediately concerns us is how the indirect nature of the evidence for Sri Aurobindo's proof-revision affects the validity of an edition of *Savitri* based on a comparison of the manuscripts, copies, typescripts and printed texts. The obvious answer is, first of all, that it has no effect whatsoever where the printed version shows no change from the previous stage, such as the revised typescript. This is the usual situation where corrections have been made in the present edition. Most of these corrections are of demonstrable discrepancies between consecutive, documented stages, such as the manuscript and the scribe's copy of it. An example of such a case, where the line remained unchanged after it was miscopied, was given in the previous instalment to make this clear.

Typesetting from a relatively clean typescript—for when a page of the typescript was elaborately revised at Sri Aurobindo's dictation, it would be typed again and it was the neatly retyped copy that was sent to the press—was a simple process compared to the copying of hardly legible manuscripts and the typing of heavily revised versions. Nevertheless, besides copying and typing mistakes, some errors could be expected to occur in typesetting. It is for identifying these and distinguishing them from Sri Aurobindo's dictated revision that the proofs would have been most valuable. But less than one twenty-fifth of the items listed in the Table of Emendations in the "Supplement to the Revised Edition of *Savitri*" are corrections of presumed typographical errors, and most of these are matters of punctuation and capitalisation. The idea that this is a central issue on which the reliability of the Revised Edition depends is, therefore, a misconception.

A handful of words could be debated, especially where a change of a single letter might have come about either accidentally or through deliberate revision. The editors have had the choice of leaving these words as they were printed, at the risk of perpetuating what may have been just a compositor's slip, or else restoring what Sri Aurobindo had originally written or dictated, at the risk of not accepting what may have been his final choice. Theoretically this could be a serious problem. In practice, the correct decision is generally obvious. This is because typographical errors, being mere accidents, rarely produce results that could be mistaken for the revision of a great poet. In doubtful

cases, alternative readings have been listed in the Supplement.

This problem did not arise for the first time when the present edition was prepared. In 1954, for example, “strident” was corrected to “trident” in a line in Book Two, Canto Eight, which was printed in the 1948 fascicle and 1950 edition as

Her dreadful strident in her shadowy hand....¹

Since “strident” does not fit the context from the point of view of either meaning or grammar, the editors of the second edition assumed the “s” to be a misprint and emended the line to what it had been in the revised typescript:

Her dreadful trident in her shadowy hand....²

In another instance, “has left” was emended in 1970 to “had left” in lines in Book Three, Canto Three, which were printed in the following form in *The Advent*, the 1947 fascicle and the 1950 and 1954 editions:

Although the afflicted Nature he has left
Maintained beneath him her broad numberless fields....³

When the 1954 edition was being prepared, Amal Kiran observed with regard to the first line:

The natural and correct grammatical form would be “had left” and not “has left”, since everything afterwards as well as before is in the past tense.

In fact, Sri Aurobindo had written “had left” in more than a dozen manuscripts, including the final version in his own handwriting, dated “May 7. 1944” at the end of the third book. It was copied and typed in the same way, but “has” was printed instead of “had” when this canto was first published in 1947. It is rather surprising that this obvious typographical error was not corrected until 1970, though Amal had pointed it out in 1954.

A bolder emendation made in the Centenary Edition was the correction of “serried” to “seried” in a line found in the last section of Book One, Canto Five. From the late 1920s to the mid-1940s, the line

The seried kingdoms of the graded Law

was written by Sri Aurobindo in his own hand no less than thirty-one times, including the variants

Grading its truth in steps of seried Law

and

The graded kingdoms of the seried Law

which occur in manuscripts 16-19. Always “seried” was spelled with a single “r”. The same spelling, “seried”, is also found in Nirodbaran’s copy and in three typescripts revised by Sri Aurobindo. It is only when this canto was published in *The Advent* and in a fascicle in 1948 that “serried” appeared in print in place of “seried”.

The word “seried” is not found in English dictionaries. Sri Aurobindo coined it and used it in *Savitri* and in *The Life Divine*⁴ in the sense of “forming a series”. After he had consistently written “seried” in different versions of this line for almost twenty years, the sudden appearance of “serried”—without any proof that the change was made by Sri Aurobindo—raises the suspicion that another “r” was added to “seried” by someone at the press who was not aware of Sri Aurobindo’s coinage and assumed that “seried” was a misspelling of “serried”. Sri Aurobindo might not have noticed the slight difference in pronunciation when the line was later read to him in this form.

The emendation of “serried” to “seried” in 1970, perhaps prompted by Amal Kiran’s recollection of the version Sri Aurobindo had sent him in 1936, therefore seems justified. Though Sri Aurobindo used the phrases “serried march”⁵ and “serried columns”⁶ in *Savitri*, “serried kingdoms” is a less convincing expression. On the other hand, the idea of “seried” is related to “graded” in the same line. The long history of “seried kingdoms”, which has come to light in recent study of the manuscripts of *Savitri*, supports the correction made in the Centenary Edition.

These examples from past editions of *Savitri* illustrate the fact that it was sometimes found necessary to emend variants that originated in the printing of the journal instalments and fascicles or in the first volume of the first edition, though technically these variants could have been changes made by Sri Aurobindo while revising the proofs. In the present edition, some further corrections of the same type have been introduced. For example, “truth” has been emended to “Truth” at the end of the first of two lines in Book One, Canto Three, which before 1993 were printed as follows:

There all the truths unite in a single truth,
And all ideas rejoin Reality.⁷

In his drafts, Sri Aurobindo wrote “a single Truth” with a capital “T”. In the dictated version of this passage, the scribe first wrote “a single truth”; but when the fair copy was revised, he put a capital “T” over the small “t”, showing that Sri Aurobindo must have given specific instructions about this when the line was read to him. The typescript has “Truth”. But when the canto appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* in August 1947, it was printed as “truth”. Elsewhere also in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo consistently contrasted

“Truth” (capitalised) with “truths” (lower case) in lines such as

Denied the Truth that transient truths might live⁸

and

There is the Truth of which the world’s truths are shreds....⁹

In the line in Book One, Canto Three, where Sri Aurobindo had written of all truths uniting “in a single Truth”, the capitalisation of “Truth” is significant in itself and agrees with the capitalisation of “Reality” in the next line, where “ideas” correspond to “truths”. In view of all this, the small “t” of “truth” printed in the 1947 version looks like an error in typesetting rather than a change dictated by Sri Aurobindo. In the 1993 edition, therefore, “Truth” has been restored in agreement with the latest indisputable evidence of Sri Aurobindo’s intention:

There all the truths unite in a single Truth,
And all ideas rejoin Reality.¹⁰

A small fraction of the differences between editions of *Savitri* are of this kind, where the proofs of the early printed versions could have confirmed the justification of emendations made for reasons such as those explained above. It is assumed, for example, that it was the compositor who substituted a small “t” for Sri Aurobindo’s capital “T” in “Truth”. Though objective proof of this is lacking, the inconsistency with other lines in *Savitri* makes it seem unlikely that Sri Aurobindo was responsible for the apparently retrograde change. Under such circumstances, it has been considered legitimate to follow the manuscript and dictated versions, which are known to be authentic, rather than accept a dubious change that appeared when the text was printed.

Most of the second half of *Savitri* was not published during Sri Aurobindo’s lifetime. Therefore the question of the proofs arises only to a limited extent. The relatively short fifth and ninth books (the latter published as “Book Seven”) appeared in their entirety in journals and fascicles in 1949-50. The fourth and sixth books were published partially during this period. The rest did not come out until 1951. There is one long canto—Book Six, Canto One—for which proofs have survived. Thus about one fourth of the text of Parts Two and Three suffers from a lack of direct documentation for one stage of proof-revision. Sri Aurobindo did not have an opportunity to revise the proofs of the second volume of the first edition of *Savitri*, which was published in May 1951, several months after his passing.

The facsimile of a page-proof for Book Six, Canto One shows a typical example of a revised proof. This canto was published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* in August 1950; the proof was revised during the previous month. The page reproduced here shows the revision of two lines near the top of the page and one word near the bottom, marked

in Nirodbaran's handwriting. Most pages of this proof have less revision than this or none at all. The most significant revision was two pages later, where three lines were added at the dramatic high point of the canto. After Narad's prediction that Satyavan would die in a year, Sri Aurobindo expanded a line in the queen's response, "For Death is a cupbearer of the wine", to

For Death is a cupbearer of the wine
Of too brief joy held up to mortal lips
For a passionate moment by the careless gods.
But I reject the grace and the mockery.

The new lines inserted here were among Sri Aurobindo's last additions to Book Six, Canto One, "The Word of Fate". His revision of the final typescript of the next canto, "The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain", would preoccupy him up to within a month of his departure.

The proof of Book Six, Canto One is a precious document in its own right. But it contributes no specific information to help us answer textual questions in this canto. If it, like the proofs of other cantos, had not been preserved, what appeared in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* would have served as an accurate record of how the proof was revised.

The kinds of errors that could have been accidentally introduced between the revised typescript and the published text fall mainly into two categories which the proofs might have been useful for identifying: (1) uncorrected errors in composing the text from the typescript, and (2) errors in carrying out the revision marked on the proof. In this canto, neither of these occurred.

A number of obvious typographical errors were corrected on this proof; "birght" was corrected to "bright", "lapis plazuli" to "lapis lazuli", "gloriously" to "gloriously", etc. In the opening passage of the canto, "moved bound" was corrected on the proof to "moved round". But when we look into the history of this line that describes the earth

Turning as if moved round by an unseen hand

we discover that the word "bound" printed in the proof was not the compositor's error. It was a slip that had occurred in typing. When the typescript was read to Sri Aurobindo, this mistake had somehow escaped his notice. He caught and corrected it only when he revised the page-proof, where the mistake had been reproduced from the typescript.

Inaccuracies in the copying and typing of the text were often not as obvious as the substitution of "bound" for "round". Those that passed unnoticed when the handwritten copy and the typescript were revised became part of the typeset version whose proofs were corrected. If they went undetected even in the proofs, these inaccuracies would become enshrined in the published text. Some such errors were corrected in the early editions of *Savitri*. Others persisted until 1993, when an edition was published on the basis of a thorough study of Sri Aurobindo's last manuscript of each passage along with

its dictated revision and the copies, typescripts and printed versions.

A word that was not what Sri Aurobindo had written or dictated sometimes remained uncorrected even when the final proof was revised. A notable instance can be seen in the facsimile of the *Mandir Annual* proof. The thirteenth line reads:

Our sympathies become our tortures.

With regard to the word “tortures”, Amal Kiran wrote in 1954 when the second edition of *Savitri* was being prepared:

Not “tortures” but “torturers”. Both sense and metre demand this correction.

The facsimile of the manuscript of this passage published in *Mother India* in July 2000¹¹ shows that, in this case as in many others, Amal divined exactly what Sri Aurobindo had written:

Our sympathies become our torturers.

The last “r” was overlooked by the scribe when he copied this line which is squeezed between other lines in the manuscript. When this copy and later the typescript and the proof were read out to Sri Aurobindo, he apparently heard the line in its correct form and was not aware that it was short by a syllable as copied, typed and printed.¹²

In the same canto, there are other instances which illustrate similarly that reverting to the text as it stood at the end of Sri Aurobindo’s last revision of the proofs, even if all these proofs were available, would not be the way to guarantee the authenticity of an edition of *Savitri*. Near the beginning of Book Six, Canto One, for example, the scribe turned two pages at once while copying, causing him to omit fifty-two lines. The omission was not corrected when the copy, the typescript and the proofs were revised, so the canto was published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* in August 1950 with all these lines missing. Luckily, they were discovered in time to be included in the second volume of the first edition of *Savitri*, after Sri Aurobindo’s passing. If they had not been found then, it is likely that these fifty-two lines would have been left out until 1993, when many other inadvertently omitted lines were restored in the Revised Edition.

Such examples suggest why, when accidental changes occurred in the copying, typing and printing of *Savitri*, these changes have been reversed by the editors in order to restore the authentic text. This has been done in each edition as instances of these accidents came to light, although in the preparation of the early editions there was not yet a systematic comparison of the manuscripts with the later stages in order to detect all such discrepancies. I have concluded with examples from a canto whose page-proofs have been preserved. But these proofs show only what could have been inferred by comparing the published text with the revised typescript. The comparative method has been used elsewhere. Fortunately, this has not been a serious handicap in the endeavour to arrive at

For nothing have we learned, but still repeat
 Our stark misuse of self and others' selves,
 And fallen from his ethereal element
 Love darkens to the spirit of nether gods.
 The dreadful angel angry with his joys
 Woundingly sweet he cannot yet forego,
 Is pitiless to the soul his gaze disarmed,
 He visits with his own pangs his quivering prey
 Forcing to cling enamoured to ~~its~~ grips *his / d /*
 As if in love with ~~its~~ own agony. *us / our /*
 This is one poignant misery in the world,
 And grief has other lassoes for our life.
 Our sympathies become our tortures.
 Strength have I my own punishment to bear,
 Knowing it just, but on this earth perplexed,
 Smitten in the sorrow of scourged and helpless things,
 Often it faints to meet other suffering eyes.
 We are not as the gods who know not grief
 And look impassive on a suffering world,
 Calm they gaze down on the little human scene
 And the short-lived passion crossing mortal hearts.
 An ancient tale of woe can move us still,
 We keep the ache of breasts that breathe no more,
 We are shaken by the sight of human pain,
 And share the miseries that others feel.
 Ours not the passionless lids that cannot age.
 Too hard for us is heaven's indifference:
 Our own tragedies are not enough for us,
 All pathos and all sufferings we make ours;
 We have sorrow for a greatness passed away
 And feel the touch of tears in mortal things.
 Even a stranger's anguish rends my heart,
 And this, O Narad, is my well-loved child.
 Hide not from us our doom, if doom is ours.
 This is the worst, an unknown face of Fate,
 A terror ominous mute felt more than seen
 Behind our seat by day, our couch by night,
 A Fate ~~waiting~~ in the shadow of our hearts,
 The anguish of the unseen that waits to strike.
 To know is best, however hard to bear". *lurking /*

a faithful and accurate edition of *Savitri*, not only for the thousands who read it today, but for the millions who will read it in centuries to come.

(Concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *Savitri*: Book II, Cantos VII-XV (1948), p. 19; *Savitri*: Part One (1950), p. 202.
2. *Savitri* (1954), p. 251; *Savitri* (1970, 1993), p. 222.
3. *The Advent*, April 1947, p. 70; *Savitri*: Book III, Canto III (1947), p. 5; *Savitri*: Part One (1950), p. 293; *Savitri* (1954), p. 365.
4. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 705, 834.
5. *Savitri* (1970, 1993), p. 10.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 459.
7. *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, August 1947, p. 20; *Savitri*: Book I, Cantos II and III (1947), p. 21; *Savitri*: Part One (1950), p. 31; *Savitri* (1954), p. 37; *Savitri* (1970), p. 32.
8. *Savitri* (1970, 1993), p. 244.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 661.
10. *Savitri* (1993), p. 32.
11. P. 525, fourth line from the bottom.
12. The facsimile published with the July 2000 instalment of "The Composition of *Savitri*" also shows the source of two emendations made on the same page in the 1993 edition. The most important of these corrections of inaccuracies in the copying of the manuscript was the reinstatement of a line missed by the scribe, "There are dire alchemies of the human heart" (*Savitri* [1993], p. 428). The punctuation of two lines on this page was emended in 1954 and 1970. Though the commas added to these lines in those editions are not found in the manuscript, the corrections are acceptable because the lines were dictated or revised by dictation. As sometimes happened in the process of dictation, punctuation appears to have been overlooked.

ERRATA

The poem "Whisper" which appeared in the December 2003 issue of *Mother India* and the poem "No-Place" which appeared in the January 2004 issue have been wrongly ascribed to Alan Stocker. The poet is Roger Calverley. The errors are regretted.

INTEGRAL YOGA AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

(Continued from the issue of January 2004)

Integral Yoga, the Scientific Method and the Future

WHY was it necessary to develop a new form of Yoga when the Indian tradition already has such a wealth of Yogic systems? Sri Aurobindo saw that the challenges of the present evolutionary crisis can be met only by an integral Yoga encompassing the totality of our complex nature. He found the various traditional methods too specialised for this purpose. He also found it impractical to combine these disparate systems, each of which has grown along its own lines for centuries. Their accumulated knowledge undoubtedly has an immense value, but has to be assimilated into a new synthesis.

Sri Aurobindo was not the first and has not been the only Yogi to address this problem in recent times. Referring to the antecedents of his own work, he observed that

in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge.¹

But for all his admiration for the spiritual genius of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo felt that something more remained to be done. He continued:

Such an example cannot be generalised. Its object also was special and temporal, to exemplify in the great and decisive experience of a master-soul the truth, now most necessary to humanity, towards which a world long divided into jarring sects and schools is with difficulty labouring, that all sects are forms and fragments of a single integral truth and all disciplines labour in their different ways towards one supreme experience.²

Sri Aurobindo believed that the human soul is becoming capable of a more direct and complete realisation of this integral truth and supreme experience than in the past. He did not pretend that this would be easy. On the contrary, the method he proposed calls for a supreme effort commensurate with the greatness of the result it has in view. Integral Yoga is not a fixed system following a prescribed series of steps without regard for differences between individuals. It is a broad path in which the mental, emotional and physical nature of each person is led towards its fulfilment and transformation by an inner guidance. Its essential movement is a progressive diminution of the element of ego

in our thought, feeling and action and an opening to a universal Light, Love and Power whose channels and instruments we are to become.

A shifting of our centre of consciousness from the rational to the suprarational level is the fundamental change envisaged in this Yoga. But we cannot expect such a radical change to take place in us if we have not even succeeded in putting our being into some semblance of order by the ordinary human faculties of reason and intelligent will. Sri Aurobindo therefore put a strong emphasis on the need to purify our nature from all sources of confusion, obscurity and wrong working of the different parts of the being. The key to this purification—or, in Sanskrit, *śuddhi*—is the right use of the capacity of understanding which makes us human. And this is not possible unless the understanding itself is pure, clear and disinterested.

This is why an adequate mental preparation of the human race, which science is now doing so much to bring about, is an indispensable condition for a collective spiritual change along the lines of Sri Aurobindo's vision. For without this preparation there would be, as he put it, a danger of "the repetition in old or new forms of a past mistake"³ such as a revival of sectarian religious obscurantism and fanaticism, rejecting the claims of the reason without substituting a higher authentic illumination.

To counteract the possibility of such dangers, a widespread cultivation of the scientific attitude is highly desirable. This could be an effective training for a Yoga of self-perfection of the kind outlined by Sri Aurobindo as the distinctive movement of an integral Yoga. The scientific attitude is characterised by rational impartiality in the seeking for truth and strict regard for accuracy. These qualities are abundantly evident on every page of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and are most strikingly displayed in his *Record of Yoga*. From beginning to end, this diary resembles nothing so much as the notes of a scientist in his laboratory.

The procedures followed in scientific research are applications of the scientific method, which is a formal expression of the scientific attitude. By perfecting this method, Western civilisation has taken the enormous strides we have seen in recent centuries in terms of the knowledge and mastery of the material universe. On the other hand, the inner realms explored by the civilisations of the East have remained almost untouched by this outward-looking science. Yet with a little adaptation, the simple series of steps constituting the scientific method could be followed in investigating not only the external world, but the subtler field of introspective self-knowledge, where greater wonders lie hidden than what the most powerful microscope or telescope can reveal.

Sri Aurobindo has given a precise description of the three principal steps of the scientific method—without calling it that—in an account of the working of the reasoning faculty in general, whether it applies itself to the objective or the subjective field:

The characteristic power of the reason in its fullness is a logical movement assuring itself first of all available materials and data by observation and arrangement, then acting upon them for a resultant knowledge gained, assured and enlarged by a first use of the reflective powers, and lastly assuring itself of the correctness of its results

by a more careful and formal action, more vigilant, deliberate, severely logical which tests, rejects or confirms them according to certain secure standards and processes developed by reflection and experience.⁴

The first step is the gathering of data by exact observation of phenomena using whatever instruments are necessary. The second step is the use of inductive reasoning, proceeding from the particular to the general, to construct a hypothesis or a preliminary generalisation suggested by the data. The final step is verification of the hypothesis by further observations and experiments, testing the validity of deductions that follow logically from the preliminary generalisation.

The rigorous application of this simple method to material phenomena observed by the senses has enabled modern science to look beyond these surface phenomena and give us a surprisingly different picture, as Sri Aurobindo points out:

To the superficial view of the outer mind and senses the sun is a little fiery ball circling in mid air round the earth and the stars twinkling little things stuck in the sky for our benefit at night. Scientific enquiry comes and knocks this infantile first-view to pieces. The sun is a huge affair (millions of miles away from our air) around which the small earth circles, and the stars are huge members of huge systems indescribably distant which have nothing apparently to do with the tiny earth and her creatures. All Science is like that, a contradiction of the sense-view or superficial appearances of things and an assertion of truths which are unguessed by the common and the uninstructed reason.⁵

Sri Aurobindo goes on from such striking results of the physical sciences to the internal field, where Western knowledge compares less favourably with that of the Eastern traditions:

The same process has to be followed in psychology if we are really to know what our consciousness is, how it is built and made and what is the secret of its functionings or the way out of its disorder.⁶

This is essentially what the Yogis have been doing in India since time immemorial. But there are differences as well as similarities between investigating the laws of Matter and seeking for the truths of the spirit. In the end, these differences force us to make a clear distinction between the scientific and Yogic approaches to knowledge. For, as Sri Aurobindo says,

the experiences of yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical

senses and enters the domain of the infinite and infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing—for one cannot see and touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not...—so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature.⁷

The ancient Rishis of India probed deeply into the spiritual nature of existence and found that, contrary to appearances, this world is the expression of a single absolute reality which they called *brahman*:

*brahmaivedam amṛtaṁ purastād brahma paścād brahma dakṣiṇataś cottareṇa,
adhaś cordhvam ca prasṛtaṁ brahmaivedam viśvam idam variṣṭam.*

All this is Brahman immortal, naught else; Brahman is in front of us, Brahman behind us, and to the south of us and to the north of us and below us and above us; it stretches everywhere. All this is Brahman alone, all this magnificent universe.⁸

Such a proposition contradicts our normal perception of the world as much as do the theories of particle physics. It can be neither proved nor disproved by science as we know it, which is equipped to study the process of things but not their reality. As a mystical experience, it may be overwhelmingly true for the person who has realised it, as Sri Aurobindo did early in his *sādhana*. For the rest of us, if we take Brahman to be something more than a philosophical concept it is because we accept the testimony of those who have had the experience of it through Yoga, just as we accept the existence of electrons on the authority of those who have verified the theories of atomic physics by appropriate experiments. Every scientist begins by accepting a large part of the knowledge in his field on trust from predecessors or colleagues and does not insist on repeating every experiment himself. To trust conclusions drawn from centuries of Yogic experience is equally sensible. And since the Indian spiritual tradition has never been static, but has been in constant development, there is no reason to reject the innovations of a Yogi like Sri Aurobindo who has been led to venture beyond the tradition into realms that have perhaps not been explored before, or at least have been rarely visited since the dawn of the ancient Vedic age.

Sri Aurobindo wrote in his *Essays on the Gita* that “truth is the foundation of real spirituality and courage is its soul”.⁹ In a letter, he commented on an example of the bold originality of the real Indian spirit, which does not hesitate to be true to its experience:

Take Vivekananda’s famous answer to the Madras Pundit who objected to one of his assertions saying: “But Shankara does not say so”, to whom Vivekananda replied: “No, but I, Vivekananda, say so”, and the Pundit was speechless. That “I, Vivekananda,” stands up to the ordinary eye like a Himalaya of self-confident egoism. But

there was nothing false or unsound in Vivekananda's spiritual experience. For this was not mere egoism, but the sense of what he stood for and the attitude of the fighter who, as the representative of something very great, could not allow himself to be put down or belittled.¹⁰

India needs to stand before the world with such confidence in the truths she represents. Sri Aurobindo termed this confidence *śraddhā svaśaktyām*, faith in the power within oneself, which is an individualised expression of the universal Shakti. It is not true that the West has arisen because it believes in reason, while India has stagnated because it is a land of faith. On the contrary, the West has arisen because it has faith in its own limited ideals, while India with her higher ideals, possessing the knowledge the world most needs for its future, has gone into a temporary decline because of a loss of living faith in the divine Shakti within her. This decline has already been reversed, but its after-effects still cling to the national life and will require a concerted and enlightened effort to shake off.

This effort has to be made under modern conditions and cannot succeed by trying to go back to the past, because Nature or the mover of Nature, the Lord in the hearts of all, has created these new conditions in order to advance towards a manifestation which is sure to be far greater than anything the earth has seen. It is useful for this purpose to insist on the distinction between religion and spirituality made by Sri Aurobindo. Religion belongs essentially to the past and has often been in conflict with the progressive march of science. Spirituality, on the other hand, belongs essentially to the future and cannot conflict with science, since science and spirituality are both searching for the truth, and the truth is ultimately one. Science is preparing the human mind for a breakthrough into the spiritual dimension. Therefore it is a natural ally of Yoga.

The difference between religion and spirituality has been clearly explained by the Mother, who carried on Sri Aurobindo's work after his passing:

Religion exists almost exclusively in its forms, its cults, in a certain set of ideas, and it becomes great only through the spirituality of a few exceptional individuals, whereas true spiritual life, and above all what the supramental realisation will be, is independent of every precise, intellectual form, every limited form of life. It embraces all possibilities and manifestations and makes them the expression, the vehicle of a higher and more universal truth.

A new religion would not only be useless but very harmful. It is a new *life* which must be created; it is a new *consciousness* which must be expressed. This is something beyond intellectual limits and mental formulae. It is a living truth which must manifest.¹¹

Integral Yoga is offered to us as a means of manifesting this living truth. But where does one begin? The Mother was asked, "What is one to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga?" She replied:

To be conscious, first of all. We are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it. It is through unconsciousness that the undivine forces enter into us and make us their slaves. You are to be conscious of yourself, you must awake to your nature and movements, you must know why and how you do things or feel or think them; you must understand your motives and impulses, the forces, hidden and apparent, that move you; in fact, you must, as it were, take to pieces the entire machinery of your being. Once you are conscious, it means that you can distinguish and sift things, you can see which are the forces that pull you down and which help you on. And when you know the right from the wrong, the true from the false, the divine from the undivine, you are to act strictly up to your knowledge; that is to say, resolutely reject one and accept the other. The duality will present itself at every step and at every step you will have to make your choice.¹²

(Concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

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2. *Ibid.*
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga* (1970), p. 198.
4. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 851-52.
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6. *Ibid.*, p. 322.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads* (1981), p. 204.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (1996), p. 45.
10. *Letters on Yoga*, p. 1388.
11. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957-58* (1977), p. 77.
12. The Mother, *Conversations 1929, 1930-31* (1997), pp. 1-2.

ALWAYS IMMERSED IN VISHNU

ALTHOUGH always immersed in Vishnu, he is yet a busy peripatetic,
And ever drinks by sight the streaming happinesses of the Name,
And like a tranquil arrow pierces into swinging pupil of the sky.
Now on the high peaks the untried wings await the land-breeze
Not as do theological fields solemn rains, but that of blue clouds.
He knows the curving path that disappears like a ray into the sun,
He knows the analogues of trees which blossom in the Elsewhere.
Then the mighty conch was blown and the ancient galaxies arrived,
And the stardome glowed, even as deep night turned into true day.
He is always immersed in Vishnu, but forgot his Veena in Heaven,
And therefore decided to acquire that suchness in these bowers too,—
Meet friends on the whizzing seamless streets, learn the labour laws,
Participate in loud council debates, join issues with the hierophants;
The blind unstruck hours must search the clock at the origin of things.
Not the mimeographs of angels and saints, nor of the cool mountains,
But a fresh living breath ought to flood the sudden green of the valley.
From the End to the n'th dimension of the involved Here-and-Now,
From the Parable of Ignorance to Time's progress ever in Knowledge,
Eternity's eye extends, like some unseen magic, to the very foot of God.
Narad is always immersed in the Chant, moving up and down the alleys,
And from the lore of the Past to modern libraries rushes the swift Word.
The celibate singer has now again brought to song undecaying silences,
The urge in bright virginity to bear the bodies of the myriad Godhead;
The Seer comes purple-goldenly tracing infinity of that widening Vast.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

IN SEARCH OF AN EVENING MARKED BY A LANTERN AND STARS

As I entered my compartment in a Surat-bound train in Bombay (now Mumbai), I was warmly welcomed by the solitary other passenger seated cross-legged on his berth who introduced himself as Mr. Rabdiwalla—unless I heard wrong—a “business magnet”. Soon I found out that he ran a moderate workshop of looms, but was obviously fond of “magnet”.

He talked fluently in his mother-tongue but realising my poor comprehension of it, switched over to a smooth concoction of English and Hindi.

“I like English and you appear to know English well. Tell me, what is the plural of child?” he quizzed me.

“Why, Sir, what can it be other than children?”

He bent double with chortle. “Can be, can be. Childs! Follow? That is Railway English. Did you not see the list of passengers hanging at the door? Mrs. Childs and two of her daughters, a pair of misses, are to be our co-passengers. The Railways meant ‘children’, but wrote Childs and they forgot to write their mother’s name.”

Before I had gathered the courage to reveal to the magnet, agog with excitement over the Railway English, that Childs indeed was an English surname, the expected party entered the compartment.

Mr. Rabdiwalla stood up, introduced himself and was ready to shake hands with Mrs. Childs, but had to go without it because the lady had luggage under both her arms.

“I’m Mrs. Childs,” she said with a smile.

“Are you really Mrs. Childs?” demanded the awestruck magnet.

No wonder the lady failed to appreciate the import of the question.

“Have we met before?” she asked, her brows raised.

“Never, never. I respect England ladies. These girls are beautiful. Your daughters?”

“Right. Lucy and Tiny.”

“Bah. But if you’re Childs, how Lucy became Hudson? Already married?” the gentleman asked, his eyes fixed on a suitcase bearing the child’s full name.

“Her father, my first husband, was Hudson.”

“Bah. Divorce? In India we also divorce.”

“He died.”

“Widow marriage! Bah. In India also we like widow marriage. Bah. We are no orthodox in 20th century.”

Had I come across a similar situation in Forster’s *Passage to India*?

Indian psychology records *Navarasa* or nine modes. But a tenth one—a combination of embarrassment and irritation—was killing me. Could I change over to another compartment? But “We’re tired,” said Mrs. Childs and got busy making beds.

The mysterious epidemic identified by some as a sort of plague was yet to invade Surat. But a look at the river Tapti was enough to make one curse the kind of industrial growth we had in our country. Innumerable factories discharged their filth into the river

and every inch of it looked obnoxious. Yet, within a year the Surtees (as the people of Surat are called) had made their city clean with a vengeance—an unmistakable example of the capacity the Indians have. Why don't we use the capacity normally? The answer, probably, is to be found in the bizarre opposite pulls of the philosophy of illusionism taught by the ascetics and endorsed by the Buddhists on one hand and the command to look upon the whole of life, including even the battlefield, as real, as taught by the original Vedanta and the Gita on the other hand.

My extension lectures at the University were over and my friends took me around the neglected ruins of the early Western settlers facing vast stretches of sand. I remembered John Orington's *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*, a rare book. It is difficult to imagine the kind of thrills, suspense and enlightenment the early Westerners experienced unless one has read their testaments. For example, Orington's friends had captured a huge monkey which escaped from their fortress. The Sahibs gave a determined chase to it. But, to their amazement, even though the creature invaded one native shop after another and broke several of their precious items and even scratched a few gentlemen, no Indian lent a helping hand to catch it. Curiosity led the Sahibs to the story of the *Ramayana*. The amusing synopsis of the great epic presented by Orington must be read to be believed. According to him the demon-king Ravana turned an ascetic!

My interest was different. At last I was out under the captainship of my scholarly friend Kaivalya to explore the ground where the Indian National Congress achieved adulthood and matured into a power capable of demanding unqualified freedom for the motherland.

The full-moon night gladdened me; for I would be able see the site of the historic Surat Congress of 1907. I was waiting for the rows of mansions and shops to end, but Kaivalya stopped his car close to a market. "So, we are here—on the Surat Congress ground."

"But where is the ground?"

"In the pages of history. However, a small part of it is still there, as a park."

We occupied a bench in the park as I turned the pages of history in my mind.

It was at the Calcutta Congress of 1906, under the Presidentship of Dadabhoi Naoroji, that resolutions had been passed for the boycott of foreign goods favouring Swadeshi and for a national education policy, with Sri Aurobindo (then Mr. Aurobindo Ghose) in the background and Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Khaparde championing the causes in the open. While the President supported such moves, moderates like Ferozeshah Mehta, Gokhale and Surendranath Bannerjee were against them.

Since the programme for working out the resolutions was to be chalked out at the next session of the Congress, the Moderates succeeded in shifting its venue from Nagpur to Surat, their stronghold.

The session began before a large audience. The President-elect, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, flanked by other leaders, ascended the dais. Ambalal Desai proposed Dr. Ghose for the chair but the moment Surendranath Bannerjee seconded it, pandemonium broke out, giving the great orator, the Pied Piper of Bengal, the jolt of his life. Here is a first-

hand report from the noted author and journalist, Henry Nevinson:

“Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks, and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators... sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment’s pause... the whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi (Chairman of the Reception Committee) still half in the chair, rang his brass Benares bell and rang in vain. Surendranath sprang upon the very table itself. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again he shouted, unheard as silence....”

The next day was not different. Surendranath exhorted all to maintain peace, and Motilal Nehru spoke in the same vein. But Dr. Ghose had hardly occupied the chair, when Tilak stood up. He had given notice for an amendment and he must move it. “You cannot move an adjournment of the Congress, I declare you out of order,” shouted Mr. Malvi. “I wish to move an amendment to the election of President and you are not in the Chair,” shouted back Tilak. “I declare you out of order,” said Dr. Ghose at the top of his voice. “But you are not yet elected. I appeal to the delegates,” retorted Tilak.

Nevinson’s inimitable narration proceeds thus:

“Uproar drowned the rest. With folded arms Mr. Tilak faced the audience. On either side of him young Moderates sprang to their feet, wildly gesticulating vengeance. Shaking their fists and yelling to the air, they clamoured to hurl him down the step of the platform. Behind him Dr. Ghose mounted the table and, ringing an unheard bell, harangued the storm in shrill, agitated, unintelligible denunciations. Restraining the rage of Moderates, ingeminating peace if ever man ingeminated, Mr. Gokhale, sweet-natured even in extremes, stood beside his old opponent, flinging out both arms to protect him from the threatened onset. But Mr. Tilak asked for no protection. He stood there with folded arms, calling on violence to do its worst, calling on violence to move him, for he would move for nothing else in hell or heaven. In front, the white-clad audience roared like a tumultuous sea.

“Suddenly something flew through the air—a shoe!—a Maharatta shoe! reddish leather, pointed toe, sole studded with lead. It struck Surendranath Bannerjee on the cheek; it cannoned off on Sir Ferozeshah Mehta. It flew, it fell, and, as at a given signal, white waves of turbaned men surged up the escarpment of the platform. Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they came striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs..., I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos.

“Like Goethe at the battle of Valmy, I could have said, ‘Today marks the beginning of a new era, and you can say that you were present at it!’ ”

Nevinson was right and significantly so. The signs of a new era took a distinct shape the next day, the Nationalists (as opposed to the Moderates) holding their conference in a serene atmosphere. Says Nevinson, “Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word—Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the Chair and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone and someone kindled a lantern at his side.”

MANOJ DAS

(From *My Little India*, courtesy National Book Trust India, New Delhi)

THE DISCIPLINE OF ART

[This talk by Jayantilal Parekh was given to students and teachers of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in the Hall of Harmony in 1990. An accomplished artist, Jayantilal studied under Nandalal Bose at Shantiniketan before joining the Ashram in 1938. Considered one of “the Mother’s artists”, he made numerous paintings and sketches under her guidance. He lived in the Ashram for more than sixty years, until his passing in 1999.]

THERE are in the world today any number of artists of various schools. They pursue art with different ideas, different purposes, different capacities, and they contribute to the societies in which they live, where their work is accepted or criticised. But what I wish to speak about today is something outside the established movements of art. What I want to point out belongs to the highest realm of art.

Those who pursue art as a creative principle make it the central aim of their life. They discipline themselves to open to the realm of art, to the force and light of the world of beauty. They live in the atmosphere of that world, they create that atmosphere in themselves, and then they try to give it perfect form. Perfection is not that easy, but the endeavour of the artist has to be in that direction.

The Twofold Discipline

The discipline of art is twofold, inner and outer. The first part is to open up one’s inner consciousness, open it to the world of beauty, in order to receive the forms and images that emerge there. This inner discipline has existed in all great civilisations, whether in Europe or Asia. Without it the artists living in them could not have created the wonderful works of art we have inherited today. In India the architects who built the temples and the artists who worked on them had to follow a certain inner practice. The sculptors, for example, first had to make the inner sky of their consciousness clear so that the image of the god or goddess they wished to depict might appear clearly in that sky. Then they had to hold that image in their consciousness, and finally they had to give the inner image an outer form that would truly reflect their vision.

So this is the twofold discipline. The first part is to clear the inner sky of one’s being, the *antarākāś*, and allow the image to appear in that sky. The second part is to train one’s eye and hand to give the inner vision an elegant external form. Unfortunately, most modern artists seem to have lost this conception of art, especially the need for inner discipline. They may be attracted by some aspect of it, they may represent it in one way or another, they may sometimes create things of beauty—but to create something truly great, lasting and satisfying, one has to follow this inner discipline by which one enters the realm of beauty. This practice was common in the Oriental traditions, Chinese, Japanese and Indian, and I think it must also have been present, consciously or unconsciously, in European civilisation.

Why is this discipline necessary? It is because all embodied creatures suffer from a downward gravitational pull. We are all full of inertia, and any effort we make to raise ourselves up is met with the resistance of inertia. So we have to undergo a discipline to overcome the resistance. Then we can rise up to the world of beauty, receive images from that world, and train the eye and hand to give them form. This discipline is very severe, no doubt, but it is necessary for those who want to take up art as the highest aim of their life and attain its highest achievements.

The Outer Discipline

For the second part of the discipline, which is to give one's inner vision an adequate outer form, the artist must to some extent depend on the existing traditions, the existing knowledge of how to give material form to his vision. Suppose he wants to cast an image in bronze. Unless he knows the principles of bronze-casting, unless he has learned the technique, he cannot create a work of art. Or suppose the sculptor is given a block of stone. He must know how to sculpt it. There is a process for handling the material—you remove the superfluous part of the block, come to the basic form you want, and then go into the details. But to acquire this technique, you have to work for years.

They often say that sculpture is more difficult than painting, because in painting you can correct yourself, but in sculpture you cannot. Sculpture is also difficult in another respect: unless the image you want to transfer to the stone is clear in your mind, you cannot do it well. Stone is not a pliable material that you can change after starting, so you have to be very clear in your mind about the form you are going to give. In the best sculpture, whether in the East or the West, even in modern times, those who have done the work have been great masters who first conceived their works in all the details.

Perhaps you know the sculpture of David which Michaelangelo created sometime in the fifteenth century. He was offered a block of marble nine feet high and asked to create something out of it. He was a man of very great genius and creative ability. There is a story that the same block of marble was offered to Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo started taking measurements and thinking about the work all the time. But when Michaelangelo finally got the block of marble, he immediately went about his business, chipped on it and created his famous work. He worked on the statue of David for two years continuously. It is a masterpiece. Many of you have seen it; pictures of it were distributed by the Mother as a prize card. To achieve that kind of perfection, you must be sure of the vision you carry within yourself, sure of your knowledge of stone and how to cut it, sure of your hand as it chisels the figure.

The art of sculpture is not being practised today to the extent it was in earlier civilisations. The modern artist Rodin has done a number of sculptures, but he used to work in clay first. He did not work directly in stone or cast his image in bronze. Sculpture requires a very steady vision and a great power to hold it. Modern man lacks the capacity of steady concentration; his mind is very often fickle and wants to change from one form to another.

Cultivating a Sense of Beauty

But it is upon inner discipline that I want to lay stress, especially for those who wish to pursue art. The first necessity is to create a certain inner condition within oneself. One must constantly cultivate a sense of beauty, one must live in a world of beauty. Looking at an object, one must make oneself familiar not merely with its physical aspect but with what I may call its significant form, the form that is revealed to one's inner vision.

I had a taste of this when I studied in Shantiniketan. My teacher, Nandalal Bose, the person who had organised the school of art there, was a great artist himself. As a result, he created the requisite atmosphere for training us in this field. He told us: "You must always carry a sense of beauty within you. Whatever you see around you—the trees, the fields, the animals, the sky—you must see the beauty in them. You must constantly feel a certain joy of beauty, a certain joy of discovery. That beauty and joy should get absorbed in your being and become part of your consciousness. Don't think of painting without first filling yourself with this sense of beauty and living constantly in it. Observe the various aspects of beauty in Nature, the significant suggestions they give, whether you are looking at flowers or animals or anything else. This will enable you to create something of fundamental beauty, because beauty has become part of you."

This practice, as I have said, is common among Chinese and Japanese artists. They are trained to identify themselves with the subject of the painting they take up, to immerse themselves in its spirit, and only then to create it outwardly. There was an artist named Tycond who came to India at the beginning of the century. He must have died thirty or forty years ago. Once he was commissioned to make a painting of a forest. Now, although he was an accomplished artist, he did not just start painting a forest scene. Instead, he took his family to the forest and lived there for a year. Day and night he stayed there. He saw the forest in all its aspects, through all the seasons, in the morning and evening, under moonlight and starlight; thus he filled himself with the spirit of the forest and felt rich with it. Then he painted a forest scene. There are innumerable stories like this about Chinese and Japanese artists.

There was another artist who belonged to a royal family. He was commissioned to make a painting of monkeys. For quite some time the man did nothing. Then a summons was sent to him, asking why the painting had not been done. He said, "I am not yet in a mood to do it." After some time it was noticed that he had shut himself up in a room and was jumping about. He tried going up the windows like a monkey, walking on his hands and legs, doing all the things that a monkey does. The whole idea was to identify himself with the subject of his work. Only then, when he had become identified with a monkey, could he give the living characteristics of the animal he was painting.

These are some of the ways in which artists have attempted to create in themselves an inner vision. In India, as I said, the method was to meditate on the god or goddess they wished to depict in order to open themselves to receive an image of the deity and then transfer it into material form.

“The Something Intangible”

I would like to read out to you a passage from one of Sri Aurobindo’s writings in which he speaks of the visual arts. He says:

Architecture, sculpture and painting, because they are the three great arts which appeal to the spirit through the eye, are those too in which the sensible and the invisible meet with the strongest emphasis on themselves and yet the greatest necessity of each other. The form with its insistent masses, proportions, lines, colours, can here only justify them by their service for the something intangible it has to express; the spirit needs all the possible help of the material body to interpret itself to itself through the eye, yet asks of it that it shall be as transparent a veil as possible of its own greater significance. (CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 270)

Sri Aurobindo speaks here about “the something intangible” that the object has to express. But the training an artist normally gets these days merely enables him to execute a work with the technical ability needed to give it form; no training, or too little training, is given to enable him to open himself and go behind the form to find the intangible thing that the form is meant to reveal.

People have little idea of what it means to “go behind”. If you are asked to paint this vase of flowers in front of me, it is not sufficient merely to copy it—something more is needed. By seeing it, by feeling it inwardly, you can perceive a certain harmony of colours, the shades of green and purple and brown; you can see the delicacy of the flower, the way it hangs. And all this can become part of you, of your inner experience and vision. Then you can give this vase of flowers an artistic form, not an outer copy but an inner impression of what it is. It is not sufficient merely to train your hand so that the vase, the flowers and the leaves are accurately portrayed; that is not the thing. The real training consists in your ability to see the vase of flowers aesthetically and significantly. But that training a school cannot easily give; it can only be encouraged. The inner “seeing” is the thing that has to be awakened in the student, in the aspiring artist. He has to learn to live in an inner atmosphere of beauty. Whenever he sees something, he must see it in the light of beauty; he must not merely see a physical object, but something behind it.

(To be continued)

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

“YOU”

At last the mind surrenders and adores,
It can no other.
For all its front is turned to Light
It gazes, dumb in wonder:
All its ideas in flocks are taking flight.
It knows not now of time
Nor even of self-giving that has brought it here.
And all is stilled beyond the pale of art
Image cannot catch the eye nor melody or rhyme the ear.
All matters passionate and sweet to heart
All that was grist to mind's hungry mill
Are ground to dust and to the ten directions blown
And all is still

No-one to stand within these sweetest spaces inside you
With whom I have conterminous grown
In golden white Eternity of Love
We are alone

With the last trailing echoes of your secret Name
When the dust begins to settle
Something is stirring its petty territory to claim:
The stunned brain
The silenced tongue
Are quivering to come back again,
A word to move the stricken lips
And tears the smitten heart.
All they would utter if they could is
“You!” “O You.”

MAGGI

INTRODUCING SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

REGARDING man's attempt to understand and explain God, Sri Ramakrishna used to say—a salt doll is going to measure the ocean! In my rash attempt to write on the vast, profound, incomparable poetry of Sri Aurobindo, I feel that the remark of Sri Ramakrishna is very much applicable to me. However, the saving grace is that Sri Aurobindo's poetry is an ocean of nectar and, in the words of Giacomo Leopardi, "sweet for me will be the shipwreck in this ocean".

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo's poetry is so mystical, so radiant with the magic of rainbow imagery, so filled with word-melody and spell-binding rhythm and so charged with sublime mantric truths, that we feel like losing ourselves completely in it—not only in his magnum opus, the epic poem, *Savitri*, but in his short, long, light, heavy, incomprehensible, crystal clear poems too, some two hundred and twenty-five or more in number. In addition, there are his verse plays, such as, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Rodogune*, etc.—all of which contain high poetry.

In this essay I shall touch upon only a small fraction of his vast output. There too I shall confine myself only to his *Collected Poems*. But before I begin I would like to share a bit of information with my readers. The English word "poet" comes from the Greek "poietes" meaning creator. Sri Aurobindo was not only the Seer who created beautiful poetry, but he was a creator of poets too.

In the early days of the Ashram how many non-poets were inspired by him to light their poetic torch from his fire! Hour after sleepless hour, with infinite patience he used to correct and polish the many crude attempts of his disciples; he commented on their merit and even taught them by himself writing poems in unusual metres. Here I quote one such example which has all the flavour and mysticism of a Japanese Haiku:

In some faint dawn,
In some dim eve,
 Like a gesture of Light,
 Like a dream of delight
Thou comst nearer and nearer to me.

The earliest poems of Sri Aurobindo included in the *Collected Poems* are the ones written in England between his eighteenth and twentieth year. In these poems we discern the influence of Greek, Latin and English literature as well as the social and political atmosphere of the age. How deeply he sympathised with Irish Nationalism we realise from his "Hic Jacet" (Glasnevin Cemetery), "Charles Stewart Parnell" and "Lines on Ireland",—this last being written in 1896, three years after his return to India.

Here he writes about Ireland:

...that light was she
In whom races of weaker destiny
Their beauteous image of rebellion saw...

We know that immediately after returning to India, Sri Aurobindo devoted himself wholeheartedly to studying Bengali and mastering Sanskrit. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the works of Kalidasa and other Sanskrit poets he studied in the original. In his poem "Envoi" Sri Aurobindo has hinted at the reason behind a Greek and Latin scholar developing such a deep passion for Indian literature and culture:

...in Sicilian olive groves no more
Or seldom must my footprints now be seen,
Nor tread Athenian lanes, nor yet explore
Parnassus or thy voiceful shores, O Hippocrene.

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

Around this time, circa 1894, he wrote a few poems on Rishi Bankim and Madhusudan Dutt, both of whom he held in high esteem. Paying tribute to the genius of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, he wrote :

O plains, O hills, O rivers of sweet Bengal,
O land of love and flowers, the spring-bird's call
And southern wind are sweet among your trees:
Your poet's words are sweeter far than these.
Your heart was this man's heart. Subtly he knew
The beauty and divinity in you....
He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.

And he summed up the genius of Michael Madhusudan in these words:

No human hands such notes ambrosial moved;
These accents are not of the imperfect earth;
Rather the god was voiceful in their birth,
The god himself of the enchanting flute,
The god himself took up thy pen and wrote.

In his Integral Yoga, Karma Yoga plays a very important role and Sri Aurobindo taught the sadhaks through his own example. His student life in England, his professional life in Baroda, his political career in Calcutta and his Yoga practice in Pondicherry—all were founded on stern, intense, tireless toil. Everybody in the Ashram knows how after the whole day's work he would stay awake till two or three o'clock in the morning to reply

patiently and lovingly to all the letters of the disciples. And yet in the midst of all this work he found time to write birthday poems to his cousins. “The Spring Child” was addressed to Basanti on her birthday. The changing seasons, the beauty of buds and flowers make up the theme of this poem. In life spring is not ever-lasting, summer and autumn take its place, and yet, says Sri Aurobindo:

Yet I deem that her soul with soft insistence
Shall guard through all change the sweet existence
And charm of Spring.

“To R. On Her Birthday” is much more thought provoking. The main motif of the poem is the sea. Life like a wave rises from the depths of the sea and rushes towards the shore:

The power that moves it is the Ocean’s force
Invincible, eternal, free...

Again, our life is like a boat

Always our Captain holds the rudder well,
He does not sleep....
Even those who sink in the victorious flood,
Where do they sink? Into His breast.
He who to some gives victory, joy and good,
To some gives rest.

The students of our Centre of Education make their first acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo’s poetry through his “Revelation”, “Invitation”, “Who”, “God”, “A God’s Labour”, “A Tree” and a few other similar poems. They are not, none of them, poems for teenagers, i.e., easy to understand, but they have such a magical grace in their rhythm, such beauty of imagery and such an alluring and apparently simple thought content, that young minds are readily attracted to them. Note the poem “Revelation”:

Someone leaping from the rocks
Past me ran with wind-blown locks
Like a startled bright surmise
Visible to mortal eyes...

The rhythm and music of the lines are very pleasing to the ear but the subject matter is far from simple; it is deeply mystical, if not outright spiritual. Here Sri Aurobindo has described a spiritual experience: he has seen a divine being who has emerged for a moment from behind the veil (the veil that hides divine mysteries?) like a flash of lightning and then disappeared as suddenly. Who is this goddess? The poet merely gives a vague hint,

a “bright surmise”, and leaves the rest to our imagination and future metaphysical experience, for this goddess cannot be conceived by “man’s corporeal mind”.

The poem “Invitation” too has an equally attractive rhythm:

With wind and the weather beating round me
 Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
 Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
 Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?

But what charms us most is the poem’s bare, wide, snow-white beauty. Similes and metaphors are conspicuous by their absence and yet the whole poem is metaphorical. The poet is inviting the seeker of God to accompany him on his spiritual adventure. He warns that the journey is solitary, difficult, dangerous, and hints at the razor’s edge nature of the path:

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
 I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
 Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
 Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.

In sharp contrast is the beauty of one of Sri Aurobindo’s most well-known poems, “Who”. The poem is chiefly phanopoeic, i.e., rich in imagery. The poet has painted picture after vivid picture in each stanza which helps us to see intimately something of the dynamic aspect of the all-creative, all-pervasive, omnipotent Divine.

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,
 Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
 When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,
 Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?

After asking these questions Sri Aurobindo himself provides the answers:

In the pattern and bloom of the flowers He is woven,
 In the luminous net of the stars He is caught....
 The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven,
 Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl....
 All music is only the sound of His laughter,
 All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
 Our lives are His heart-beats...

And finally Sri Aurobindo describes Him in these revelatory words:

It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless,
 And into the midnight His shadow is thrown;
 When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,
 He was seated within it immense and alone.

The whole poem vibrates with beauty—of thought, imagery and music. I have quoted at such length only because I wanted my readers to get the full impact of Sri Aurobindo's immortal words and taste their nectar.

"A God's Labour" is another much appreciated poem of the Master. Here too, although we can easily make out the central theme, if we delve a little deeper we realise that it is not at all simple. The poem teems with images, similes and metaphors whose origin is without doubt some occult or spiritual world.

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
 Between the gold and the blue...

This silver air, this gold and blue cannot be ignored as a mere play of poetic imagination, especially since we know the deep inner significance of colours. White is the colour of the light of the Mother's consciousness. Blue is the fundamental colour of the Ananda. Pale blue denotes Illumined Mind and whitish blue Sri Krishna's light. The golden light is the light from the Supermind. Therefore these dreams are the dreams of the transformation of the earth, which the god or the Avatar has built around the Divine Mother and stored them in Her spiritual consciousness between the Supramental and Overmental planes.

To dream is easy but to realise it requires intense tapasya. Even a god who wishes to build a rainbow bridge marrying the soil to the sky, has to labour hard, bear the burden of earthly nature, tread the dolorous way and face the ruthless attacks of the adverse forces. And what is his reward?

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
 To bring the fire to man;
 But the hate of hell and human spite
 Are my meed since the world began.

Sri Aurobindo explains the cause of man's ingratitude in this manner:

He harbours within him a grisly Elf
 Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
 And from all things glad and pure...

Some of the images in this poem do shake our disposition with thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls:

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
 At the very root of things
 Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
 On the dragon's outspread wings.

In the next three stanzas Sri Aurobindo hints at his *sadhana* as a result of which

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
 And the undying suns here burn...

"A God's Labour" is classed as a short poem even though it is a poem of 120 lines. Among the longer poems we have "Baji Prabhou" (500 lines), "Love and Death" (around 1100 lines), "Urvasie" (some 1500 lines) and other narrative poems.

Based on Maratha history, "Baji Prabhou" is a very inspiring poem. Baji's heroic self-sacrifice for the motherland while holding the Pass of Rangana—"the tiger-throated gorge"—against impossible odds, moves us to the very depths of our being. Sri Aurobindo's vivid description of the furious battle between the Marathas and the Moguls makes us feel as though he were an eyewitness like Sanjay describing the Kurukshetra war to Dhritarashtra. His similes and metaphors have a cameo-like quality. He describes the battlefield with the words: "Where Death was singing mid the laughter of the swords!" Even such an unromantic object as a bullet becomes a thing of beauty when we hear of the "assault fire-winged of bullets" and

...Active they thronged
 Humming like bees and stung strong lives to death.

Please note the four words,—thronged, humming, stung and strong. All these words have very short vowels and metallic consonants, suggesting not only the clash of metal but also the bustle and excitement of the battlefield. But the greatness of "Baji Prabhou" is not limited to its theme, imagery, music and astounding words. It contains a great philosophy which can be the master light of all our seeing. Baji asserts:

...not in this living net
 Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
 Is a man's manhood seated. God within
 Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
 Can, if He will, show equal godhead....
 ...We but employ
 Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh
 Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm.

"Love and Death" and "Urvasie" are based on the legends of the Mahabharata. While telling the story of the immortal love of the celestial nymph Urvasie and the mortal king

Pururavus, Sri Aurobindo lets us experience the whole gamut of their emotions of love, union, separation and, after years of *tapasya*, their final reunion in heaven. But he does not stop there; through this love story he sings the glory of ancient Aryavarta in such terms that we feel proud to be Indians.

Every line of “Love and Death” throbs with a sweet passion. The sudden untimely death of Priyuvada overwhelms the youthful Ruru:

He felt the bright indifference of earth
 And all the lonely uselessness of pain....
 And his heart cried in him as when a fire
 Roars through wide forests and the branches cry
 Burning towards heaven in torture glorious.
 ...he raised
 His young pure face all solemnised with pain,
 Voiceless. Then Fate was shaken, and the Gods
 Grieved for him, of his silence grown afraid.

In this poem Sri Aurobindo has given us an alluring description of Kama, the Indian god of love:

...a golden boy,
 Half-naked, with bright limbs all beautiful—
 Delicate they were, in sweetness absolute:
 For every gleam and every soft strong curve
 Magically compelled the eye, and smote
 The heart to weakness. In his hands he swung
 A bow...
 ...the string moved and murmured like many bees,
 And nameless fragrance made the casual air
 A peril.

The dire, relentless Death has always waged a war against the gentle, delicate Love. He is Yama, the ruthless observer of law, he is Dharma, the righteous, he is “Critanta, who ends all things and at last Himself shall end.” Tears cannot melt his stony heart, prayers cannot move him, gifts do not appease him. His sole craving is for life. He is the preserver of the law and order of the universe. Compassionate and lethal are his eyes. Misty, cold, dispassionate, silent is his realm. Therefore he resists the youthful, anarchic power of the warm, great Love and his vernal jurisdiction:

But sacrifice
 Is stronger, nor may law of Hell or Heaven
 Its fierce effectual action supercede.

Through his supreme sacrifice Ruru regains his beloved Priyumvada.

While reading “Love and Death” we are, quite naturally, deeply stirred by the suffering of the lovers separated by cruel Death. But what is unusual is that we are also led to sympathise with “the Shadow Antagonist” and realise the dire necessity behind the solitary existence of Death.

Sri Aurobindo has written a few tiny poems which are just perfect like Rajput miniatures—complete in every detail. In the poem “God”, he gives us the quintessence of the Divine:

Thou who disdainest not the worm to be
Nor even the clod...

and

Master of all who work and rule and know,
 Servant of Love!

In “A Tree” he uses just four words to express the mystic reality of a tree:

Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

Then, with superb insight, he says:

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.

In “Reminiscence” Sri Aurobindo speaks of the realisation of the Soul as *soham*—I am He. In simple unornamented language he declares :

My soul arose at dawn...
It beheld the stars
Born from a thought and knew how being prepares.
Then I remembered how I woke from sleep
And made the skies, built earth, formed Ocean deep.

(To be continued)

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

THE SUPRAMENTAL MAHASHAKTI

THE Sunlit Path is the path of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. The foundation of this path is the psychic aspiration and its opening to the Mother. And the goal, the guide, the force behind this path is the Mother herself. Left to ourselves we could never have known the truth of the Mother; but Sri Aurobindo has revealed, as a token of his supreme love for Earth and Man, the deepest truths of the Mother in his jewel of a book, *The Mother*. I quote a relevant portion from this book:

“Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhutis and shall found in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother. To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, pp. 25-26)

Since the beginning of creation, it is these four aspects of the Mother that have stood in front for Her work in this universe. It is interesting to note that each one of Her aspects has dominated one of the Chaturyugas. The first yuga, Satya Yuga, was dominated by Maheshwari; the second one, the Treta Yuga, by Mahakali; the third, the Dwapara Yuga, by Mahalakshmi, and, the present Kali Yuga is dominated by Mahasaraswati. Mahasaraswati is supposed to be the youngest of the four. She is the youngest because her action comes at the final stage. Maheshwari lays down the general outlines of the world—how it ought to be and what is its future development etc.; Mahakali seems to put these general outlines into action; Mahalakshmi brings about a greater unity and harmony between all these forces. And Mahasaraswati brings in perfection in all the works. Explaining as to why Mahasaraswati is considered to be the last, the Mother said, “These aspects are like the attributes of the Mother, which manifested in succession according to the necessities of the work; and the necessity of perfection was the last, so she is the youngest.” (*CWM*, Vol. 6, p. 289)

This becomes pretty obvious to us if we were to see how our modern age is attempting to perfect Matter through the fields of science. The great stress on work and Matter today is not without a meaning and a rhythm. In spite of the negative effects of Materialism, there is a tremendous positive work that is taking place. Wherever there is a true attempt at perfection—there is the work of Mahasaraswati!

Regarding these four aspects I had once written to the Mother, in 1967, because I was planning to make a painting of these four aspects of the Mother and give it to her as my birthday offering. I wrote, “Ma, please help me to have a clear representation of the four aspects of the Mother as described by Sri Aurobindo in his book, *The Mother*.” She replied, “Above the overmind, in the supramental region, in the higher regions, the aspects of the Mother have very simple forms and don’t have multiple limbs. All the details and complications are appearances mostly added by men in order to give a symbolic expression to invisible qualities.” So when humans have added these multiple limbs, it is more a symbolic gesture to show the different capacities and powers of the different gods.

And again, in 1969, I was a bit perturbed by the way festivals were celebrated in India. Disturbed, in the sense that I did not find much truth in them. I felt that people were not really concentrating on the truth of the festivals and were instead more interested in the pomp and fun that went with them. I wrote to the Mother, “Mother, what is the origin, significance and purpose of festivals such as Deepavali, Holi and also some of the Western festivals? On these days do gods respond more to human aspiration? Thirdly, what is the connection between the inner truth and the external functions of these festivals? Lastly, what should be our attitude towards these festivals?” The Mother’s reply was: “Men like festivals.” Again I asked her, “In the answer to my question about the significance of festivals you wrote to me ‘Men like festivals’. Does it then mean that they are men’s fancy and whim? Have they no meaning and no utility?” Mother answered, “It is men who give a meaning to festivals in order to legitimise their presence.” That will tell you the importance of festivals in the East or the West, in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Another letter from the Mother makes their standpoint very clear. “Those who still believe in gods can still continue to worship them if they feel like it. But they must know that this creed and this worship has nothing to do with the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and no connection whatever with the supramental realisation.” This is only to clarify the relation of the four aspects of the Mother to the different festivals that have come up in their name. The festivals have no connection with the supramental realisation which is the work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo here upon earth.

Sri Aurobindo writes, “There are other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, but they were more difficult to bring down and have not stood out in front with so much prominence in the evolution of the earth-spirit.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, p. 35) We don’t know what these personalities are. However, there could be a hint of these personalities when she explained about one of her own photographs. She said, “In every form I am there. It depends on the photograph. It depends on many things, for in each photo I am different. For each individual to whom I give it, is a different aspect of myself...”

“For one person it may be the aspect of kindness, for another it may be the aspect of calm, of perfect serenity; or it may be that of mercy, compassion, cosmic truth, of eternal infinite consciousness. Or else the aspect of power, of humility, of divine sweetness and so on which may manifest in the same photograph....”(Sweet Mother, Part 1, p. 10) So,

even if all of you are looking at the same photograph, she may be responding differently according to your own need, your inner need, the overall need of your evolution, the need of the moment—all things put together. She says in the same photo she could be any one of these aspects or all of these: “My child, I am there in the photos. Exactly as you see me here now: the whole being like this, I am there in the photos. What I am is there in the photos. Only, in each photo a different aspect of myself is revealed. All the same it is I who am there.” (*Ibid.*)

However, “the central consciousness here in the material world is that of the Mahashakti.” What should be understood is that although the Mother has put forth these four aspects, and although she may come to us in any of these aspects, originally She is the central consciousness, She is the Mahashakti. And as the Mahashakti, in the material world, She always has the power to control these different aspects though they are also quite independent personalities and act according to their own aspirations. Yet they are always subject to the Mahashakti’s control. To exemplify this case, the Mother once narrated: “If Kali decides that she is going to intervene and the Mahashakti, who has naturally a much more total and general vision of things, sees that the moment for intervention is not opportune or that it is too soon, well, she can very easily put a pressure upon Mahakali and tell her, ‘Keep quiet.’ And the other is obliged to keep quiet; and yet she acts quite independently.” (*CWM*, Vol. 6, p. 290)

Thus, although each of these four aspects is independent, the Mother is the central consciousness who can command and control them whenever necessary. A well-known incident is that of Kali. During World War II, Kali had come to the Mother’s room and started dancing a furious dance, shouting “Paris will be destroyed”. The Mother looked at her and said, “No, Paris will not be destroyed.” She put a stop to what Kali was trying to do. The news came the next day that Paris was saved. The Germans were marching into Paris and suddenly, for no apparent reason, the German army turned around and marched off. The Mother later explained that when she said, “No”, her “No” created a reversal of the situation. That occurred because the centre of Paris was so deserted that the Germans thought they were going to face an ambush. They saw no one, there was no resistance at all, and there was a sudden fear in them that there could be an ambush and they turned around and went away. And the Mother said that was the moment when she had said “No!” to Kali.

That is how the Mother, as the Mahashakti, can control her own aspects and change the course of events. Not that her aspects don’t have the wisdom, but she explains that each one of her aspects sees from its own angle, whereas the supreme Mother, who has all the aspects in her, has a global vision of things. To give you another example. In the early 70s, goddess Durga appeared before the Mother. The Mother asked her, “Why don’t you worship the Lord instead of getting worshipped yourself?” Durga agreed and prayed to the Supreme, “Let me be your instrument.” That is, Durga agreed to what the Mother said, and instead of receiving the worship herself, she got merged with the Mother.

There is another interesting incident regarding the Mother’s personality of Ananda given in the booklet *The Mother*:

“There are among them Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation,—most of all one who is her Personality of that mysterious and powerful ecstasy and Ananda which flows from a supreme divine Love, the Ananda that alone can heal the gulf between the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter, the Ananda that holds the key of a wonderful divinest Life and even now supports from its secrecies the work of all the other Powers of the universe.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, pp. 35-36)

Of those personalities which are required for the completion of the supramental manifestation, the most powerful is that of Ananda, said the Mother in 1954. She says that the Ananda personality “*has come*, bringing with her a splendour of power and love, an intensity of divine joy unknown to the earth so far.

“The physical atmosphere was completely changed by it, saturated with new and marvellous possibilities....

“But for her to be able to settle and act down here, she needed to meet with at least a minimum of receptivity, to find at least one human being having the requisite qualities in the vital and physical nature, a kind of super-Parsifal endowed with a spontaneous and integral purity, but at the same time having a strong and balanced body in order to bear the intensity of the Ananda she had brought without giving way.

“Till now she has not obtained what was necessary. Men obstinately remain men and do not want to or cannot become supermen. They can only receive and express a love cut to their measure—a human love! And the marvellous joy of the divine Ananda escapes their perception”. (*CWM*, Vol. 6, p. 291-92)

“But after all, to tell the truth, I think you have such an easy life that you don’t take much trouble!... Are there many among you who really feel *an intense need* to find your psychic being? to know what you really are, what you have to do, why you are here? One just goes on living or even complains when things are not too easy. And then one takes like that things as they come, and sometimes, if some aspiration arises and one meets a difficulty in oneself, one says, ‘Oh, Mother is there, she will manage this for me’, and then thinks of something else!” (*Ibid.*, p. 296)

This example was given only in order to highlight the fact that for all our suffering and all our problems we cannot ever blame the Divine. It is we who have invited the suffering upon ourselves. And, maybe, something in us is attached to our own suffering and sorrow. It is the Mother who has brought down the power, the aspect of Ananda so that the world can be redeemed and the sorrow and suffering can be eliminated. But, as she says, when she brings in the supreme power of Ananda, there is hardly a single being ready to receive her. Whose fault is it? There is not enough psychic aspiration in us so that we can prepare ourselves for these higher forces. We all seem to be wallowing in our own sorrow and suffering, and it is only from time to time that we seem to send up a cry for help to the Divine. Otherwise, most of the time we even forget the existence of the Divine himself!

Sri Aurobindo affirms, “But human nature bounded, egoistic and obscure is inapt to receive these great Presences or to support their mighty action. Only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life

and body, can those other rarer Powers manifest in the earth movement and the supramental action become possible.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, p. 36) The Mahashakti, the Divine Shakti in “the sense of Chit-Tapas”, the Creative Power, the Creative Consciousness, is in reality the Universal Mother and it is this aspect of “the one original transcendent Shakti” who “works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made.” (*Ibid.*, p. 21)

Sri Aurobindo explains that this Mother to whom we pray for guidance and grace, is the individual aspect of that “one supreme transcendent Shakti” known in the Vedas as Aditi. So, this individual Mother known to us, whom some of us here have seen, is the incarnation of the supreme Aditi. She has also this universal aspect, we call her the Divine Shakti, Mahashakti.

And it is this Divine Mahashakti who creates the world. “But there are many planes of her creation, many steps of the Divine Shakti. At the summit of this manifestation...” there are many worlds of Satyaloka, Chaitanyaloka and Anandaloka “over which the Mother stands as the unveiled eternal Power.... Nearer to us are the worlds of a perfect supramental creation in which the Mother is the supramental Mahashakti, a Power of divine omniscient Will and omnipotent Knowledge.... But here where we dwell are the worlds of the Ignorance, worlds of mind and life and body separated in consciousness from their source... This too with all its obscurity and struggle and imperfection is upheld by the Universal Mother... the Mahashakti.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, pp. 22-23)

(Note: Last of a series of talks on the Sunlit Path given at the Hall of Harmony, S.A.I.C.E. Pondicherry, on 20-2-2000)

(To be continued)

ANANDA REDDY

It [the physical mind] is the instrument of understanding and ordered action on physical things. Only instead of being obscure and ignorant and fumbling as now or else guided only by an external knowledge it has to become conscious of the Divine and to act in accordance with an inner light, will and knowledge putting itself into contact and an understanding unity with the physical world.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1266)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

THE most ambitious and the most nobly evocative of ‘Nine Poems’ is *Ahana*, in rhymed hexameters. *Ahana*, a long poem of over five hundred lines, is placed at the end of the section ‘Nine Poems’, in the second volume of Sri Aurobindo’s *Collected Poems and Plays* (1942). It was written originally at Pondicherry, when Sri Aurobindo already had “a sure basis, a wide knowledge, and some mastery of the secret”; and it was first published along with other poems, in 1915. However, it was later “enlarged and recast”, and it is this new final version that is included in the Collected Edition. It is therefore legitimate to look upon *Ahana* as somewhat of a palimpsest, a convenient bridge between the imaginative, sensuous and intellectually alert poet of *Urvashie, Love and Death* and *Perseus the Deliverer* on the one hand and the yogin-singer of the *Rose of God* on the other.

Ahana is important for another reason as well. It is as good as a key—a poetic key, if you will—to the luminous citadel of *The Life Divine*, or, to vary the metaphor, it is a ticket-of-entry as it were, giving the fortunate owner the right and the freedom and the strength to move in the splendorous halls and winding corridors, to gaze on the shining tapestries, to follow the austere heaven-pointing spiral of aspiration, to struggle up the steep staircase of effort, to arrive at last at its sun-lit gold-white-tinged terrace of total apprehension. In a word, *Ahana* is an astounding summary of Sri Aurobindo’s thought and poetry, and it holds within its lucent stream, in clear, strong solution, both a history and a criticism, a looking back and a forging forward. It is almost an Aurobindonian poetic encyclopaedia in dazzling miniature.

The earlier (1915) *The Descent of Ahana*, now included in volume 5 (*Collected Poems*) of the centenary library edition, was in two parts, both in dialogue form.

Ahana is shown as a being apparently reluctant to return from her transcendent retreat to the turbulent ways and wants of the world. The voices of earth, however, who are the Ancients of Knowledge, the sons of the Morning, tell her that She cannot choose but must submit to the prayers and purposes of the world. It may be imperfect, but the earth carries the seeds of perfection. Joyless it may be, but it is instinct with the potentiality of bliss, and though earthly is yet capable of the forms, colours and perfumes of the red roses of which heavenly voices plead!

Earth has her godheads; the Tritons sway on the toss of the billows,
Emerald locks of the Nereids stream on their foam-crested pillows,—
Dryads peer out from the branches, Naiads glance up from the waters;
High are her flame-points of joy and the gods are ensnared by her daughters.¹

Music is here of the fife and the flute and the lyre and the timbal,
Wind in the forests, bees in the grove,—spring’s ardent symbol
Thrilling, the cry of the cuckoo; the nightingale sings in the branches,
Human laughter is heard and the cattle low in the ranches.²

Ahana is the mighty goddess, She is Ashtarothe, She is Aphrodite. What need for her, then, to return to the earth. What attractions there, what compensations? In answer, the voices raise a compulsive chorus, greeting her as Diana, Usha, Delight, Latona, Yakshini, Gandharvi, Durga, hundred-ecstasied woman, Daughter of Heaven, and her descent is peremptorily invoked:

“Come from thy summits, Ahana, come! Our desire unrelenting
Hales thee down from God and He smiles at thee sweetly consenting.
Lo, she is hurried down and the regions live in her tresses.
Worlds, she descends to you! Peoples, she nears with her mighty caresses.
Man in his sojourn, Gods in their going, Titans exultant
Thrill with thy fall, O Ahana, and wait for the godhead resultant.”³

“Calm like a goddess, alarmed like a bride”, Ahana is in readiness to descend, though not actually descending. But the moment has almost come. In the second part, following a further pull of irresistible prayer from the “Voice of sensuous mortal”, Ahana descends at last, and prepares to guide Man anew to Brindavan.

It is riotously magnificent as poetry and is very little weighted with philosophy; it is more like Tagore’s *Urvashi*, and Ahana is invoked tantalisingly as Woman and Goddess, as Beauty and Love, as rapture and as Harlot and Virgin, and as the bane and boon of all.

The second Part of *The Descent of Ahana* is less Dionysian, more Apollonian, and it is this section that is recast and elaborated and infused with illumined thought as the Song of Dawn, *Ahana*, that appeared in 1942 in *Collected Poems and Plays*.

Ahana has a perceptive dramatic cast, ‘Ahana’ is Dawn—“the Dawn of God”—and her advent is the occasion for universal rejoicings. As she appeared on the mountains of the East, the Hunters of Joy greet her first, and behind them are the Seekers after Knowledge and the climbers in quest of Power also. Even at its most puissant, human power is half-rooted in the earth-crust, human knowledge at its most luminous is yet half-blinding because of its exuberance, and only Joy born of Love has the undimmed vision to recognise and not deny the dawning Light. It is appropriate therefore that the Hunters of Joy should lead the pilgrim-throng and hymn their hallelujah of praise and welcome replete with evocations of sound and colour and inwrought with felicities of *dhvani*:

Vision delightful alone on the hills whom the silences cover,
Closer yet lean to mortality; human, stoop to thy lover....
Tread through the edges of dawn, over twilight’s grey-lidded-margin;
Heal earth’s unease with thy feet, O heaven-born delicate virgin.⁴

The hour has arrived at last, and the labour of the ages is over; man must no more be diverted from God, nor heaven be separated from the earth, and the Divine should lean closer to man and respond to his love. As an exordium, the first ten lines of *Ahana* are

splendidly articulate with their opulence of apt imagery.

Separated on earth from their divine source, the Hunters of Joy are nevertheless conscious of their origin; but the separation has made them earth-bound and reduced their life to a brief incompleteness. Perhaps the carefree gods are incomplete too, after a fashion, even like incomplete men afflicted with desire and hovering death. Ahana should draw close “to the breast of our mortal desire”, for the earth too has a part to play in forging of the final cosmic harmony. No mere desert is our earth, for she has “beatitudes warmer than heaven’s”, and she has her own heritage of sight and sound.

Earth is indeed crammed with loveliness, and it cannot all be a vain emptiness, an enormous futility. Earth declaims in Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Heavens*:

I, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven;
 My lonely sorrow surpasses its rose-joys,
 A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven;—
 My dumbness fills with echoes of a far Voice.⁵

Earth’s lap has pleasures of her own—and pains no less. The cycle of birth and death and birth again strikes us at first as an endless futility. But one day the gods shall meet men half way, and a new harmony shall be established here.

The materialist now comes forward and exhibits “the reverse of the coin”. Not the Spirit, but Matter, is the one sole Reality. The “hoax, the Spirit can impose upon us no more”. The story of creation is laid bare before us. The materialist no doubt argues that first life and then mind have evolved out of inconscient matter and given rise to the million forms of earth-life covered by the extremes of inanimate matter and Homo sapiens. But the snag is just this: Can life issue out of matter unless it is already there? Nothing can come out of nothing. Does it not follow, then, that if life emerges as an active principle of terrestrial existence, it has already been there all the time, however veiled or obscured, in inconscient matter. There can be thus no evolution unless it has been preceded by the contrary process of involution. Although the pessimist, the sceptic and the stoic reject the vision of a divine future possibility, and are content to forge a limited destiny for themselves, the dreamers have continued to dream and have pinned their faith on man’s evolutionary future. Petal by petal, the hidden powers open out with their lure and fragrance, and although humanity has yet to march through “whirl-wind and death-blast and storm-race” the forward movement has been steadily maintained; and what are agonies but austere disciplines, what are fallings but fresh spring-boards, and what are failings but needed felicities. Clear and strident is the Divine Charter whose accents permit no misunderstanding:

Mortals, your end is beatitude, rapture eternal his meaning:
 Joy, which he most now denies, is his purpose: the hedges, the screening
 Were but the rules of his play; his denials came to lure farther.⁶

Suffering too is the grace of God, it is the hammer of God raining refining blows on the anvil, beating us to the desired shape. If Rudra is mighty and fierce and ruthless, Shiva whispers in his tenderness his murmurs of understanding and pity. Wherefore are we afraid, then? Of whom are we afraid?

Time was when, in the Garden of Eden, man and woman lived happily:

Adam, the goodliest man of men since born,
His sons; the fairest of her daughters, Eve.⁷

Ahana is charmed by the “voice of the sensual mortal”—his “heart of eternal longing” has pursued and won her—his age-long tribulations and travail have pierced her armour and awakened her pity. She makes the decisive god-appointed motion and vouchsafes the prayed-for divine-human response:

But I descend at last....
Lo, I come, and behind me Knowledge descends and with thunder
Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom
Joy to thy arms.⁸

(To be continued)

(Adapted by Nilima Das from K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's
Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history)

References

1. *SABCL*, Vol. 5, p. 524.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 544.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 575.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 531.
7. *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, lines: 323-24.
8. *SABCL*, Vol. 5, pp. 535-36.

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of January 2004)

Songs of Tagore: the Metaphor of Beyonding - III

TAGORE'S shorter lyrics are obviously more effective than the longer ones, which sometimes aim at an epic style and fail miserably, simply because his genius is far from the Epic. It is in the shorter lyrics, especially meant to be sung, that he appears to us as a remarkable genius. Call him a Butterfly or a Chameleon, he is a strange angel tasting the multiple varieties of the great Essence and expressing his delight and pain as a taster. He is never out of touch, he is charmed by the sights and smells spread around him; he is never tired of his search for the keys through his songs. In song no. 46 of the Worship phase in *Gitobitan*, he is aspiring for an Aurobindonian calm and blending that slowed-down gesture with the emotional mood of Chandidasa. Let me try a translation—

Slow my Friend, very slowly
let me walk up to your lonely temple.
I don't know the way,
there is not a drop of light anywhere,
it is dark replacing dark
inside out.
I've just received
the sound of your footsteps
in this dense forest.

Slow my Friend, very slowly
let me walk alongside the edge of the dark.
I'll walk in the night
following the signal of your breeze,
I've received today
the smell of your clothes
in this breeze of the Spring.¹

Sri Aurobindo would have called it half-thought. Yet it is thought still, living, at least a genuine memory of our true being that pines for the far away smell, which pierces open the mud-wall of our self from time to time. For Tagore, it becomes an acute smell quite often, so acute that only in songs he hopes to find some relief, some release from the bondage of his little self. One drop of lyric relaxes his tension of death, desire and incapacity. He wakes up to listen to that invitation to go far, beyond the seas into a secret continent. He wakes up with an attitude of response telling the caller that he has cast aside the burden, that he wishes to be taken into the silent night to quench his thirst. All

his words will float away with the tune of the caller.

In a song running to eighteen lines (Worship no. 59, *Gitobitan*), Tagore's perception of motiveless love is in line with the grand principle of love expressed by Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

I wish to give you something
even if you don't need it.
When I saw you,
you were roaming about
alone in the lonely dense forest
in the dark.
Then I wished to light a lamp
on your path,
even if you didn't need it.²

Those who deny the word 'spiritual' to Tagore, must consider the approving words of Sri Aurobindo on the finer emotional motives of even the common man, who rises above the common in those rare moments of consciousness:

It is so that life can be changed into worship,—by putting behind it the spirit of a transcendent and universal love, the seeking of oneness, the sense of oneness; by making each act a symbol, an expression of Godward emotion or a relation with the Divine; by turning all we do into an act of worship, an act of the soul's communion, the mind's understanding, the life's obedience, the heart's surrender.³

Tagore's songs thus become a symbol, an expression and a positive step taken towards the God-province. The symbol is legitimate, because it is an act of sincere offering. Each song in the Worship phase in *Gitobitan* is an example of sincerity; but there are some, which are just smells of a sacred incense. Everything is taken, nothing is refused. Rabindra-sangeet is sacred action, and the confirmation of such works is very clear in the *Gita*. The song is synonymous with the examples of a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a cup of water, in fact, anything which is offered with devotion. But then, it is something more, a very precious gift of love, a gift which has come from the Divine, who wishes to get back the same thing from the human individual. Receiving the song from the Lord, Tagore returns that as a gift of love. It is a strange love-game of songs. This alone will prove why Sri Aurobindo found in Tagore a wayfarer to the Divine. Tagore's song is an action done under the spell of Godward emotion. Even when he diverges in the Nature-lyrics, the love lyrics and the lyrics on various other themes, he can always come back through his own queer ways or he can achieve a refined aesthetics, creating his own religion. Tagore's very inspiration and respiration, his very heartbeats, are made conscious in him as the living rhythm of the universal love.

There are songs which have grown out of the dark night of the soul. That too confirms

the pilgrim march. There are frequent broodings over persistent spells of darkness. He wriggles as if in a cave of darkness. Darkness leads to further darkness. Obstacles stay for a long time. When will this darkness cease to burn? When will it be filled up with delight? “When will the flute of the All-Delight light up my soul? Well, let darkness be there encircling me, but let the great touch keep me awake in the midst of gloom.” This gesture shapes itself out in different songs.

Oblivion is pain. He sings of rest and distraction. But they are temporary failures for him. Once he has known the goal, he never loses its memory, the memory of a glorious future. He sees kindness in the apparent cruelty of the Divine. Who can receive the Great Light without preparing for it? The mouth of the jar must expand by the heat of suffering, and it is only then that the divine’s love may descend smoothly into the jar. Tagore seems to have known this Vedic concept of suffering. The Divine says ‘no’, because He loves to say ‘yes’ at the right moment and because the jar or the human body needs to expand to receive the divine juice. A premature consent will break the jar or the human body.

Too short lyrics lack the genuine fire of aspiration even when the tunes are set to them. Quite often, they are just musical exercises. They are minor poems by a great poet-singer, who just experiments with some Indian ragas. Tagore usually takes seven or eight lines to write a good poem as a song. Songs running to four or five lines are mostly dry poetry. They fail to image the sense of beyonding without the tunes.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitobitan* (1973) Kolkata, Visva-Bharati Granthan Bibhag, p. 25. (Translated by Goutam Ghosal.)
2. *Ibid.*, p. 30. (Translated by Goutam Ghosal.)
3. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 153.

THE 'AIR' WE BREATHE...

THERE is a 'compactness' in the air we breathe—an 'intensity' of many levels of the Real bearing upon us with the massiveness of a mighty action in the making...

We feel its 'presence'—settling in us and around us too. And feel it upholding the world in the manifoldness of its action. In the world's attempt to change...

Its 'presence' is visible and concrete in the forms and movements of 'matter' that is emerging. A new 'matter'... new in the density of 'light' that it contains and which it manifests—in our life, as daily occurrence. In the manner in which it moulds itself, expressing new powers of action and relation and structure. Forms of itself on which man's life on earth finds firm base of functioning and fresh creation—unforeseen and constant.

A sense of heightened anticipation is with us. In working with matter, we are led to the Spirit at its source! The 'wholeness' we sought at the 'summit' is found in the 'depths'!

There is a new world of matter that holds us in its thrall. A matter made of the stuff of the Spirit. And deeper and deeper, we move into another matrix of 'substance'.

A 'substance' that has a 'feel' and 'touch' and 'fragrance' unlike any other. A 'coherence' in its movement, an 'infallibility' in action—from the most minute detail to the structuring of the 'Whole'. And a 'substance' that has the 'molten density' of the fullness of *love*.

Is this Matter or is this Spirit? A 'substance' that delights our senses—but senses that are 'turned within' and rest in whatever is in its 'core'.

We breathe more powerfully this 'air' that surrounds us... the twelfth anniversary of the descent of the 'Supermind' approaches on February 29, 2004. We feel its presence in our midst—in the circling of the universe, and ourselves with it...

ASTER

The habit in the physical is obstinate and seems unchangeable because it always recurs—even when one thinks it is gone. But it is not really unchangeable; if the physical mind detaches itself, stands separate, refuses to accept it, then the habit in the physical begins to lose its force of repetition. Sometimes it goes slowly, sometimes (but this is less frequent) it stops suddenly and recurs no more.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1442)

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Human Cycle and *The Ideal of Human Unity*—these two books by Sri Aurobindo were published serially in the magazine *Arya* about thirty years ago. They were brought out in book form very recently. The author has made alterations where necessary, and has added a new chapter at the end of the second book.

We have undertaken the arduous task of introducing the ordinary reader to these two volumes in the firm conviction that no study of the Master's synthetic philosophy can be complete without knowing its applicability to life. All life is Yoga, Sri Aurobindo has told us often. But the saying is true not only of individual life, but of the corporate life of mankind as well. Of these two books under review, the author said in the *Arya* over thirty years ago by way of a general preface to his synthetic philosophy—"We start from the idea that humanity is moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race—and our aim has been to search for the spiritual, religious and other truth which can enlighten and guide the race in this movement and endeavour. We have tried in the *Synthesis of Yoga* to arrive at a synthetic view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual self-discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence. But this is an individual self-development, and therefore it was necessary to show too how our self-ideal can work out in the social life of mankind. In the *Psychology of Social Development** we have indicated how these truths affect the evolution of human society. In the *Ideal of Human Unity* we have taken the present trend of mankind towards a clear unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting to them in order that real human unity may be achieved."

The scope of the two works is thus clear. But so vast is the ground that has been covered, so comprehensive is the view that has been taken, so detailed has been the consideration of the various historical data relied on, that no perfunctory reading of the books is likely to be of any use. A certain amount of previous training would undoubtedly be helpful. But even when that is absent, the reader must make an honest attempt to follow the Master's lucid lines of reasoning and not take fright at a string of unfamiliar names to him such as Schleswig-Holstein, Alsace-Lorraine, Austro-Magyar, Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, Romanoff etc. Sri Aurobindo's language is, apart from its grandeur, so charming, so polite, that it will carry the reader along. No part of the two books is dry—the subject, the gradual blossoming out of man's corporate life, is entrancing and the luminous personality of the author never quite forsakes the devoted reader. A sentence like the following is brilliant, with its gorgeous sweep of the horizon, but to enjoy it truly, the reader must take the high flight with Sri Aurobindo as his inner guidance:

"Therefore the old status had to dissolve and disappear, in India into the longer and bureaucratic empires of the Gupta and the Maurya to which the Pathan, the Mogul and

* Later renamed *The Human Cycle*.

the Englishman succeeded, in the West into the vast military and commercial expansions achieved by Alexander, by the Carthaginian Oligarchy and by the Roman Republic and Empire.”

In considering the gradual evolution of human society Sri Aurobindo has given us four definite stages—the Symbolic, the Typal, the Conventional and the Rational and shown how man’s life has passed gradually from the earliest submental to the present day rational stage. In political evolution, the Master has indicated how man’s life has evolved from the family to the clan and tribe, from the clan and tribe to the nation, from the city and regional state to the nation state—how man has attempted throughout to transcend the narrower limits of a nation-unit and established empires, federations and leagues.

Before we go over the subject matter of the two books in some detail, it would be needful to indicate briefly the ultimate goal of man’s social and political progress as envisaged by the Master.

Speaking of the gradual advent of the Spiritual stage, he says that many new spiritual waves will probably come in the course of evolution with their special motives and disciplines, but they will only be steps in man’s progress and will never be wholly valid. “The one thing essential must take precedence, the conversion of the whole life of the human being to the lead of the Spirit.” For this, man as he is, the highly mentalised being, must be transformed to a creature divine. This is not only the need of the race, but the need and undoubted intention of Nature. This transformation will be integral of life as a whole and not piece-meal.

Even as the primitive insignificant living creature has risen to a high stage of intellectual mentality in man, so will the mental being of today ascend to a suprarational spiritual level. The pioneers on the higher plane will take up the whole human life for their province and proceed to divinise it. They will give a decisive turn to the progress of the race and lead it to a higher and higher spiritual level in a divine progress.

As to the ultimate goal of man’s political endeavours, it can only be achieved by a realisation of the triune principle of God, Freedom and Unity—God being the primary principle, for without him neither Freedom nor Unity can have a meaning on the spiritual level. From the commencement, man has been moving towards a larger and larger unit of corporate life. The tendency is perfectly clear even today. The Master declares explicitly that some form of world-union is necessary and inevitable in spite of “the disarranging features, and dangerous possibilities” that we see around us. Neither megalomania nor blind fanaticism is likely to be helpful to man. He has got to get over both these tendencies and there is no doubt that he will succeed some day. Rising to the life of the spirit is a slow process. A spiritual oneness creating oneness of the mind, but not dependent on the intellect in any way, would be the basis for the highest type of man’s corporate existence. Until man realises this oneness of the spirit, he must go on with his attempt to bring about unity by mechanical means. Dishonest political protestation, unscrupulous tactics, cruel and inhuman weapons will continue playing their part. “The higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in

themselves.” This is how the Yogic discipline of the individual connects up with the political destiny of the race.

We shall now go over the two books under review in some detail, indicating the steps by which man's collective life has arrived at its present stage. Let us take *The Human Cycle* first. In the nineteenth century human existence was looked at entirely from the point of view of physical science. Mind and Soul were not recognised as anything independent of matter. Thinking was looked upon as a material process, but of late, in Sri Aurobindo's words, a movement of emancipation from the obsession of physical science has set in. It has begun to be recognised that the historical development of man's life is determined not only by economic causes but by “profound psychological, even perhaps soul factors”. We have already referred to the four psychological stages accepted as a working hypothesis by the Master. It is necessary to know a little more about them. The first is symbolism, the symbol being of something hidden and mysterious behind his life and activities, the Gods. Out of this symbolism there developed easily the type with a corresponding ethical development and a social function. This second stage is, we see easily, pre-eminently mental and social or ethical and answers to the term of the Gita, “Gunakarmavibhagashah”. From the typical we pass on to the conventional stage when the division into types has become stereotyped. The great ethical and social ideals of the second stage endure for a time and then pass away leaving an urge which Sri Aurobindo calls the ideal of social honour. The division into four castes may be taken to illustrate what we mean. In the symbolic stage the conception of the Vedic sages was that the four orders represented the Divine as Knowledge, the Divine as Power, the Divine as Production and Enjoyment, and the Divine as Service and Obedience in human society. In the next stage, the four castes represented ideas of social honour—the honour of the Brahmin residing in purity, piety etc., the honour of the Kshatriya dwelling in courage, strength etc., the honour of the Vaishya living in skill in production, rectitude in dealing etc., and the honour of the Shudra in obedience and faithful service. In the conventional stage, the outward expression of the idea of honour tends to become more important than the inner spirit. “In the end”, as Sri Aurobindo says, “they remain more as a tradition in the thought and on the lips than a reality of the life.” Once this rigidity has set in, the need of maintaining an ethical type becomes secondary, even tertiary, and birth becomes the most important qualification. The old system becomes a name, a shell, a sham and must be dissolved in the crucible of the reason. When this has happened the stage has been set for the self-assertion of the individual, for the revolt of reason. Society enters into the fourth or rational stage.

And yet this conventional period is often very beautiful and attractive to the distant view of posterity by its precise order, symmetry, fine social architecture, the admirable subordination of its parts to a general and noble plan. We in India look back in the same way to our Hindu Satya Yuga when man had submitted his whole life, entirely, to the guidance of the Shastras. But this Golden Age was not all gold. Sri Aurobindo says that it was the copper age and not the true golden age, for the outer form prevailed and the spirit receded. There were always subsequent attempts to reconstitute the form but without

any success. The time-tendency was much too powerful. Of this we have had many examples in India, as well as in Christian Europe.

Ultimately, when the gap between convention and truth becomes intolerable, rational intellect intervenes and sweeps aside the tissues of formulae and mandates, seeks out the truth and instals it as the sole guide in man's affairs. This is the Age of Reason, "a necessary passage to the subjective period of humanity through which man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilisation."

(*To be continued*)

C. C. DUTT

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, August 15, 1950.)

In the ordinary life people accept the vital movements, anger, desire, greed, sex, etc. as natural, allowable and legitimate things, part of the human nature. Only so far as society discourages them or insists to keep them within fixed limits or subject to a decent restraint or measure, people try to control them so as to conform to the social standard of morality or rule of conduct. Here, on the contrary, as in all spiritual life, the conquest and complete mastery of these things is demanded. That is why the struggle is more felt, not because these things rise more strongly in sadhaks than in ordinary men, but because of the intensity of the struggle between the spiritual mind which demands control and the vital movements which rebel and want to continue in the new as they did in the old life. As for the idea that the sadhana raises up things of the kind, the only truth in that is this that, first, there are many things in the ordinary man of which he is not conscious, because the vital hides them from the mind and gratifies them without the mind realising what is the force that is moving the action—thus things that are done under the plea of altruism, philanthropy, service, etc. are largely moved by ego which hides itself behind these justifications; in yoga the secret motive has to be pulled out from behind the veil, exposed and got rid of.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1297)

THE INDIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of January 2004)

THIS brings us to an important lacuna in ancient Indian social thought. It has the spiritual ideal of Moksha for the individual but no clear idea or vision of the spiritual destiny of the collectivity. There was of course the collective ideal of Dharmarajya. But this is more of a moral than a spiritual ideal. The concept of Dharmarajya conceives an ideal society as the one which is regulated by moral and natural principles; it is a society in which each individual lives in perfect harmony with the self-law of his inborn and natural temperament, swadharma, and in doing so lives in spontaneous harmony with others and the society and the universal Nature. The path mapped out to reach this ideal is a fourfold social order in which each individual is assigned a fixed social function which is in harmony with his swadharma.

The Indian spiritual thought conceived the human individual essentially as a free, immortal and infinite soul. In its present condition it is in a state of forgetfulness of its essential nature and entangled in the net of ignorance of its egocentric individuality, but evolving through various stages of natural evolution towards the recovery of its true nature. This natural evolution of the individual can be accelerated by the specialised process of psycho-spiritual discipline which is what yoga is all about.

But the Indian social thought, for all practical purposes, viewed the individual primarily in terms of its social function and the entire society only as a field and training ground for his natural and psychological evolution. Once this training is over and the individual is ready for the higher spiritual life, he has to renounce life and society altogether and enter the forest or live on the mountain top or in the monastery for an exclusive pursuit of the highest spiritual aim of Moksha. So human society, all this great and fascinating collective endeavour of man, has no other meaning and purpose than educating and preparing the individual for the forest or the monastery.

But is this the highest truth of the social man and the destiny of the collectivity? The major defect of the ancient Indian social thought is that it tends to hedge the freedom and creative potentiality of the individual in the society within the boundaries of his social function as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. But an individual cannot be confined to his Brahminhood or Shudrahood. Each individual is a fourfold being and contains all the four faculties and powers of the chaturvarna in his soul and nature, though one particular power may dominate over the others giving a unique tinge to his personality. In every human being there is the thinking faculty with its urge to know and understand of the Brahmana, a faculty of will with its urge for power and mastery of the Kshatriya, the faculty of emotions and the vitality which in the collective life tends toward harmonious mutuality of the Vaisya and finally the faculties of the physical being of man with its urge for hard work and obedient and loyal service of the Shudra. The ancient Indian social thought, by confining the role of the social man to his inborn natural temperament tends to curtail the integral development of the individual in the society. For this fuller

development of the social man we have to enlarge the scope of the Indian social thought by bringing into it the deeper truth of the modern democratic ideals.

There cannot be any objection to the Indian insight that the social occupation of the individual should harmonise with his inborn natural temperament, which means in our broader conception the most dominant and developed power of his nature. But for the integral development of the individual in the society he must be given complete freedom and opportunity to develop and manifest not only the powers and faculties of his inborn natural temperament, but all the faculties of his soul and nature, his thought, feeling and will, his ethical, aesthetic, practical and spiritual powers. This means full recognition of the two central ideals of the modern democratic conception of the society but illumined with the deeper insight of the Indian ethos.

The first idea is the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and full development of which they are individually capable. Social development and well-being mean the development and well-being of each and every individual in the society and not merely the flourishing of some community in the mass which resolves itself really to the power and splendour of one or two classes while the rest are assigned to a bare function of service. This is an ideal which is now accepted fully by the modern, progressive mind of humanity.

We accept in principle this modern democratic conception of social development but with this corrective modification. In this modern conception, the individual is primarily an ego made up of his body, life and mind. The development of the individual means the development of the ego and its body, life and mind and their faculties. The practical result of such a conception is the competitive struggle for existence among the egos and the survival and prospering of not necessarily the fittest, but the most vitally strong, efficient and successful ego. But in our Indian conception, the individual is not an ego, but a soul or a spirit with a body; life and mind are the instruments of the spirit; development of the individual means primarily the development of the soul or spiritual dimension in man; and the development of the body, life and mind is only a means for self-expression of the evolving soul in life. Since the soul or spirit in man is an eternal portion of the transcendent and universal Self of all, the development of this spiritual dimension in man leads to a growing inner fraternity with all in the Unity of the spirit. The practical result of such a growing sense of inner Unity will be the replacement of competitive strife by a spontaneous expression of mutuality and harmony in the collective life of man.

The second idea of the modern democratic conception of the society is that the individual is not merely a social unit; he is not merely a member of a human pack or hive or ant-hill; he cannot be confined within the narrow boundaries of his social function. He is a free and unique individual with an individual thought, feeling, will, conscience, and initiative, which demand freedom, space and opportunity for self-expression. This should not be suppressed or relegated to the spiritual and cultural field as was done in ancient India; it has to be respected and permitted to express itself freely in the economic, social and political life. Here also we accept this idea in principle but again with a corrective modification.

In the modern conception, individual liberty means the right or liberty of the individual ego to assert its thought, will and conscience against or at the expense of the thought, will and conscience of others. Naturally it leads to tremendous conflict in the society. Modern democratic and capitalist thinkers tend to view conflict as a desirable thing conducive to creativity. This may be true upto a certain point. But a society based entirely on the self-assertion or “liberty” of the individual ego generates too much of avoidable and wasteful conflict which, when it goes beyond a certain point, may lead to collapse of the social order.

But in the Indian conception individual liberty means primarily the liberty of the soul or spirit in man to grow in harmony with the unique truth and law of its being. This brings us to an important and original contribution of Sri Aurobindo to Indian spiritual philosophy. According to Sri Aurobindo the highest spiritual self in man has two aspects or poises. First is the unborn and eternal Self beyond space and time, the Atman of the Upanishads for which there is no evolution. The other one is a unique spark of the Atman projected into space and time, and dwells in the innermost depth of the heart of every individual. This is the evolving spiritual element in man which grows by gaining experience in space and time through many births and finally develops into a unique spiritual person, harmoniously integrated with his mind, life and body. In fact, the unique truth and law and qualities of this evolving spiritual element in man is the true, essential, highest and permanent swabhava and swadharma of the individual. The inborn natural temperament of the ego-personality made of body, life and mind is not the highest swabhava and swadharma of the individual; it is only a temporary formation put forward by the soul in this birth. Even in the same birth this “inborn” psychological temperament of the ego-personality may undergo modification or change under the pressure of a psychological or spiritual discipline.

So in our Indian conception liberty means freedom of this soul or the unique eternal and evolving spiritual element in man to grow and express the truth, potentialities and law of its being. This truth and law, swabhava and swadharma of the spiritual nature of the soul is something infinitely larger and more flexible and many-sided than that of the natural temperament of the ego-personality; it contains the fourfold powers of the chaturvarna in perfect harmony, though as we have said earlier one of these powers may dominate over the others and determine the typical nature and quality of the swabhava of the soul-personality. The ideal and practice of liberty in the new social order of the future which the spiritual genius of India has to conceive and create will be based on this intuition of the spiritual individuality of the Soul and a discipline to bring it forward and manifest its potentialities in the individual and collective life of man. In this new dispensation the liberty of the ego has to be subordinated and disciplined in such a way that it aids and does not interfere with or harm the progress and well-being of the soul; the interests and values of the ego have to be subordinated to the values of the soul; the development of the ego and of the body, life and mind has to be made to serve and feed the development of the soul.

In this Indian perspective, the human or the individual ego will not be forced to

immolate its freedom or subordinate its development to the interest of the collectivity as it was sought to be done in the socialistic systems. This is a fruitless and sterile sacrifice of a higher, more luminous and conscious principle with a greater potentiality to a lower, darker, subconscious entity. In the Indian spiritual conception, the individuality will be called upon to merge not in the collective ego but in something which is egoless and universal and transcendent beyond the individual and collective ego. What disappears here is the separative and dividing ego and not the soul or the spiritual self of the individual or the collectivity. This spiritual individuality of the human soul is something unique and distinct but not separate from that of others. The soul of man is a direct expression of the transcendent and universal Self and therefore one with all and harmoniously related with all in the unity and harmony of the highest universal Self of all.

This does not mean that in the spiritualised social order we were discussing, the body, life and mind of the natural ego-personality will be denied their freedom and development. For freedom is one of the foremost values of the spirit. The legitimate and natural needs, inclinations and aspirations of the body, life and mind have their truth in the spirit. They should not be suppressed, mutilated or killed with ascetic harshness. They have to be given full freedom to discover their higher truth in the spirit and their faculties and powers have to be developed to the utmost and put at the service of the spirit. The spiritualised society of the future will give a much greater freedom of self-expression to the natural man than the ancient Indian society. It will not hedge the individual within the narrow boundaries of his inborn natural temperament and social function but will give him full freedom, encouragement and opportunity to develop all the fourfold powers of his soul and nature.

So a spiritualised society of the future will give at least as much freedom to the life and mind of man as some of the modern "secular" democratic and capitalistic societies, as, for example, the USA. At the same time the spiritual order of the future will hold before the people the greater knowledge, ideals and values of an integral spiritual vision possessed by neither the ancients nor the moderns. This is Sri Aurobindo's vision of a spiritualised society which we will discuss in our subsequent article. In brief Sri Aurobindo's vision conceives the future society as a gnostic society founded on the values of Unity, Mutuality and Harmony not merely in thought, ideal and sentiment but in actual realised experience.

At present the collective consciousness of humanity lives mostly in the subconscious vital ego driven by its blind instincts and desires and tries to arrive at some form of conscious unity and harmony by external organisation or outward regulation, through rules and standards or vital association or mental affinity, through shared values and ideals. But a gnostic collectivity of the future will live not in the external vital or mental ego but in the oneness-consciousness of its deepest, inmost and universal self beyond the mind and therefore will be able to feel the unity of its corporate life as concretely as we are able to feel our body. In such a gnostic collectivity there is no need for any regulated or constructed harmony enforced on the collectivity by external rules, regulations or organisations nor does it need shared mental ideals and values to feel its Unity. The

gnostic collectivity will live from within outwards. The diversity of the outer life will flower spontaneously from the seed of unity-consciousness felt in the deepest self and in the substance of the collective being.

Now the question is whether the collective or group-consciousness of humanity is capable of such a high spiritual realisation? Can the collectivity, like the individual, attain spiritual self-realisation? This brings us to another major lacuna in ancient Indian spiritual thought. Ancient Indian thought had the intuition that both the individual and the collectivity, *vyasti* and *samasti*, are the equal self-expression of the divine self in man. But in thought and practice, Indian culture failed to give as much importance to the development of the divine in the collectivity as it did to the divine in the individual.

The central idea implied in this intuition of the divine in the collectivity is that as the individual is a living soul with a body, life and mind and is a self-expression of the universal divine Self evolving progressively towards self-realisation in the Divine, so also is every human collectivity—group, nation or humanity as a whole—a living soul with a body, life and mind and evolving progressively towards self-realisation in the divine. This is the idea which Sri Aurobindo develops fully in his writings making an original contribution to the social thought of the future. Sri Aurobindo explains with lucid clarity this idea which has tremendous potential for the future evolution of mankind:

“The primal law and purpose of the individual life is to seek its own self-development. Consciously or half-consciously or with an obscure unconscious groping it strives always and rightly strives at self-formulation,—to find itself, to discover within itself the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it. This aim in it is fundamental, right, inevitable because, even after all qualifications have been made and caveats entered, the individual is not merely the ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves, but a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifesting spirit. In the same way the primal law and purpose of a society, community or nation is to seek its own self-fulfilment; it strives rightly to find itself, to become aware within itself of the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it as perfectly as possible, to realise all its potentialities, to live its own self-revealing life. The reason is the same; for this too is a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Spirit that is within it. The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may see even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life.”¹

This means not only the individual but every collectivity and humanity as a whole is capable of spiritual self-realisation and spiritual perfection in the Divine. In Sri Aurobindo's vision, this is the ultimate goal and destiny of human evolution. Just like a race of self-conscious mental beings evolved out of the vital life of the animal creation, a

race of a superconscious God or superman will evolve out of man. To initiate, prepare and consummate this spiritual evolution has to be the mission of the spirituality of the future.

The second important idea implied in this intuition of the Group-soul is that just as the psychological and spiritual evolution of the individual can be quickened and accelerated by the psycho-spiritual discipline of Yoga, the evolution of the collectivities or group-souls can also be quickened and accelerated by an analogous process of a collective yoga.

These are some of the major tasks of the spirituality of the future and therefore must be part of the mission of future India, the spiritual capital of the world. Only India with her innate spiritual genius having discovered the secret of individual spiritual perfection, can also discover the secret of collective spiritual perfection. As Sri Aurobindo sums up the mission of future India:

“It is perhaps for a future India, taking up and enlarging with a more complete aim, a more comprehensive experience, a more certain knowledge that shall reconcile life and spirit, her ancient mission, to found the status and action of the collective being of man on the realisation of the deeper spiritual truth, the yet unrealised spiritual potentialities of our existence and so ensoul the life of her people as to make it the Lila of the greater Self in humanity, a conscious communal soul and body of Virat, the universal spirit”.²

This will be the Golden Age of the future which India has to herald for herself and the world. This, and not a nostalgic dreaming of the bygone golden age of the Guptas which is in comparison to the golden age awaiting us a relatively poor thing, an imitation gold or a mixture of bronze, copper and lead painted with a golden coat, is the ideal for which we have to aspire, dream, create and realise.

(Concluded)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

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BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Reflections on ‘Leadership and Power’, edited by S. K. Chakraborty & Pradip Bhattacharya. Published by Oxford University Press 2001; price: Rs. 595; pages 453.

Introduction

POWER is a mysterious, yet pervasive phenomenon. We experience it in some form or another, at each instant in life, and often wonder at the way in which circumstances either remain adamantly unchanged or change swiftly, no doubt in both cases, through the application of different kinds of power.

In their book, Chakraborty and Bhattacharya have compiled a wide selection of perspectives on power. Twenty-nine diverse pieces, ranging from the use of power by characters from the Mahabharata, to Gandhi’s use of power, to modern day use and abuse of power in the corporate and political sectors, provides ample practical and some theoretical insight into the nature of power. The enriching material has been obtained from contributors from different parts of the world and from different fields and professions, including the political and the bureaucratic executive, the judicial, the press, economists, philosophers, teachers and practitioners of management.

The editors’ primary concern has been with the way power has been used by human agents and agencies in ‘managing’ or should we more appropriately say, in mismanaging the individual, social and environmental aspects of existence. This they have summed up in the following—“The accelerating spread of mammon worship, galloping commercialization of science, technology and the academia, along with the crumbling of traditional norms that upheld social conduct, have all combined to produce increasing evidence of worrisome abuse and misuse in all channels of life-flow. A dense pall of narcissism looms over our minds. The resultant clogged and contaminated life-flow is hardly a worthy legacy to hand over to posterity. Here is a small effort to examine this global problem from multiple perspectives.”

The editors have organized the book into four sections—Secular Insights, Spiritual Insights, Applied Insights, and Sagacious Insights, which suits their goal of examining the use or abuse of power from multiple perspectives.

This review, however, will proceed by first developing a framework for power, whose emergence has been stimulated by reading the materials in the book. It will then go on to examine a few of the pieces against the constructed framework, to thereby further refine the framework, which will in the end-analysis stand as the image which has been glimpsed through the study of the machinations and dynamics of power provided by these pieces. For, in reading the different pieces on power different questions arise, and in working through these questions, it is as though unique faces of power are being revealed, which in their totality begin to provide an in-view into the diamond that must be at the center. For what else can power be, given that all invention, all history, all present and future possibilities, seem to be determined by something of its substance?

Emergence of a Framework

In reading Hiten Bhaya's piece "Management of Power in Government and the Corporate World" the reader is made aware that corruption is a reality in many corporate and government environments. Parties in power, so he describes, begin to throw their weight around before elections, in order to raise money to finance the elections. Hence, companies are forced by party officials to give contracts to those who will subsequently contribute a percentage of the contract proceeds toward party coffers. For this reason also, government companies are often required to have, or to transfer their headquarters to Delhi, so that these same politicians can exercise a 'tighter hold' over crucial financial resources.

In reading this, the following chain of observations occurs. An environment exists. This environment has certain unwritten rules that largely determine its dynamics. They are unwritten, because the written rules dictate quite another and perhaps more ideal way that corporations and governments should act. These unwritten rules exercise their own power—they influence and determine how things are done. The question is, is the following and enforcing of these unwritten rules, which we will have more to say about shortly, an exercise in power? If so, then how is this power different from the one that gets things done through abiding by the ideal rules, or through changing the unwritten rules? Are there different kinds of powers with different degrees of effectiveness? Are we suggesting, therefore, that there is a gradient to power?

Perhaps there is. Perhaps in constructing one, more sense can be made of the myriad views and manifestations of power. Let us experiment with a tri-level gradient to the manifestation of power.

The first level is one in which the game is fixed. Perhaps we can refer to this level as the physical-vital conglomerate. The influence of the physical fixes the game in accordance with certain vital level dynamics. In other words the ego is the master and the game is played for self-aggrandizement, and those that are subject to it believe that it simply *is*, and therefore that it cannot be changed, unless of course one is the initiator of the vital-level play, in which case the game is still subject to dynamics characteristic of the unrefined vital level, and hence too, the notion of choice exists now only within certain less-restricted vital limits.

At the next level, the mind becomes active, and hence the notion of questioning and choice, and individuality becomes more pronounced. A player can choose to accept the game as it is, or through force of personality can begin to play it differently by imparting something of who they are into the situation. In fact, the more differently it is played, in accordance with the uniqueness as opposed to the subservience of the player, the more the personality comes forward and the more the third layer, with its increasing display of diamond-like power, can begin to be entered into.

The third layer, in Mr. Dasgupta's view, an octogenarian scholar of English literature and contributor of a brilliant piece in the book, would perhaps be described as giving "poetry" to the situation. Seeing beyond the lines that have been etched out for us, recognizing that reverence is the master key to unlocking unforeseen potentialities, to

truly make it other than it may commonly be held to be. Leadership at this level would imply that which invokes the sense of reverence, to awaken something lofty in those around.

But this tri-level gradient only depicts the outer play in some settled formation. The motive forces, resident in each individual, and which through expression and repetition or lack thereof, it can be opined, give the outer play its settled characteristics, is perhaps what power is all about. At the physical-vital end of the spectrum the play of this power is restricted by the nature of the physical-vital substance. Acting like filter, only that which reinforces its essential principle can freely come forward. At the mental level, and even much more at the level of “poetry”, more of the unique substance resident in each person is allowed to come forward, which in turn shapes the reality of things.

This book, in fact, opens with a line from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga*—“All power is really soul-power”. Keeping this in mind then, perhaps it would be fair to say that the soul and its powers more easily manifest themselves in accordance with the development of the instrument—be it the individual, the corporation, or the environment. At the physical-vital end of the spectrum therefore, perhaps it can be said that the instrument being relatively less developed, allows only established, repetitive patterns to come forward. Game-changing initiatives, dynamics that transcend the notion of self-aggrandizement, dynamics that represent poetry in the making, would therefore not really find the substance necessary to express their possibilities.

At the mental level, and even much more at the level of “poetry”, however, the soul-powers are perhaps more able to ride and even shape the corresponding instrumental substance to create astounding new possibilities.

But what really is meant by soul-powers? S. K. Chakraborty, in his wide-ranging piece on Wisdom Power, refers to a framework developed by Sri Aurobindo, which “enables a why-centered mind to perceive wisdom, power, harmony and work—the principal qualitative ingredients of human affairs—in their unified Cosmic setting”. Wisdom and knowledge, he points out, conceive order and principle. Power sanctions, protects and enforces. Harmony relates and arranges the parts, and work implements, guided by the preceding three. These then are the stuff of soul-power, and if “All is Atman”, must surely be the means by which all around us is arranged and organized.

The primary soul-power at the physical level must then be that of work, with the other three being present in whatever way possible. The primary soul-power at the vital level must be that of power. The primary soul-power at the mental level must be that of knowledge, and the primary soul-power at the level of poetry must be that of harmony. At each subsequent level more of the other three are able to express themselves, so that in contrast to the physical level where knowledge, power and harmony perhaps exist in carefully designed and narrow grooves, at the level of harmony, all the four exist more fully and freely, and obviously with a greater degree of mutuality and integral coordination.

We return then, to the original question: how is the power obtained from ‘submitting’ to the rules different than the one obtained from ‘changing’ the rules? We are now perhaps better equipped to answer this, and therefore to make sense of the different descriptions

and notions of power as they arise in this book. Power obtained from submitting to the rules, as in many corporate and government circles as described in Hiten Bhaya's article, is of a qualitatively different substance than that which operates from the level of poetry, as referred to in Dasgupta's article. It reinforces existing dynamics. It suppresses individuality. It enriches a few and that too only in very narrow and ultimately self-destructive ways. In its essence, it is the reinforcing of yesterday and its ways, that which has already made its way into the physical and vital layers of existence, and therefore, by the very notion and observable fact of progress, must sooner or later yield to another way of being. Power at the level of poetry, on the other hand, is creative, involves more of the stuff of the soul, and brings forth widening, deepening, heightening possibilities that substantially enrich humankind. In its essence it is futuristic, with its insights, intuitions, and inspirations, changing the very stuff of life, so that the progress that it points at becomes the road-sign to gradually spell the reality at the levels below.

Application and Further Insight

With the aid of this lens, let us now look at a few selected pieces from the book which perhaps can help to refine the framework of power that seems to be emerging here.

Let us look at Pradip Bhattacharya's insightful analysis in "Management of Power: Insights from Mahabharata", where he examines the use of power by several key characters in the Mahabharata.

The author makes the point that Bhishma is the representative of the old dharma and must be removed in order that the new dharma may manifest. In our context then, Bhishma is the holder of the matrix of past life, with its physical-vital norms of yesteryear. The author points out that these norms were essentially loyalty to the clan, which overrode all other claims, and fidelity to one's own word or vows as the be-all and end-all of all matters. Bhishma thus, was trapped by these primarily physical-vital dynamics, which he in turn upheld to the last, as is perfectly characterised by his inability to say or do anything at the time of the brutal de-clothing of Draupadi in court.

Never did he freely step into the mental level, to truly question as to what would be necessary from the point of view of statesmanship to ensure the good of all. Or if he did do this, his enslavement to the existing order of things was so strong, that he either trivialised it as being less important than the existing balance of things, or chose to willfully ignore it. In either case, it is clear that Bhishma was not a free-thinking individual, but the quintessential summary of a vital-physical order that sought to prolong itself beyond its useful time. His power derived from the automaticity of this lower physical-vital layer seeking to prolong its reign.

Under such a scenario it becomes necessary for an authentic personality, outcome of the flowering of the soul, to reverse this natural arrestation and spur society on to the adoption of a truer dharma. In the context of the Mahabharata, Krishna was just such a personality. Svarat, master of himself, fully aware of the play of physical-vital-mental forces in himself, in those around, and in the game of life, he could play at the level of the

existing order of things, by the rules of the existing orders of things, to shape the outcome in accordance with the unstated goal of moving all to the next level. His source of power, thus, was not solely the vision of the future stated in ideal terms.

He stands, thus, as the ultimate leader. Ultimate, because, he is not building castles in the air, or relying on empty words to instigate action, but takes action where and when necessary to ensure that the vision embodied by the words is fulfilled. Ultimate, because, the vision of what is to be done is always present, even if guiding from behind, to seize on the stuff of the lower levels of being to compel them to execute in a fashion absolutely faithful to the working out of the presiding vision. In our context, it is perhaps fair to say that the soul-powers, even able to run along the narrow grooves and circles of the physical and vital levels of being, find expression, even if in diminished form, at all the levels of being.

This, then, brings out an important notion in our framework, whereby the integrality of power is important. Integrality in the sense of both, letting the highest vision become the anchor around which the lower levels are organized, and letting the guiding soul-powers exercise themselves freely, albeit perhaps in diminished form, at whatever level necessary.

With this insight, it is now perhaps sufficient to turn to the figure of Gandhi, who has featured eminently in several articles in the discussion of power, and in fact has been referenced close to 50 times in this book on leadership and power. A full-analysis that encapsulated all these references would require an independent study. Here, however, a representative reference drawing on Gandhi's own words is used instead.

In thinking of Gandhi, it is not the figure of Krishna that seems to flash forth, but more the figure of Bhishma. Protector of an old way of being, fashioned by admirable dharmas no doubt, though of questionable value in the modern context of life. Chakraborty, in his article on Wisdom Power, elaborates on Gandhi's *satyagraha*.

Speaking on the code of conduct for governors, ministers, parliamentarians, etc., he offers practical elaboration of the theory of *satyagraha*:

- His private life should be so simple that it inspires respect, or even reverence. He should give one hour to productive physical labour.
- Bungalows and motor cars should be ruled out, of course.
- The other members of his family, including children, should do all the household work themselves, servants should be used as sparingly as possible.
- Plain living and high thinking must be his motto, not to adorn his entrance but to be exemplified in daily life.
- The seat of power is a nasty thing. You have to remain ever wakeful on that seat.
- They may not make private gains either for themselves or for their relatives.
- They must be humble. People often think nothing of not keeping their word. They should never promise what they cannot do.

In reading through these statements one gets the impression that it is not authentic personalities, resplendent with the full and free play of any and varied combination of soul-powers, that are being called forth or asked to exercise themselves, but men and women carved into brittle images of what is considered to be ethical and moral. Further, these would-be-leaders are not being asked to embrace life, the world, with its various developments, and integrate them into a self where integral power is the master key, but to clinically abstain from anything that has been known in the past as being tempting, and therefore likely to bring about a downfall. It is not therefore a race of men that is being invoked in the above notion of *satyagraha*, but one of puppets. This would curtail rather than increase possibility.

We are thus led full-circle to the original concern of the editors epitomized in the statement—"The accelerating spread of mammon worship, galloping commercialization of science, technology and the academia, along with the crumbling of traditional norms that upheld social conduct, have all combined to produce increasing evidence of worrisome abuse and misuse in all channels of life-flow." The crucial question we are faced with is how do we move beyond this into a saner yet progressive milieu? Do we, as Gandhi suggests, return to the simple life, follow a strict code of conduct whereby our every interaction with the world has already been assigned a positive or negative value and therefore determines what should and should not be done, or do we invoke *purushartha*, to become Krishna-like masters of ourselves, using the very stuff of life to shape and express our individualities?

Conclusion

The articles in the book are thought-provoking, and deal with real issues we are faced with on a day to day basis. On several levels the material in the articles is rich. Many of them represent the life-experience of people and hence have a high degree of authenticity about them. Others capture the views of well-known figures. There is also a high degree of scholarship in many of the articles with myriad references from many renowned sources and personalities spanning mythology, history and geography. In this sense the articles are a rich source with which to glimpse many aspects of power.

Beyond these obvious perspectives, in reading these pieces many questions arise which, when worked through, facilitate the emergence of a framework for power. Perhaps this framework can itself become the starting point in a further iteration, in which all the individual pieces are re-examined for their position and play within the emergent framework. Such an exercise in synthesis will likely provide immense practical insight into the nature of power, and may even hint at fruitful pathways by which to move beyond this present era characterised by 'galloping commercialization' and 'mammon worship' to one which is a 'worthy legacy to hand over to posterity'.

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