

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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### CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
ELECTRON (Poem)	...	183
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘THOU ART ALL’	...	185
<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
PARTY AND THE COUNTRY	...	186
A LETTER	...	187
TWO VERSES FROM THE GITA	...	194
MAHAKAL (A poem in Bengali)	...	195
<i>Richard Hartz</i>		
TIME (Translation of ‘Mahakal’)	...	197
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘A NEW WORLD IS BORN’	...	200
<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
THE GOAL	...	204
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>		
REPLY TO A FOUR-WORD TELEGRAM	...	205
<i>Ananda Reddy</i>		
THE SUPRAMENTAL MAHASHAKTI	...	206
<i>Debashish Banerji</i>		
LIVING LABORATORIES OF THE LIFE DIVINE	...	211
<i>Aniruddha Sircar</i>		
INTRODUCING SRI AUROBINDO’S POETRY	...	217
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>		
REMEMBERED FIELDS OF LIGHT (Poem)	...	226
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY	...	227

<i>Jyotsna Mohanty</i>	TRUE SELF (Poem)	...	234
<i>Jayantilal Parekh</i>	THE DISCIPLINE OF ART	...	235
<i>C. C. Dutt</i>	SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	...	240
<i>Dilip Kumar Roy</i>	THE FAITHFUL (Poem)	...	243
<i>Goutam Ghosal</i>	TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO	...	244
<i>Ashalata Dash</i>	ALL-PERVADING (Poem)	...	247
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>	A GAP IN PURANIC HISTORY BRIDGED	...	248
<i>Nilima Das</i>	SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	...	251
<i>Gautam Malaker</i>	GLIMPSES OF CHINA—CIVILISATION VS DEVELOPMENT	...	254
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE			
<i>Matthijs Cornelissen</i>	<i>Review of THE PRACTICE OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA by</i> JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE	...	259

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### A Correction

On p. 110 of *Mother India* February 2004 instead of “In 1910 she came to hear of Sri Aurobindo who had settled in Pondicherry a year earlier.” Please read “In 1910 she came to hear of Sri Aurobindo who had settled in Pondicherry in the same year.”

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## ELECTRON

[Sri Aurobindo's *Last Poems*, p. 3; first published in August 1952]

### Electron

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,  
Leaped into being as particles of God.  
A spark from the eternal energy spell  
It is the definite blind meretricious globe.  
In that small gleaming chariot thro' voids.  
The One devoid in unpopulated  
The mass in invisible forms he hides,  
Time's tiny temples of eternity.  
Atom and molecule in their unseen place  
Bustles an edifice of strange processes,  
Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man, —  
None a when the World-Unity shall rise,  
Hiding his sub-species in epiphany  
Of the Father's vastness of Infinity.

(Transcription overleaf)

**ELECTRON**

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,  
 Leaped into being, a particle of God.  
 A spark from the eternal Energy spilt,  
 It is the Infinite's blind minute abode.

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.  
 The One devised innumerably to be;  
 His oneness in invisible forms he hides,  
 Time's tiny temples of<sup>1</sup> eternity.

Atom and molecule in their unseen plan  
 Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,  
 Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man,—  
 Man on whom the World-Unity shall seize,

Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany  
 Of the timeless vastness of Infinity.

15.7.1938

1. to

## ‘THOU ART ALL’

November 19, 1912

I SAID yesterday to that young Englishman who is seeking for Thee with so sincere a desire, that I had definitively found Thee, that the Union was constant. Such is indeed the state of which I am conscious. All my thoughts go towards Thee, all my acts are consecrated to Thee; Thy Presence is for me an absolute, immutable, invariable fact, and Thy Peace dwells constantly in my heart. Yet I know that this state of union is poor and precarious compared with that which it will become possible for me to realise tomorrow, and I am as yet far, no doubt very far, from that identification in which I shall totally lose the notion of the “I”, of that “I”, which I still use in order to express myself, but which is each time a constraint, like a term unfit to express the thought that is seeking for expression. It seems to me indispensable for human communication, but all depends on what this “I” manifests; and how many times already, when I pronounce it, it is Thou who speakest in me, for I have lost the sense of separativity.

But all this is still in embryo and will continue to grow towards perfection. What an appealing assurance there is in this serene confidence in Thy All-Might!

Thou art all, everywhere, and in all, and this body which acts is Thy own body, just as is the visible universe in its entirety; it is Thou who breathest, thinkest and lovest in this substance which, being Thyself, desires to be Thy willing servant.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 4)*

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When we have passed beyond knowings, then we shall have Knowledge. Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar.

When we have passed beyond willings, then we shall have Power. Effort was the helper; Effort is the bar.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377)*

## PARTY AND THE COUNTRY

THE uses of party are a secret known only to free nations which value their freedom above all other things. Men of free minds and free habits are too strong of soul to be the slaves of their party feelings and too robust of mind to submit to any demand for the sacrifice of their principles on the altar of expediency. It is only in a servile nation unaccustomed to the habits of freemen that party becomes a master and not an instrument. The strength of mind to rise above personal feeling, the breadth of view which is prepared to tolerate the views of others while fighting resolutely, even aggressively, for one's own, the generosity of sentiment which can clasp the hand of an opponent so long as the claims of patriotism are satisfied, these are qualities that do not grow in the barren soil of servitude or flourish in its vitiated atmosphere. The pains of wounded vanity are as strong in slaves as in children; the pride which will not forgive defeat, the malice which broods over an affront for ever, the narrowness which does not allow good in an opponent or honesty in his opinions, while arrogating all virtues for oneself and one's party, these are the growth of the unhealthy air of slavery. So long as these are present, party is a curse because it becomes faction. And without party self-government is impossible.

The growth of parties immediately before the Swadeshi movement was one of the signs of an approaching awakening in the national mind. When the intellect is stirred and feelings become sincere and acute, parties arise, each passionate for its opinions, eager to carry them out, full of enthusiasm for an imagined ideal. The air becomes vibrant with life, the full blast of hope and endeavour fills the sails of destiny and through a sea sometimes stormy and never quite placid, the ship of a nation's fate plunges forward to its destination. A political life in which there are no parties is political stagnation, death-in-life. It means that the intellect of the nation is torpid, its feelings feeble and flaccid, its aspirations untouched with passion of sincerity, fervour of hope unawakened, love of the country an inoperative sentiment confined to the intellect only and not yet close to the heart. The patriot is consumed with the passion to serve his country, to make her great, free or splendid. His brain is full of plans for the fulfilment of his hopes and he seeks helpers and followers to bring it about, while he tries to disabuse the country of ideas which he believes injurious to his plans. A Mazzini planning the republican freedom of Italy creates the party of New Italy, a Garibaldi filled with the same hope but bent on freedom first and republicanism afterwards forms his Legion of Red Shirts and holds the balance of parties, a Cavour full of grandiose schemes of a Kingdom of Italy leads the old monarchical sentiment of Piedmont and all that gathers round it. These parties fear and distrust each other, but all have one clear and unmistakable purpose, the freedom of Italy, and work for it, each doing something towards the common end which the others could not have done. Thus the purpose of God works itself out and not the purpose of Mazzini, or the purpose of Garibaldi, or the purpose of Cavour. Parties are necessary but they must have a common end overriding their specific differences, the freedom, greatness and splendour of their Motherland. Only one party is inexcusable, inadmissible, not to be parleyed with, the party which is against freedom, the party which seeks to perpetuate national slavery.

April 24, 1908

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, Vol. 1, pp. 875-76)

## A LETTER \*

[April 7, 1920?]

Dear Barin,

I have your letter, but have not succeeded till now in writing an answer. It is a miracle that even now I have sat down to write; to write a letter is for me an event that takes place once in a blue moon—especially to write in Bengali, a thing I have not done in five or six years. If I can manage to finish this letter and put it in the post, the miracle will be complete!

First, about your yoga. You wish to give me the charge of your yoga and I am willing to take it, but that means giving its charge to Him who is moving by His divine Shakti, whether secretly or openly, both you and me. But you must know that the necessary result of this will be that you will have to walk in the special way which He has given to me, the way which I call the path of Integral Yoga,—what I began with, what Lele gave me was a seeking for the path, a circling in many directions—a touch, taking up, handling, scrutinizing this or that in all the old partial yogas, a complete experience in some sense of one and then the pursuit of another.

Afterwards, when I came to Pondicherry, this unsteady condition came to an end. The Guru of the world who is within us then gave me the complete directions of my path—its complete theory, the ten limbs of the body of this Yoga. These ten years He has been making me develop it in experience, and it is not yet finished. It may take another two years; and as long as it is not finished I doubt if I shall be able to return to Bengal. Pondicherry is the appointed place for my yoga siddhi, except indeed one part of it, and that is action. The centre of my work is Bengal, although I hope that its circumference will be all India and the whole earth.

I shall write and tell you afterwards what is this way of yoga. Or if you come here I shall tell you about it. In this matter the spoken word is better than the written one. At present I can only say that its root-principle is to make a harmony and unity of complete knowledge, complete works, and complete Bhakti, to raise this above the mind and to give it its complete perfection on the supramental level of the Vijnana. The defect of the old yoga was here—the mind it knew and the Spirit it knew, and it was satisfied with the experience of the Spirit in the mind. But the mind can grasp only the divided and partial; it cannot utterly seize the infinite, the indivisible. The mind's means to reach the infinite are Sannyasa, Moksha and Nirvana, and it has no others. One man or another may get indeed this featureless Moksha, but what is the gain? The Brahman, the Self, God are always there. What God wants in man is to embody Himself here in the individual and in the community, to realise God in life.

The old way of yoga failed to bring about harmony or unity of the Spirit and life: it rather dismissed the world as Maya or a transient Play. The result has been loss of life-

\* For a long time, only portions of this Bengali letter of Sri Aurobindo to his brother were available. The translation of the incomplete text reproduced here is from *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1967, pp. 123-30. For a new translation of the complete letter, see *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, April 1980, pp. 11-23.

power and the degeneration of India. As was said in the Gita, “These peoples would perish if I did not do works” these peoples of India have truly gone down to ruin. A few Sannyasis and Bairagis to be saintly and perfect and liberated, a few Bhaktas to dance in a mad ecstasy of love and sweet emotion and Ananda, and a whole race to become lifeless, void of intelligence, sunk in deep *tamas*—is this the effect of a true spirituality? No, first we must get indeed all the partial experiences possible on the mental level and flood the mind with the spiritual delight and illumine it with the spiritual light, but afterwards we must rise above. If we cannot rise above, that is, to the supramental level, it is hardly possible to know the last secret of the world and the problem it raises remains unsolved. There, the ignorance which creates a duality of opposition between the Spirit and Matter, between truth of spirit and truth of life, disappears. There one need no longer call the world Maya. The world is the eternal Play of God, the eternal manifestation of the Self. Then it becomes possible to fully know and fully possess God—to do what is said in the Gita, “To know Me integrally.” The physical body, the life, the mind and understanding, the supermind and the Ananda—these are the Spirit’s five levels. The higher we rise on this ascent the nearer to man comes the state of that highest perfection open to his spiritual evolution. Rising to the Supermind, it becomes easy to rise to the Ananda. One attains a firm foundation in the condition of the indivisible and infinite Ananda, not only in the timeless *Parabrahman* but in the body, in life, in the world. The integral being, the integral consciousness, the integral Ananda blossoms out and takes form in life. This is the central clue of my yoga, its fundamental principle.

This is no easy change to make. After these fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when this Siddhi will be complete, then I am absolutely certain that God will through me give to others the Siddhi of the Supermind with less effort. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for success in the work. What is to happen will happen in God’s appointed time. I have no impulse to make any unbalanced haste and rush into the field of work in the strength of the little ego. If even I did not get success in my work I would not be shaken. This work is not mine but God’s. I will listen to no other call; when God moves me then I will move.

I know very well that Bengal is not really ready. The spiritual flood which has come is for the most part a new form of the old. It is not the real transformation. Still this too was needed. Bengal has been awakening in itself the old yogas and exhausting their Sanskaras, extracting their essence and fertilising with it the soil. At first it was the turn of Vedanta—the Adwaita, Sannyasa, Shankara’s Maya and the rest. What is now in process is the turn of the Vaishnava Dharma—the Lila, love, the intoxication of emotional experience. All this is very old, unfitted for the new age and will not endure—for such excitement has no capacity to last. But the merit of the Vaishnava Bhava is that it keeps a connection between God and the world and gives a meaning to life; but since it is a partial Bhava the whole connection, the full meaning is not there. The tendency to create sects which you have noticed was inevitable. It is the nature of the mind to take a part and call it the whole and to exclude all the other parts. The Siddha who brings the Bhava,



although he leans on its partial aspect, yet keeps some knowledge of the integral, even though he may not be able to give it form. But his disciples do not get that knowledge precisely because it is not in a form. They are tying their bundles, let them. The bundles will open of themselves when God will manifest Himself fully. These things are the signs of incompleteness and immaturity. I am not disturbed by them. Let the force of spirituality play in the country in whatever way and in as many sects as there may be. Afterwards we shall see. This is the infancy or the embryonic condition of the new age. It is a first hint, not even the beginning....

The peculiarity of this yoga is that until there is Siddhi higher above, the foundation does not become perfect. Those who have been following my course had kept many of the old Sanskaras; some of them have dropped away, but others still remain. There was the Sanskara of Sannyasa, even the wish to create an Aurobindomath. Now the intellect has recognised that what is wanted is not Sannyasa, but the stamp of the old idea has not yet been effaced from the Prana. And so there was next this talk of remaining in the midst of the world, as a man of worldly activities and yet a man of renunciation. The necessity of renouncing desire has been understood, but the harmony of the renunciation of desire with enjoyment of Ananda has not been rightly seized in the mind. And they took up my Yoga as very natural to the Bengali temperament, not so much from the side of Knowledge as from the side of Bhakti and Karma. A little knowledge has come in, but the greater part has been left unacquired; the mist of sentimentalism has not been dissipated, the groove of the *sāttwic bhāva* has not been broken. There is still the ego... I am not in haste, I allow each to develop according to his nature. I do not want to fashion all in the same mould. That which is fundamental will indeed be one in all, but it will express itself in many forms. Everybody grows, forms from within. I do not want to build from outside. The basis is there, the rest will come.

What I am aiming at is not a society like the present one rooted in division. What I have in view is a *saṅgha*, founded in the spirit and an image of its oneness. It is with this idea that the name *Deva saṅgha* has been given—the commune of those who want the divine life is the *Deva saṅgha*. Such a *saṅgha* will have to be established in one place at first and then spread all over the country. But if any shadow of egoism falls over this endeavour, then the *saṅgha* will change into a sect. The idea may very naturally creep in that such and such a body is the one true *saṅgha* of the future, the only centre and all else must be its circumference, and that those outside its own limits are not of the fold or even if they are, they are gone astray, because they think differently.

You may say, what need is there of a *saṅgha*? Let me be free and live in every vessel; let all become one without form and let whatever must be happen in the midst of that vast formlessness. There is a truth there, but only one side of the truth. Our business is not with the formless Spirit only; we have to direct also the motion of life. And there can be no effective movement of life without form. It is the Formless that has taken form and that assumption of name and form is not a caprice of Maya. Form is there because it is indispensable. We do not want to rule out any activity of the world as beyond our province. Politics, industry, society, poetry, literature, art will all remain, but we must

give them a new soul and a new form.

Why have I left politics? Because the politics of the country is not a genuine thing belonging to India. It is an importation from Europe and an imitation. At one time there was a need for it. We also have done politics of the European kind. If we had not done it, the country would not have risen and we too would not have gained experience and attained full development. There is still some need of it, not so much in Bengal as in the other provinces of India. But the time has come to extend no longer the shadow but seize on the reality. We must get to the true soul of India and in its image fashion all works.

People now talk of spiritualising politics. Its result will be, if there be any permanent result, some kind of Indianised Bolshevism. Even to that kind of work I have no objection. Let each man do according to his inspiration. But that is not the real thing. If one pours the spiritual power into all these impure forms—the water of the Causal ocean into raw vessels—either that raw thing will break and the water will be spilt and lost or the spiritual power will evaporate and only the impure form remain. In all fields it is the same. I can give the spiritual power but that power will be expended in making the image of an ape and setting it up in the temple of Shiva. If the ape is endowed with life and made powerful, he may play the part of the devotee Hanuman and do much work for Rama, so long as that life and that power remain. But what we want in the Temple of India is not Hanuman, but the God, the Avatar, Rama himself.

We can mix with all, but in order to draw all into the true path, keeping intact the spirit and form of our ideal. If we do not do that we shall lose our direction and the real work will not be done. If we remain individually everywhere, something will be done indeed; but if we remain everywhere as parts of a *saṅgha*, a hundred times more will be done. As yet that time has not come. If we try to give a form hastily, it may not be the exact thing we want. The *saṅgha* will be at first in unconcentrated form. Those who have the ideal will be united but work in different places. Afterwards, they will form something like a spiritual commune and make a compact *saṅgha*. They will then give all their work a shape according to the demand of the spirit and the need of the age—not a bound and rigid form, not an *acalāyatana*, but a free form which will spread out like the sea, mould itself into many waves and surround a thing here, overflow a thing there and finally take all into itself. As we go on doing this there will be established a spiritual community. This is my present idea. As yet it has not been fully developed. All is in God's hands; whatever He makes us do, that we shall do.

Now let me discuss some particular points of your letter. I do not want to say much in this letter about what you have written as regards your yoga. We shall have better occasion when we meet. To look upon the body as a corpse is a sign of Sannyasa, of the path of Nirvana. You cannot be of the world with this idea. You must have delight in all things—in the Spirit as well as in the body. The body has consciousness, it is God's form. When you see God in everything that is the world, when you have this vision that all this is Brahman, *Sarvamidam Brahma*, that Vasudeva is all this—*Vāsudevaḥ sarvamiti*, then you have the universal delight. The flow of that delight precipitates and courses even through this body. When you are in such a state, full of the spiritual consciousness, you

can lead a married life, a life in the world. In all your works you find the expression of God's delight. So long I have been transforming all the objects and the perceptions of the mind and the senses into delight on the mental level. Now they are taking the form of supramental delight. In this condition is the perfect vision and perception of *saccidānanda*.

You write about the *Deva saṅgha* and say, "I am not a god, am only a piece of much hammered and tempered iron." ...No one is a god but in each man there is a god and to make Him manifest is the aim of divine life. That we can all do. I recognise that there are great and small *ādharma*s (vessels). I do not accept, however, as accurate your description of yourself. Still, whatever the nature of the vessel, once the touch of God is upon it, once the spirit is awake, great and small and all that does not make much difference. There may be more difficulties, more time may be taken, there may be a difference in the manifestation, but even about that there is no certainty. The God within takes no account of these hindrances and deficiencies. He breaks his way out. Was the amount of my own failings a small one? Were the obstacles less in my mind and heart and vital being and body? Did it not take time? Has God hammered me less? Day after day, minute after minute, I have been fashioned into I know not whether a god or what. But I have become or am becoming something. That is sufficient, since God wanted to build it. It is the same as regards every one... Not our strength but the Shakti of God is the *sādhaka* of this yoga.

Let me tell you in brief one or two things about what I have long been seeing. My idea is that the chief cause of the weakness of India is not subjection nor poverty, nor the lack of spirituality or *dharma* but the decline of thought-power, the growth of ignorance in the motherland of Knowledge. Everywhere I see inability or unwillingness to think—thought-incapacity or thought-phobia. Whatever may have been in the Middle Ages, this state of things is now the sign of a terrible degeneration.... The Middle Ages were the night, the time of the victory of ignorance. In the modern world it is the age of the victory of knowledge. Whoever thinks most, seeks most, labours most, can fathom and learn the truth of the world, gets so much the more Shakti. If you look at Europe, you will see two things, a vast sea of thought and the play of a huge and fast-moving and yet a disciplined force. The whole Shakti of Europe is in that. And in the strength of that Shakti it has been swallowing up the world, like the *Tapaswins* of our ancient times, by whose powers even the gods of the world were terrified, held in suspense and subjection. People say Europe is running into the jaws of destruction. I do not think so. All these revolutions and upsets are the preconditions of a new creation.

Now look at India. Except some solitary giants, everywhere there is your "simple man", that is, the average man who does not want to think and cannot think, who has not the least Shakti but only a temporary excitement. In India, you want the simple thought, the "easy word". In Europe they want the deep thought, the "deep word"; there even an ordinary labourer or artisan thinks, wants to know, is not satisfied with surface things but wants to go behind. But still there is this difference that there is a fatal limitation in the strength and thought of Europe. When it comes into the spiritual field, its thought-power can no longer move ahead. There Europe sees everything as a riddle—nebulous

metaphysics, yogic hallucination. They rub their eyes as in smoke and can see nothing clear. Still, in Europe some effort is being made to surmount even this limitation. We have already the spiritual sense—for this we owe to our forefathers—and whoever has that sense has at his disposal such a Knowledge and Shakti as with one breath might blow away all the huge power of Europe like a blade of grass. But to get that Shakti one must be a worshipper of Shakti. We are not worshippers of Shakti. We are worshippers of the easy way. But Shakti is not got by the easy way. Our forefathers dived into a sea of vast thought and gained a vast Knowledge and established a mighty civilisation. As they went on in their way, fatigue and weariness came upon them. The force of thought diminished and with it also the strong current of Shakti. Our civilisation has become an *acalāyatana*, our religion a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light or a momentary wave of religious intoxication. And so long this sort of thing continues any permanent resurgence of India is improbable.

In Bengal this weakness has gone to the extreme. The Bengali has a quick intelligence, emotional capacity and intuition. He is foremost in India in all these qualities. All of them are necessary but they do not suffice. If to these there were added depth of thought, calm strength, heroic courage, and a capacity for and pleasure in prolonged labour, the Bengali might be a leader not only of India, but of mankind. But he does not want that, he wants to get things done easily, to get knowledge without thinking, the fruits without labour, Siddhi by an easy Sadhana. His stock is the excitement of the emotional mind. But excess of emotion, empty of knowledge, is the very symptom of the malady. It brings about in the end fatigue and inertia. All the time the country has been gradually sinking down. The life-power had ebbed away. What has the Bengali come to in his own country? He cannot get enough to eat or clothes to wear, there is lamentation on all sides, his wealth, his trade and commerce, his lands, his very agriculture has begun to pass into the hands of others. We have abandoned the Sadhana of Shakti and Shakti has abandoned us. We do the Sadhana of Love, but where Knowledge and Shakti are not there love does not remain, there come narrowness and littleness and in a little and narrow mind there is no place for love. Where is love in Bengal? There is more quarrelling, jealousy, mutual dislike, misunderstanding and faction there than anywhere else even in India so much afflicted by division.

In the noble heroic age of the Aryan people there was not so much shouting and gesticulation, but the endeavour they undertook used to remain steadfast through many centuries. The Bengalis' endeavour lasts for a day or two only.

You say that what is needed is maddening enthusiasm to fill the country with emotional excitement. In the time of the Swadeshi we did all that in the field of politics, but what we did is all now in the dust. Will there be a more favourable result in the spiritual field? I do not say there has been no result. There has been. Any movement will produce some result, but it is for the most part of the nature of an increase of possibility. This is not the right method, however, to steadily actualise the thing. Therefore I wish no longer to make emotional excitement or any intoxication of the mind the base. I wish to make a large and strong equanimity the foundation of the yoga. I want established on that

equality a full, firm and undisturbed Shakti in the system and in all its movements. I want the wide display of the light of Knowledge in the ocean of Shakti. And I want in that luminous vastness the tranquil ecstasy of infinite love, delight and oneness. I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get a hundred complete men, purified of petty egoism, who will be the instruments of God. I have no faith in the customary trade of the Guru. I do not wish to be a guru. If anybody wakes and manifests from within his slumbering godhead and gets the divine life—be it at my touch or at another's—this is what I want. It is such men that will raise the country.

You must not think from all this lecture that I despair of the future of Bengal. I too hope what they say that this time a great light will manifest itself in Bengal. Still I have tried to show the other side of the shield, where lie the fault, the error, the deficiency. If these remain, the light will not be a great light and it will not be permanent.

The meaning of this extraordinarily long talk is that I too am packing my bag. Still I believe that this bundle is like the net of St. Peter, only crammed with the catch of the Infinite. I am not going to open the bag now. If I do that before the time, all would escape. Neither am I going back to Bengal now, not because Bengal is not ready, but because I am not ready. If the unripe goes amidst the unripe, what work can he do?

Your *Sejdā*

1. Elder brother.

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When we have passed beyond enjoyings, then we shall have Bliss. Desire was the helper; Desire is the bar.

When we have passed beyond individualising, then we shall be real Persons. Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377)

## TWO VERSES FROM THE GITA

One sees it as a mystery or one speaks of it or  
hears of it as a mystery, but none knows it.  
Gita II. 29

When men seek after the Immutable, the Indeterminable,  
the Unmanifest, the All-Pervading, the Unthinkable,  
the Summit Self; the Immobile, the Permanent, equal in  
mind to all, intent on the good of all beings, it is to Me that  
they come.  
Gita XII. 3, 4.

*One sees it as a mystery or one speaks of it or hears of it as a mystery,  
but none knows it.*

Gita. II. 29.

*When men seek after the Immutable, the Indeterminable, the  
Unmanifest, the All-Pervading, the Unthinkable, the Summit Self, the  
Immobile, the Permanent, equal in mind to all, intent on the good of all  
beings, it is to Me that they come.*

Gita. XII. 3, 4.

Two of the verses from the Gita translated by Sri Aurobindo.

*(Essays on the Gita, SABCL, Vol. 13, after contents)*

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When we have passed beyond humanity, then we shall be the Man. The Animal was  
the helper; the Animal is the bar.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377)*

## মহাকাল\*

কি এ ব্রহ্মাণ্ড ফুঁড়ি প্রচণ্ড স্কুরণ।  
বহি প্রাণে দিন রাত ঋতু সংবৎসর  
বুঝেছি তোমার ভাব, দেখেছি শরীর।  
কে আত্মা তোমার? কোন্ অদৃষ্টের বলে  
ঘুর মহাচক্রে সদা ঘুরাও জগতী।  
বিচিত্র আকাশ যবে কিরণ-প্রপাতে  
মায়াপুরী রচয়িত্রী নিম্নলি সঙ্ঘ্যার,  
ভ্রমেছি নদীর তীরে কলকলস্বর  
সমাকুল প্রাণগীতি তরঙ্গ-বীণায়  
মিলাইতে হৃদিতারে। অনন্ত রজনী  
নামিয়া নিঃশব্দ পদে মুকুটের ছায়া  
বিস্তারি গগনপটে, উড়ায়ে অঞ্চল  
মসৃণ আঁধার পাতি দীর্ঘ ধরাতলে,  
টানিয়া গভীর কোলে শান্তিস্তম্ভ প্রাণী  
সুযুপ্তির অভিনেত্রী থামাইল আসি  
জীবনের কোলাহল অন্তহীন মৌনে।  
চিত্তামগ্ন নেত্রতারা বিপুল শয্যায়  
আকাশ-ব্রহ্মের ধ্যানে নিলীন ভৈরবী  
কৃষ্ণকায় জগন্মাতা সমাধিস্থ ভবে।  
নীরবতা-মধুভোজী তারকার পাল  
দীপ্তির মৌমাছি সম উড়ে আসে নভে।  
ঢালিতে প্রাণীর মর্মে আনন্দ কিরণ  
সুশীতল রভসের সমুজ্জ্বল ভাণ্ড  
ভেসে উঠে শশী মণি-খচিত নিশায়।  
স্বল্প আলোকিত জ্যোৎস্না-প্লুত অন্ধকারে  
মানবের ক্ষুদ্র প্রাণ এ অসীম প্রাণে  
ডুবাইয়া শুনিয়াছি নীরবের গান।  
বাজিল অন্তরে যবে মাধুর্য-স্পন্দন  
ভাঙ্গিল সমাধিঘোর স্তম্ভ যোগিনীর।  
আলোক-বসন-স্পর্শে জাগিল কাহার।  
কার দূর পদধ্বনি পশিল মরমে।  
পরিতৃপ্ত শূন্যতার ঘনস্তর বিঁধি  
উষা উঠিয়াছে হাসি রঞ্জিত গগনে,

\* Sri Aurobindo's Bengali poem *Mahākāl* was written around 1918. There are several manuscripts of this poem, which in a shorter form was entitled *Kāl*. Different versions of the text have been published, based on different manuscripts or combinations of manuscripts. The text published in the 1999 edition of *Bānglā Racanā*, which is reproduced here, is the most complete and accurate, incorporating all of Sri Aurobindo's latest revision.

মনোহর স্মিত-আঁখি বালিকা যেমন,  
 উস্কাম উল্লাস পদে হাসি ভরা প্রাণ  
 পিতার ভবনে নাচি মুক্ত আঙিনায়।  
 জীবনের হর্ষ যে মঞ্জু মিষ্ট ডাকে  
 জানাইতে পরস্পরে পলকে পলকে  
 ডাকিতেছে পক্ষীকুল সুমধুর তানে,  
 সহস্র উন্মত্ত শাখা, সবুজ বসন  
 নাচিতেছে তরুরাজি আলোক-উৎসবে।  
 সেই আলোক-উৎসবে অন্তরালে ঢাকা  
 স্বর্গসোমপানে মত্ত জগৎ-ঋষির  
 আনন্দের বেদগানে শুনি মর্মে মর্মে  
 জানিলাম কি গভীর আনন্দস্কুরণে  
 ফুটিয়াছে বিশ্বপদ্ম অনন্তের স্রোতে।  
 নিদ্রিত মধ্যাহ্ন যবে বিশ্বকক্ষে একা  
 সুনীল আকাশ পরে হেলাইল শির,  
 জ্যোতির্ময় পূর্ণতার শয়ন শিবিরে  
 বিশ্বমঙ্গলের গীতি গুপ্ত মহিমায়  
 মন্ত্রর বিশাল ধ্বনি ত্রিকালের কণ্ঠে  
 মহামন্ত্র বাজিয়াছে জগৎ-আত্মার।  
 মিলাইয়া তুষ্টিপ্রাণে অগণন ভাব  
 চিরশান্ত উচ্চকর্মা দেখিতেছে কেহ  
 মহাকাব্যে আনন্দিত সনাতন কবি  
 পূর্ণচন্দ্র সৃষ্টি তার। গভীর সন্তোষে  
 সান্তে বহি সে অসীম অপরূপ রূপে  
 ঘুরিছে অনন্ত বিশ্ব প্রভু পদপ্রান্তে।  
 লঙ্কতপাঃ কিরণের প্রচণ্ড প্রসারে  
 গগনের চূড়া হতে মানিতে বিধান  
 নামিয়াছে সূর্য্য যবে বীর মহিমায়,  
 অবসানে ভরাশান্তি লভিয়াছে চিত্তে,  
 জীবনসুধার পান শূন্য করি পাত্র,  
 তুরীয়ার মহাগীত পরিতুষ্টি কর্ণে।  
 এইরূপ প্রতিদিন অদম্য কৌতুকে  
 একদিনে বাঁধি যেন অনন্ত সময়,  
 অঙ্লেতে সর্ব্বস্ব ঢালি নিজমূর্তি আঁক,  
 রূপস্রষ্টা প্রাণশিল্পী। নূতন নূতন  
 পুরাতন সেই চক্র ভাসে চিত্তপটে।

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

(আগামী সংখ্যায় সমাপ্য)



## TIME \*

What moves this world? Why throbs its mighty pulse  
Age after age? We feel the ebb and flow  
Of day and night, the seasons and the years,  
We see your body, know your moods, O Time;  
Where is your soul? What unseen power propels  
Your endless cycles, turns the universe?  
It was the hour when sunset floods the sky  
With radiant colour, conjuring up the gleam  
Of magic cities, casting twilight's spell.  
I walked beside a river, lost in thought,  
Listening to the music of the waves,  
And tuned my heart-strings to life's murmuring song,  
Its choir of babbling voices. Boundless Night  
Descended then with unheard steps: one saw  
The shadow of her crown invade the heavens,  
While, settling on the earth, her garment's hem  
Enveloped it in darkness' silken folds.  
Arriving in the guise of Sleep who draws  
These creatures deep into her lap of calm,  
She stilled life's noise in her unfathomed hush.  
Communing with the stark Reality  
Behind the screen of space, on her vast couch  
Outstretched, austere, with inward gaze, the dark  
World-mother gathered all into her trance.  
Lured to the honeycombs of silence, stars  
Like lustrous bees now thronged the firmament.  
Showering down the gladness of its rays,  
A shimmering bowl of cool delight, the moon  
Floated aloft into the jewelled vault.  
In the soft glow, the darkness faintly bathed  
In moonbeams, one could merge this little life  
Of man in some illimitable life  
And hear the wordless song of Silence' heart.  
At length a throb of sweetness stirred within  
And, touched by an ethereal robe of light,  
Out of her motionless trance the Ascetic woke;  
A distant footfall echoed in her breast.  
Parting the heavy curtains of the void,

\* A free rendering of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali poem *Mahākāl*. The original is printed on the preceding pages.

Troubling the sky's contented emptiness  
With colour and with laughter, Dawn arrived  
Like a bright girl who dances smiling-eyed,  
Light-hearted and with free and happy feet  
In a wide courtyard of her father's house.  
Singing to one another their joy to live,  
Packing each moment with enchanting sound,  
Birds filled the air with their melodious calls;  
Waving a thousand arms, the green-clad trees  
Were dancing in the festival of light.  
Concealed behind that celebration's pomp,  
Drunk with celestial wine, the cosmic Seer  
Intoned the rapture-rhythms of his chant;  
Listening deeply in my heart, I felt  
What quiverings of unfathomable bliss  
Compelled the lotus of the world to bloom  
Upon the river of eternity.  
Later, when in her solitary drowse  
Noon leaned her head against the azure sky  
As if against the wall of a great tent  
In luminous fulfilment, from the depths  
Of the world-soul a low and mighty voice  
Arose; a hymn of universal weal  
In mystic strains of splendour rang through time.  
Blending in harmony a myriad moods  
In his contented breast, serene and free  
Mid his stupendous works, One brooded there,  
A Poet contemplating with delight  
His rhythmical creation. Ever moved  
To circle in the boundaries of space  
With an unbounded motion, at the feet  
Of its eternal lord the world revolved.  
Then, glorious in the halo of his rays,  
Obedient to the law of things, the sun  
Descended from his sovereign throne in heaven.  
At last I knew the plenitude of peace,  
As when a man has drained life's nectar-cup  
And hears the grandiose call of the Beyond.  
Thus day by day with undiminished zeal,  
Packing eternity into the hours,  
On each day's canvas you redraw your shape,  
Form-builder, unseen artist of our lives!

Each day the wheel renews its ancient round  
And turns again upon the screen of mind.

*(To be concluded)*

(Translated by Richard Hartz)

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Transform reason into ordered intuition; let all thyself be light. This is thy goal.

Transform effort into an even and sovereign overflowing of the soul-strength; let all thyself be conscious force. This is thy goal.

Transform enjoying into an even and objectless ecstasy; let all thyself be bliss. This is thy goal.

Transform the divided individual into the world-personality; let all thyself be the divine. This is thy goal.

Transform the animal into the Driver of the herds; let all thyself be Krishna. This is thy goal.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377)*

## ‘A NEW WORLD IS BORN’

It is quite difficult to free oneself from old habits of being and to be able to freely conceive of a new life, a new world. And naturally, the liberation begins on the highest planes of consciousness: it is easier for the mind or the higher intelligence to conceive of new things than for the vital being, for instance, to feel things in a new way. And it is still more difficult for the body to have a purely material perception of what a new world will be. Yet this perception must *precede* the material transformation; first one must *feel* very concretely the strangeness of the old things, their lack of relevance, if I may say so. One must have the feeling, even a material impression, that they are outdated, that they belong to a past which no longer has any purpose. For the old impressions one had of past things which have become historic—which have their interest from that point of view and support the advance of the present and the future—this is still a movement that belongs to the old world: it is the old world that is unfolding with a past, a present, a future. But for the creation of a new world, there is, so to speak, only a continuity of transition which gives an appearance—an impression rather—the impression of two things still intermingled but almost disconnected, and that the things of the past no longer have the power or the strength to endure, with whatever modifications, in the new things. That other world is necessarily an *absolutely* new experience. One would have to go back to the time when there was a transition from the animal to the human creation to find a similar period, and at that time the consciousness was not sufficiently mentalised to be able to observe, understand, feel intelligently—the passage must have been made in a completely obscure way. So, what I am speaking about is absolutely new, *unique* in the terrestrial creation, it is something unprecedented, truly a perception or a sensation or an impression... that is quite strange and new. (*After a silence*) A disconnection: something which has overstayed its time and has only quite a subordinate force of existence, from something totally new, but still so young, so imperceptible, almost weak, so to say; it hasn't yet the power to impose and assert itself and to predominate, to take the place of the other. So there is a concomitance but, as I said, with a disconnection, that is, the connection between the two is missing.

It is difficult to describe, but I am speaking to you about it because this is what I felt yesterday evening. I felt it so acutely... that it made me look at certain things, and once I had seen them I felt it would be interesting to tell you about them.

(*Silence*)

It seems strange that something so new, so special and I might say so unexpected should happen during a film-show.<sup>1</sup> For people who believe that some things are important and other things are not, that there are activities which are helpful to yoga and others

1. A Bengali film, *Rani Rasmani*, which describes the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Rani Rasmani, a rich, very intelligent and religious Bengali widow, who in 1847 built the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar (Bengal) where Sri Ramakrishna lived and worshipped Kali.

which are not, well, this is one more opportunity to show that they are wrong. I have always noticed that it is unexpected things which give you the most interesting experiences.

Yesterday evening, suddenly something happened which I have just described to you as best I could—I don’t know if I have succeeded in making myself understood—but it was truly quite new and altogether unexpected. We were shown, comparatively clumsily, a picture of the temple on the banks of the Ganges, and the statue of Kali—for I suppose it was a photograph of that statue, I could not manage to get any precise information about it—and while I was seeing that, which was a completely superficial appearance and, as I said, rather clumsy, I saw the reality it was trying to represent, what was behind, and this put me in touch with all that world of religion and worship, of aspiration, man’s whole relationship with the gods, which was—I am already speaking in the past tense—which was the flower of the human spiritual effort towards something more divine than man, something which was the highest and almost the purest expression of his effort towards what is higher than he. And suddenly I had *concretely, materially*, the impression that it was another world, a world that had ceased to be real, living, an outdated world which had lost its reality, its truth, which had been transcended, surpassed by something which had taken birth and was only beginning to express itself, but whose *life* was *so intense*, so true, so sublime, that all this became false, unreal, worthless.

Then I truly understood—for I understood not with the head, the intelligence but with the body, you understand what I mean—I understood in the cells of the body—that a new world *is born* and is beginning to grow.

And so, when I saw all this, I remembered something that had happened.... I think I remember rightly, in 1926.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had given me charge of the outer work because he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and he had announced to the few people who were there that he was entrusting to me the work of helping and guiding them, that I would remain in contact with him, naturally, and that through me he would do the work. Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and... I must say, in an extremely interesting way.

One day, I went as usual to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening—we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm in my account of what had taken place—then Sri Aurobindo looked at me... and said: “Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed,...” and then he smiled and said: “It will be a

1. On 24 November 1926 Sri Aurobindo withdrew into seclusion and Mother assumed charge of the running of the Ashram.

*great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.”

With my inner consciousness I understood immediately: a few hours later the creation was gone... and from that moment we started anew on other bases.

Well, I announced to you all that this new world was born. But it has been so engulfed, as it were, in the old world that so far the difference has not been very perceptible to many people. Still, the action of the new forces has continued very regularly, very persistently, very steadily, and to a certain extent, very effectively. And one of the manifestations of this action was my experience—truly so very new—of yesterday evening. And the result of all this I have noted step by step in almost daily experiences. It could be expressed succinctly, in a rather linear way:

First, it is not only a “new conception” of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This conception was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself many a time, and it could be formulated somewhat like this: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world just where it was, as it was; whereas our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, indeed it is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation with an improvement, a widening of the old world as it was—and so long as this is a conception up there in the field of thought, in fact it is hardly more than that—but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed—unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn’t disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly.

In any case, to simplify things, it could be said that characteristically the old world, the creation of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind, was an age of the gods, and consequently the age of religions. As I said, the flower of human effort towards what is above it gave rise to innumerable religious forms, to a religious relationship between the best souls and the invisible world. And at the very summit of all that, as an effort towards a higher realisation there has arisen the idea of the unity of religions, of this “one single thing” which is behind all these manifestations; and this idea has truly been, so to speak, the extreme limit of human aspiration. Well, that is at the frontier, it is something that still belongs *completely* to the Overmind world, the Overmind creation and which from there seems to be looking towards this “other thing” which is a new creation it cannot grasp—which it tries to reach, feels coming, but cannot grasp. To grasp it, a reversal is needed. It is necessary to leave the Overmind creation. It was necessary that the new creation, the supramental creation should take place.

And now, all these old things seem so old, so out-of-date, so arbitrary—such a travesty of the real truth.

In the supramental creation there will *no longer be any religions*. The whole life will be the expression, the flowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call gods.

These great divine beings themselves will be able to participate in the new creation; but to do so, they will have to put on what we could call the “supramental substance” on earth. And if some of them choose to remain in their world as they are, if they decide not to manifest physically, their relation with the beings of a supramental earth will be a relation of friends, collaborators, equals, for the highest divine essence will be manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on earth.

When the physical substance is supramentalised, to incarnate on earth will no longer be a cause of inferiority, quite the contrary. It will give a plenitude which cannot be obtained otherwise.

But all this is in the future; it is a future... which has *begun*, but which will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak—not in its essence but in its outer manifestation—not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely *sure* of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out—nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, a *universal beginning*. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: “I invite you to the great adventure.”

It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails—a *real adventure*, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will *never* be again in the same way. If that interests you... well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow—I have no idea.

One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then... set off walking into the unknown. And—come what may! There.

THE MOTHER

## THE GOAL

WHAT I cannot do now is the sign of what I shall do hereafter. The sense of impossibility is the beginning of all possibilities. Because this temporal universe was a paradox and an impossibility, therefore the Eternal created it out of His being.

Impossibility is only a sum of greater unrealised possibles. It veils an advanced stage and a yet unaccomplished journey.

If thou wouldst have humanity advance, buffet all preconceived ideas. Thought thus smitten awakes and becomes creative. Otherwise it rests in a mechanical repetition and mistakes that for its right activity.

To rotate on its own axis is not the one movement for the human soul. There is also its wheeling round the Sun of an inexhaustible illumination.

Be conscious first of thyself within, then think and act. All living thought is a world in preparation; all real act is a thought manifested. The material world exists, because an Idea began to play in divine self-consciousness.

Thought is not essential to existence nor its cause, but it is an instrument for becoming; I become what I see in myself. All that thought suggests to me, I can do; all that thought reveals in me, I can become. This should be man's unshakable faith in himself, because God dwells in him.

Not to go on for ever repeating what man has already done is our work, but to arrive at new realisations and undreamed-of masteries. Time and soul and world are given us for our field, vision and hope and creative imagination stand for our prompters, will and thought and labour are our all-effective instruments.

What is there new that we have yet to accomplish? Love, for as yet we have only accomplished hatred and self-pleasing; Knowledge, for as yet we have only accomplished error and perception and conceiving; Bliss, for as yet we have only accomplished pleasure and pain and indifference; Power, for as yet we have only accomplished weakness and effort and a defeated victory; Life, for as yet we have only accomplished birth and growth and dying; Unity, for as yet we have only accomplished war and association.

In a word, godhead; to remake ourselves in the divine image.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 378-79)*



## REPLY TO A FOUR-WORD TELEGRAM

I DULY received your telegram on my birthday:

FELICITATIONS LOVE RESPECTS—YOGENDRA

Thank you for the threefold greeting. With this trinity-in-unity you have set my cerebrum vibrating. “Felicitations” means “Congratulations” in common parlance, but your choice of this word instead of its synonym is rather “felicitous” in the sense of “apt” because it carries echoes of “felicity” in however indirect a form. It told me that at the same time you wish me great happiness and shake my hand or pat my back for having achieved 78 years in this perilous yet beautiful world.

Of the three telegraphed terms “Love” is, of course, the most welcome. It is a rare commodity and “the bright link” not only between one human being and another but also between human beings and “the high Transcendent”, for it is indeed “the high transcendent’s Angel here”, bringing oneness in the midst of the multiple and manifesting in that flame-up of unity the secret presence of the single Source of all, the Vasudeva who is hidden in everything and who will one day step forth into the open when he is born not merely as an Avataric Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo but as each Yogendra and Amal as well.

I have said that Love is a rare commodity, for it is just the opposite of the Vedic “One Reality whom the sages call by many names”. It is “the One Name by which the non-sages call many realities”. The word has sounded in my ears a lot of times with always a suggestion of a golden ring, but in not more than a few instances has it rung true in fact. Whenever it has come from you, there has been a sense of shining in the touchstone of my heart. Your “Respects” makes me cast my eyes down, because I am overwhelmed by the idea of all that I have still to be—compared to which what has been is so little. But to get appreciation for what one has striven to be is a sweet thing.

Yes, your threefold greeting was indeed good to read. Even better to read was the “turya”, the marvellous Fourth: the name “Yogendra”.

5.12.1982

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

## THE SUPRAMENTAL MAHASHAKTI

(Continued from the issue of February 2004)

THERE are three levels of creation. The highest level is that of Anandaloka, Chaitanyaloka and Satyaloka. There is a middle rung of creation born from the supramental Mahashakti. The third one, this world of ignorance where we live, is separated from the Divine though upheld by the Mother. On the highest levels she is called Anandamayi or Chaitanyamayi or Satyamayi. Then, on the level of the Supramental worlds, she is called the Vijnanamayi. And on our level She comes in multiple forms, out of which the four major Personalities are those of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. It is the same Supreme Divine Mother who, because of the work needed and the intensity of consciousness required, takes on these different Personalities. So, these Personalities are only different aspects of the same Mother. And the Mother, that is the universal Mother, “not only governs all from above but she descends into this lesser triple universe”. This is the individual aspect of the supreme Mother. As the individual she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, “makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine nature”. So our sweet Mother is the mediator between the transcendental Mother and the individual aspect of this triple poise of the Divine.

We need now to look into the individual aspect a little more closely. What is this aspect? It is normally known as the Avatar, that is, the individual incarnation of the Divine. Speaking of the Avatar, I am reminded of a very enigmatic message the Mother had given on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo’s birth centenary year. She gave the message: “One more step towards Eternity.” And in another message the same day she said, “Sri Aurobindo came on earth from the Supreme to announce the manifestation of a new race and the new world, the Supramental.” Earlier She had said: “Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another.” Let us link up all these and see what we understand. Is it, as it is said in the Gita that whenever there is the uprising of evil, the Avatar comes? But, the question to be asked is, why should the avatar come whenever there is an uprising of *adharma* (unrighteousness)? Is it because people on earth call the Divine? No. Humanity is so immersed in itself, it has no time, nor the vision or the consciousness to call down the Supreme. Then who calls down the Avatar? Did we not read the other day that there is a Supreme Consciousness embedded in the earth itself which is constantly aspiring for and invoking the Divine presence? At each level, wherever there is an evolutionary problem, the Divine comes down. First he may send his vibhuti, he may send his grace, he may send great intuition to people, he may send great spiritual experiences to some people, but when there is an evolutionary problem facing the earth-consciousness, the Supreme himself descends on the earth. But, let us be clear, it is not humanity which is evoking, it is the Divine within the earth—it is the “Divine below”, as Sri Aurobindo says, the earth’s call from below which makes this possible.

We have analysed previously “the call” of human beings; but this is the call of the Divine from “below” for the Divine “above”. So it is this Divine who calls down and evokes, and as a response there is the descent of the incarnation from above, there comes down the Avatar. But each of these Avatars or divine incarnations are time specific, need specific, evolutionary specific and yuga specific. Each fulfills the work for which he or she has incarnated upon the earth. He imbibes in him the work and consciousness of the past Avatars and delivers the new message of the next future. It is in this light that we understand the Mother’s message, “Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past nor to history. Sri Aurobindo is the Future advancing towards its realisation.” (*CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 5) This is how at each instance the supreme divine grace comes down and the Mother too, in response to the need of the whole earth, has come down as the incarnation of the Divine Grace and Divine Love.

We have to understand that each Avatar who comes down imbibes the consciousness of all the previous Avatars, and then reveals the next future. For each Avatar has a particular mission to pioneer, a particular consciousness to establish upon earth. This path of evolution is endless and each Avatar is only “one more step in Eternity”. Now we understand why the Mother calls Sri Aurobindo “One more step in Eternity”. Evolution is eternal; Sri Aurobindo is the last Avatar in one sense, and yet not the last Avatar in another sense. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are the last Avatars in the physical human body. But there may be Avatars after and beyond also because evolution is an endless and eternal process. All Avatars have the same origin but, at the same time, each one surpasses the previous Avatars in the work and consciousness that he does or manifests. Thus in the parable of the ten avatars of Vishnu, the first three are in animal forms, “then in the animal man [Narasimha, Man-Lion], then in the dwarf man-soul, Vamana, the violent Asuric man, Rama of the axe [Parashurama], the divinely-natured man, a greater Rama, the awakened spiritual man, Buddha, and... the complete divine manhood, Krishna,—for the last Avatar, Kalki, only accomplishes the work Krishna began,— he fulfils in power the great struggle which the previous Avatars prepared in all its potentialities.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 13, p. 157)

Sri Aurobindo writes, “Krishna opened the possibility of overmind with its two sides of realisation, static and dynamic. Buddha tried to shoot from mind to Nirvana in the Supreme, just as Shankara did in another way after him... Krishna on the other hand was leading by the normal course of evolution. The next normal step is not a featureless Absolute, but the supermind.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 402-03) We have received such clear indications from Sri Aurobindo that the very next evolutionary step is not trying to achieve a Brahmic consciousness. Sri Krishna had opened these two gates of the dynamic realisation and the static realisation. Buddha and Shankara followed the static realisation so they reached the Nirvana or Nirguna Brahman or whatever it is. That was a kind of offshoot but in the normal process of the ten avatars the next step is the descent of the Supermind. And it is Sri Aurobindo, says the Mother, who came to announce the creation of tomorrow—the coming of the Supramental being. Thus the specific mission and purpose of Sri Aurobindo’s avartarhood is to bring down the Supermind into the earth’s con-

sciousness and transform it. And the purpose of the Mother as well, she being Sri Aurobindo's Force, Sri Aurobindo's Shakti, is the same. Sri Aurobindo writes about the Mother: she "comes in order to bring down the Supramental and it is the descent which makes her full manifestation here possible." "Her embodiment is a chance for the earth-consciousness to receive the Supramental into it and to undergo first the transformation necessary for that to be possible." (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, pp. 48-49)

In this manner the specific embodiment of the Divine Mother in the present incarnation is that of the Supramental Mahashakti. Though the Mother has within herself the Transcendental and Universal aspects, what is required for the present is the dominating consciousness of the Supramental Mahashakti, because this is the new age of the supramental creation itself. In one of her conversations the Mother said that once there was a talk about the pralaya—that the universe was destroyed by pralaya six times and it is said that the seventh creation will survive. To this idea Sri Aurobindo added: "Yes, not only will it survive this time but it will see the transformation also." That is so because of the descent of the Supermind. And no other power can transform this earth except the supramental. All the Avatars who came in the past did not have the Supramental force and power, so there was no possibility of a transformation of this earth. But this time we have the assurance of the supramental transformation. Therefore, the Shakti who has to come down is the Supramental Mahashakti. There couldn't have been the descent of any lesser Force.

The Mother's role as the Supramental Mahashakti is clearly visible in some of her prayers. "Thou plungest me, O Lord, into the most opaque darkness; it must be then because Thou hast so firmly established Thy light in me that Thou knowest it will stand the perilous test. Hast Thou chosen me for descending into the vortex of this hell as Thy torch-bearer?" (*Prayers and Meditations*, March 4, 1915) The Divine's reply was: "I have chosen thee from all eternity to be my exceptional representative upon the earth, not in an invisible and hidden way, but in a way apparent to the eyes of all men. And what thou wert created to be, thou shalt be." Another prayer: "O my God, Thou has told me, plunge into matter and identify thyself with it, it is there that I would manifest." The Mother says, "And Thy will has been done." She describes it in one of the Prayers as to how the work has been done: "But the consciousness cries: 'I want Thee, I want Thee, without Thee I am nothing, I do not even exist!' And the vibration of the call is so strong that even this heavy Matter is shaken by it. 'I want Thee, I want Thee! Since thou dost not permit me to spring towards Thee, leaving all behind to be with Thee, I shall call Thee from here; and I shall beseech Thee so very much that Thou wilt come down and infuse Thyself into a world that has finally awakened to the absolute need of Thy Presence.' " (*CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 40) These are some of the indications of the Mother having descended into this Matter and doing the work of transformation. It is not yet apparent to our eyes but as she said, in 1956, after the descent of the Supermind, or the Supramental Truth-Consciousness: "My Lord, what Thou hast wanted me to do I have done. The gates of the supramental have been thrown open and the Supramental Consciousness, Light and Force are flooding the earth.... Now that the supramental is there... is it that the mission of this

form is ended and that another form is to take up the work in its place?" And as though in reply she heard from the Lord with an indisputable certitude: "If you cannot do it, no other body upon earth can do it." (CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 57-58) This is regarding the transformation of her own body: if she cannot do it, no other body upon earth can do it!

This is the work that she accomplished, because as you know, in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, we understand that to bring down the overmental consciousness Sri Krishna had to come down. It means that the supreme Sachchidananda comes down as Sri Krishna who is the incarnation of the overmental consciousness. When there is a necessity of bringing a particular consciousness into this evolutionary world the Divine descends as an incarnation of that particular consciousness. Sri Krishna is not a representative of the supramental just as Sri Rama is not a representative of the Overmind. At each level the Divine descends with a dominant consciousness in him. This time Sri Aurobindo says earth's evolution will have to move into the Supermind. So it was obvious and necessary that the Divine comes down as the supramental power. This is the first time we see the Divine coming down as twin Avatars, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. What Sri Aurobindo represents is the Supramental Light and the Mother represents the Supramental Mahashakti or the Divine Shakti. Here are a few lines from *Savitri* describing the descent of the Mother, her power and work:

O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light  
 And bring down God into the lives of men;  
 Earth shall be my work-chamber and my house,  
 My garden of light to plant a seed divine.  
 When all thy work in human time is done,  
 The mind of earth shall be a home of light,  
 The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,  
 The body of earth a tabernacle of God.  
 Awakened from the mortal's ignorance  
 Men shall be lit with the Eternal's ray  
 And the glory of my sun-lift in their thoughts  
 And feel in their hearts the sweetness of my love  
 And in their acts my Power's miraculous drive.  
 My will shall be the meaning of their days;  
 Living for me, by me, in me they shall live.

(SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 699)

This last sentence is perhaps the secret of the sunlit path. Because, without this living for her, in her, it is not possible even to tread upon the sunlit path. The sunlit path means a transformation of oneself, it is not just realisation of one's self. And for any of these transformations, the key is the Mother. All of these powers are gathered in our Mother. Sri Aurobindo writes that the four Personalities have not yet founded "their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body." To transform ourselves

and hold together in our being the aspects of wisdom, power, harmony, and perfection, the only way is to follow the sunlit path and to surrender to this luminous Supramental Sun—Ma-Sri Aurobindo. Let us imbibe Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra: "Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth." This is the Mother, the Supramental Mahashakti, who has come down particularly to transform our earth.

There seems to be no other shortcut to this path. If one does not have that inner psychic call, it may be very difficult to follow this path. We may have some kind of emotional satisfaction that we have turned to Sri Aurobindo and that we have the blessings of the Mother, etc but that may be just the very beginning. To take up Yoga,... it is a long way... but if you have faith and trust and surrender to the Mother, even that long way can be realised—all because of our divine Mother—the Supramental Mahashakti.

*(Concluded)*

ANANDA REDDY

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To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions. He values education for its utility in fitting a man for success in a competitive or, it may be, a socialised industrial existence, science for the useful inventions and knowledge, the comforts, conveniences, machinery of production with which it arms him, its power for organisation, regulation, stimulus to production. The opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organiser of industry are the supermen of the commercial age and the true, if often occult rulers of its society.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Human Cycle, SABCL, Vol. 15, p. 73)*

# LIVING LABORATORIES OF THE LIFE DIVINE

(A talk for AUM 2003 Conference)

TODAY I will speak on the subject “Living Laboratories of the Divine Life”. By “living laboratories”, I am referring, of course, to Sri Aurobindo’s justly famous phrase taken from *The Life Divine*. But before turning our attention to that phrase, I would like to back up a little in time and consider the idea of the Superman as it makes its beginning in the utterance of Friedrich Nietzsche.

In many ways Nietzsche, as a philosopher, can be said to inaugurate the modern age. Modern philosophy, where it has been fruitful, has been largely an engagement with Nietzsche’s thought. Nietzsche is a controversial figure, a very complex figure. Complex because he received intuitions from above and uttered them in a new kind of way which challenged the metaphysical tradition. He also introduced ideas—new ideas—that were half-baked. They were often not well-formed and sometimes apparently inconsistent. So to denigrate him or to adulate him is, in either case, a dangerous thing. Nietzsche introduces the idea of the Superman in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. I will read out a passage from this work. In recent translations of this work, the German term *Übermensch* has been rendered as ‘Overman’ instead of ‘Superman’. Some of us are familiar with a similar kind of replacement which has been attempted by Georges Van Vrekhem who has translated the Mother’s ‘*Surhomme*’ as ‘Overman’ rather than ‘Superman’. I do not wish to enter into technical controversies or debates over these terms, but bring to your notice that there is a degree of fluidity about these things that lend themselves to varieties of interpretation.

I read you Walter Kaufman’s translation of Nietzsche’s passage:

I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves. And do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the Overman. A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from the worm to man and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you to become ghosts or plants?

Behold, I teach you the Overman. The Overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of

other-worldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go...

Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the Overman: he is this sea; in him, your great contempt can go under.

What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue....

Man is a rope, tied between beast and Overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.

I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may someday become the Overman's....

I love him who does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself but wants to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides over the bridge as spirit.

It's a very interesting passage, a profound passage, a passage that I wanted to read out because many who have read Sri Aurobindo have never read Nietzsche and acquire some preconceptions of what the Nietzschean Superman is all about. I'd encourage them to divest themselves of these ideas. Nietzsche inaugurates the future destiny of the human race in the modern age; at a crisis point in western civilization, he holds out the goal of the self-exceeding of man in the Super/Over-man. We don't need to assume that Nietzsche himself knew with clarity what he meant by the term 'superman' or 'overman' as the case may be, but it's best to receive the complexity of his thought and see its vastness and its greatness, see it side by side with the Superman as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, how their Superman relates, if at all, to Nietzsche's idea.



I read first from the Mother a familiar passage. It is from a talk to the children of the Ashram:

There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it. (*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 116)

There is much in this that bears resemblance with Nietzsche's description of the Overman. Both texts are explicit about the transitional character of the human species. The Mother's statement actually contains within it Sri Aurobindo's famous assertion "Man is a transitional being" and for Nietzsche, "Man is a rope tied between beast and overman" and again, "Man is a bridge and not an end..." Secondly, both texts emphasize an earthly destiny. And finally, note the not so noble appraisal of the human being. Man is no longer the "measure of all things" extolled in the European Renaissance, the source of western civilizational hubris. While the human being in the Mother's formulation may not be the contemptible worm of Nietzsche, it isn't too far from that either. The Mother quickly disabuses humanity of its exalted notion of itself.

I now read Sri Aurobindo's passage from *The Life Divine* where he likens us to "living laboratories":

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which he secretly is. (pp. 3-4)

Let us ponder these three texts. In all three, there is the notion of the self-exceeding of

man. The human being has to exceed himself, because from the viewpoint of the imperfection of nature, humanity is as faulted as the animal, as the worm is to the human being and it is to set our sights on that kind of goal that Nietzsche is calling us through the voice of Zarathustra. But Nietzsche's call is going out to the will of man. It is not a simple call to the ego—it is not a call to titanism as has been popularly supposed, it is a call to sacrifice, to vastness, it is a call to the formation of the gods within us. The overman according to Nietzsche is like the gods of the Greek classical heritage. It is Nietzsche's allergy towards the Christian tradition that makes him deny god, but it is in the becoming of god or of the gods in human guise that his message lies. But it ends here. What apart from the human will is there to lead us to this goal? If we are hardly more evolved than the worm or the animal in most of our nature, what hope do we have except for willing something which is faulted into existence in our drive upwards?

If we look at Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's texts, we see there one critical element which is missed out by Nietzsche. They are not talking about the human will attaining to the superman. They are talking about the human being as the site where the superman is formed by agents other than the human. In both cases they use the term "Nature" to indicate this extra-human agency. What is it that they mean by "Nature"? Evidently, if there is something which ties these uses of the word to some common ground, we have to think of "Nature" as the evolutionary force in a conscious form, the evolutionary will.

Sri Aurobindo's texts need to be read in a cross-cultural context. They have contexts which are equally eastern and western. "Nature", in Sri Aurobindo's usage, is backgrounded by the entire metaphysical romantic tradition, the European tradition of Nature as a cosmic presence and power. With the metaphysical "death of God" and the birth of the Modern Age at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c. in Europe, German Romanticism found Nature as replacement for God—Nature as a power with an intelligence instinct in it, as a cosmic container, a Mother-Force. It is in this sense that the English Romantic poets also extol Nature. Sri Aurobindo draws partly on this tradition in his usage. But Nature is equally and perhaps even more for him all that that term means in the Indian tradition when you translate it into "Prakriti".

Prakriti—Sri Aurobindo has written extensively about this term, the various things it means and has meant. The term comes to us from Sankhya as that *mukhya*, that Chief of the manifested world which is the primary force manifesting things. It is that which runs us, drives us, drives everything, Matter, Life and Mind. It gives us the sense of agency through the creation of an Ego, *ahamkara*, but actually is the complete authority through the operation of its three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—of all that happens in us—conditionings, all is conditioning. But Prakriti also, from an even earlier tradition, lost and then revived in the Gita—Prakriti that has two faces to it, returning to us through another guise in the Tantra, two colors—dark and golden. Prakriti which occupies two hemispheres in two different modalities—Para and Apara. Apara Prakriti of the lower hemisphere, of Avidya, Ignorance, wearing the dark guise of Unconscious Nature, the automatisms of Sankhya, the laws that are coded into Matter, Life and Mind, that run everything within which we are given the illusion of Consciousness—and Para Prakriti,

the unveiled Force, Nature-Force of the Supreme Divine, the calling forth into Becoming of Being, of the One Being, the only Being there is. And this dichotomy, this two-fold nature, is something that is contained, encapsulated in that simple word “Nature” that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are using in their texts. Because, indeed, the way to the Superman as far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, is in these two hands of Nature, this twin-aspected Nature.

The lower Nature, ignorant, is still instinct with the force of divinity. It has moved matter into the domain of Life. It has moved Life into the domain of Mind. It will move Mind into the domain of Supermind. But the question is when? Nature has eternity in her hands, as the Mother has said. Nature doesn't care for our time schemes. Nature experiments, plays with forms, plays with possibilities, with ideas and creates this plethora of manifest reality that we find so delightful in this world. We build our botanical gardens and our zoos so that we can travel to these parks and delight in these multitudinous and wonderful creations of Nature. Nature has thrown up our human diversity too, our diversity of types, our diversity of thinking, our diversity of cultures. It's all the doing of Nature, and She is here to play an infinite number of games because She is the creative spirit, and progress takes place at her own slow pace through all this.

But the human being, as Aswapathy, in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, expresses in his appeal to the Supreme Mother, is a hapless unfinished experiment of Nature, a product of its half-grown march toward super-humanity, caught between the worm and the God. From life to life we suffer the pains and discords of a half-baked consciousness that yearns to exceed itself, that is replete with complex problems which it can never solve because of fundamental incapacity, that feels trapped and imprisoned and cries out for *moksha*, liberation, ultimate escape out of this prison-house of the round of suffering and insoluble complexity, finding no other goal.

This is where Sri Aurobindo intervenes to indicate that Nature has another poise—the poise of Nature in the Knowledge, in the *Vidya*, the golden Mahakali behind the black Kali, the body of light, of knowledge, of gnosis, the Gnostic Mother. And it is this Gnostic Mother, if she descends now, becomes active as the unveiled Power controlling the lower Nature, that can change everything within the *Avidya*, that can change the conditions of the *Avidya*. For then, it will be no longer a play of trial and error, a slow and painful growth through eternity of the ascending powers of consciousness, but of the future bringing the present into itself, a precipitation of the goal that begins working within the present, transforming it to its own conditions. This is the one reason why Sri Aurobindo chose to spend all his time and all of his superhuman yogic power to focus on the bringing down of the Supermind. He could very easily have sat in his room in Pondicherry and accomplished what he has said some yogis have done in the Himalayas—brought about revolutions in the world. Why ‘could’, he did—a number of them. But he wasn't satisfied with this because it didn't solve mankind's problems. The problems of humanity cannot be solved by a change of the external conditions, or even a temporary change in the inner consciousness of individuals or peoples that causes them to do exalted things beyond their habitual or normal capacity.

For an hour God resides in a nation or in a time. We experience an hour of God. Human beings are empowered temporarily to do deeds they never could have done; but then, as in the first canto of *Savitri*, The Symbol Dawn, inevitably the Power recedes and we are left to “the common light of earthly day”, we are back to business as usual, the sordid poverty of human life. There is only one way that this can change and that is not through our unaided effort. It is through the bringing down of a force which, in spite of us, can change conditions here. But the “in spite of us” has to be understood in its right dimensions. This change of conditions is not an external or a temporary change, it is first and foremost a radical change of consciousness—and this cannot change without our conscious cooperation. That is why in the statement I have quoted from *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo puts it, as always in his wonderful global sentences, with every aspect of the question included. As he says there, “Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god.”

Let us make no mistakes about the priorities of this process. It is the Para-Prakriti, Supreme or Higher Nature, who is the Scientist of this laboratory. It is we who serve her purpose through our adherence. We are the conscious cooperators. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s primary yogic work has been to change the agency of this process from the Lower to the Higher Nature, or rather, to establish the Higher within the Lower. And what is called the Supermental descent and manifestation is exactly this collapse of the division between the *Vidya* and the *Avidya*. It is the implosion of the Power, the Knowledge, the *Vijnana-Shakti* into earth and that entry has initiated a New Age.

A New Age does not start by astrological factors. It isn’t because it is written in the calendar that a New Age suddenly begins. A New Age is an act of consciousness. It is a powerful act of consciousness, willed by the human cooperators and assented to by the Divine. And this is the New Age that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have inaugurated. It is a New Age, first and foremost, of world yoga. It is a New Age of Yoga and of World Yoga—Yoga, the accelerated process towards conscious evolution. Prakriti, Nature, has always been doing yoga. This is why in *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo can say, “All life is Yoga.” But the yoga of Nature is a slow, semi-conscious process. The yoga of human beings who wake up from within by the pointing finger of light that comes as a beacon showing the way is a conscious yoga, a conscious yoga that accelerates, quickens the process, that condenses into a lifetime or a few years what would otherwise would have taken many lifetimes, that brings the future into the present. And this is exactly what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done on a cosmic or terrestrial level. They have initiated the earth into a new yoga. The ear of the earth has been privy to the mantra of a new yoga and has accepted it. That yoga has begun.

(To be concluded)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

## INTRODUCING SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

(Continued from the issue of February 2004)

IN 1939 and 1940, during the Second World War when the whole world was stunned by Germany's spectacular successes on the battlefield and some even lauded the leadership of Adolf Hitler, Sri Aurobindo wrote two poems—"The Dwarf Napoleon: Hitler, October 1939" and "The Children of Wotan (1940)". Both poems were written satirising Hitler and Nazi Germany. But they were not mere caustic satires. In them the poet stated in no uncertain terms how terribly evil, how *asuric* were Hitler and his cohorts, and that at a time when few knew of the inhuman treatment meted out to the Jews under the Nazi regime and the real nature of the infamous Concentration Camps. With his Truth-Seer's eye Sri Aurobindo had seen the calamitous condition of Europe and Hitler's true image—*asuric* and ridiculous at the same time.

Hitler wanted to emulate Napoleon without possessing an iota of Napoleon's greatness, idealism or divine inspiration. Hence Sri Aurobindo calls him the dwarf Napoleon.

This puny creature would bestride the earth...  
...this creature of a nether clay,  
Void of all grandeur, like a gnome at play,  
Iron and mud his nature's mingled stuff,  
A little limited visionary brain  
Cunning and skilful in its narrow vein,...

Even the fact that while delivering his speeches Hitler often screamed like a maniac, and foamed at the mouth, has been mentioned by the poet—but in very refined terms :

World-destiny waits upon that foaming lip.

Sri Aurobindo then utters his words of warning:

A Titan Power supports this pigmy man,  
The crude dwarf instrument of a mighty Force.

If once his tenebrous empire were established on the earth, mankind too would share the doom of the mammoth and dinosaur, i.e., total extinction. Finally, in the last two lines, almost two years before Stalin's Russia and Roosevelt's America declared war against Germany, Sri Aurobindo prophesised:

...he must stride on...  
Perhaps to meet upon his storm-swept road  
A greater devil—or thunderstroke of God.

History bears witness that Stalin was much more *asuric* than Hitler and that the Allied Forces won the ultimate victory through a series of miracles, the work, as we all know, of the Will of the Divine.

In “The Children of Wotan” with supreme mockery Sri Aurobindo puts a song of triumph on the lips of the Hitler Youth. Nietzsche’s superman had assumed a distorted form in Hitler’s demented brain. Hitler dreamt of a tall, blonde, blue-eyed Aryan race, modelled after the Scandinavian people, but created through coercion, who would rule the world. Sri Aurobindo has named this poem “The Children of Wotan” after the Norwegian god, Wotan or Odin.

But the shadow fell between Hitler’s dream and reality. This master race became, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “A cross of the beast and demoniac with the godhead of power and will”. And their triumphal march? “We march, lit by Truth’s death-pyre, to the world’s satanic age.”

Now I shall mention a few of those poems which are seemingly simple but actually charged with a profound mystic sense. “Life” is written in the rather unusual trochaic metre:

Mystic Miracle, daughter of Delight,  
Life, thou ecstasy...

Sri Aurobindo has not written this poem merely to sing a paean of life or to prove that life is a curious playfield of paradoxical truths. We shall get some hint of the true depth of this poem if we read it aloud maintaining the inner rhythm and enunciating each word correctly and meditate over the words. It is as though to make his readers conscious of all this that Sri Aurobindo has used the trochaic metre. For the speciality of trochee is that at every beat the stressed syllable preceding the unstressed one adds more power to the words. In “Mystic Miracle” in addition to this power there is a sonorous alliteration which immediately after striking our outer ear penetrates and rings in our inner ear, which Sri Aurobindo calls the “inner hearing”.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is like the mantra, which cannot be fully grasped by the intellect but must be felt and realised intuitively. If we concentrate even on a tiny insect and go into a deep trance, we shall perhaps understand how mystical, enigmatic and miraculous Life is and why she is the daughter of delight. As the poem develops Sri Aurobindo gives us his subjective feelings towards life and continues:

Even in rags I am a god;  
Fallen, I am divine;  
High I triumph when down-trod,  
Long I live when slain.

“The Mother of Dreams” is another poem whose beauty of imagery and haunting melody capture the heart. The lines are long and each line contains several internal rhymes. To these are added the gravity and solemnity of long vowels. As a result we get almost

breathless while reading the poem and we seem to hear the horns of paradise faintly blowing. Listen to this:

Thine is the shade in which visions are made; sped by thy hands from celestial  
lands come the souls that rejoice for ever.  
Into thy dream-worlds we pass or look in thy magic glass, then beyond thee we  
climb out of Space and Time to the peak of divine endeavour.

Personally, I feel that the poems such as “Bride of the Fire”, “Rose of God”, “The Blue Bird”, “The Island Sun”, “Ascent”, “Shiva—The Inconscient Creator”, “Jivanmukta”, “In Horis Aeternum”, are all purely spiritual in nature. In each of these poems Sri Aurobindo has expressed his spiritual experiences of the Overmental plane through earthly symbols and images.

“Bride of the Fire” is a poem of four stanzas in each of which the poet has manifested one special aspect of the Divine Mother and has asked for the corresponding boon, having first made himself worthy of receiving it. The Goddess is the Bride of the Fire, she is the Beauty of the Light, she is the Image of Ecstasy and she is the Voice of Infinity. In order to receive Her Grace, the poet has slain desire, sacrificed longing and parted from grief. He is now capable of bearing the Ganges flow of Her Delight.

The Blue Bird directly refers to the Spiritual World:

I am the bird of God in His blue...  
My pinions soar beyond Time and Space  
Into unfading Light...  
I have perched on Wisdom's tree  
Thronged with the blossoms of Paradise  
By the streams of Eternity.

bear no ambiguity. Identifying himself completely with the Blue Bird with its ruby eyes, burning heart and the shoreless and still mind, Sri Aurobindo has declared:

My song is rapture's mystic art,  
My flight immortal will.

These lines do not merely form part of “The Blue Bird”, they are a recondite indication of the true nature of Sri Aurobindo's poetry.

In his correspondence with the sadhaks, Sri Aurobindo has once in a while written about his own poetry. These letters do help us to some extent in fathoming his poems. On 3rd June 1934 he writes about “Jivanmukta”:

This *Jivanmukta* is not merely a poem, but a transcript of a spiritual condition, one of the highest in the inner Overmind experience.... Silence, Light, Power, Ananda, these are the four pillars of the Jivanmukta consciousness....

And again,

The lines:

Revealed it wakens when God's stillness  
Heavens the ocean of moveless Nature

express an exact spiritual experience with a visible symbol which is not a mere ornamental metaphor but corresponds to exact and concrete spiritual experience, an immense oceanic expanse of Nature-consciousness (not the world) in oneself covered with the heavens of the Divine Stillness and itself rendered calm and motionless by that over-vaulting influence.

In his book *Talks on Poetry*, the poet Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) has given us a total realisation of Sri Aurobindo's "The Rose of God". Here I shall refer to a few passages from his appreciation of this poem. However, I request all of you to read the two relevant chapters—lovers of poetry will benefit from them immensely, more so from the whole book.

"The Rose of God" reveals through the mystic rose five different aspects of the Divine which the poet has "feelingly visioned and visionarily comprehended and comprehendingly felt." Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love are the aspects of the Divine Epiphany. The Rose of God is the "vermilion stain on the sapphires of Heaven". As the Rose of Bliss she is "fire-sweet", as the Rose of Light she is the "immaculate core of the ultimate seeing", as the Rose of Power she pierces the night with her diamond halo, as the Rose of Life she is "crowded with petals colour's lyre" and as the Rose of Love she is the "ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace".

Amal Kiran has given us the literary evaluation of the "vermilion stain" in the following words: "The word 'stain' is a happy violence showing the passion that bursts forth as if with God's own rich blood forced through the rapt distance of the Absolute... 'fire-sweet'... is an unusual combination in which we have the passing of the seen through the touched into the tasted. And to get this combination needs not only a fusion of the senses but also their turning subtle to concretise the realities of inner experience...On the mystical level, it is the contact of the Divine, the communion with the Eternal, bringing an all-enkindling, all-consuming joy in which the separative ego is lost in an infinite radiance."

Regarding the phrase "colour's lyre", Amal Kiran remarks, "a turn of phrase suggestive of colour growing a sound-power, artistic vision growing a mantra, Divine Beauty capable of converting into a rhythmic whole whatever it touches and tinges with its passionate joy."

The melopoeia of the incantatory musical effect of "The Rose of God" is so magnificent that I dare not try to analyse it for fear of doing it a grave injustice. The reader will discover it for himself if he reads the poem aloud in a calm, meditative mood, enunciating the words properly and giving its right value to each vowel sound and, of course,



maintaining the right rhythm. The melody of the alliterations, assonances and consonances all harmonised by the short and long vowel sounds will surely ring in his inner ear, enchanting him with its magic.

Let us now talk about Sri Aurobindo's sonnets. There are some eighty of them in the *Collected Poems* most of which were composed between the years 1930 and 1950. The characteristic of the sonnet form is that it gives a feeling of intimacy. It is as though the poet is sharing some private thought, sentiment or experience with the reader. Sri Aurobindo's sonnets too are no exception, the only difference is that they are of a very high level because in most of them he has revealed his spiritual experiences and realisations. But among them there are a few humorous sonnets too, through which Sri Aurobindo makes it amply clear that spiritual life is not devoid of humour. "Despair on the Staircase", "A Dream of Surreal Science", "Self" fall in this category.

In "Despair on the Staircase" the octave builds up the mystery which surrounds the lonely occult being standing on the topmost stair. "She is stately, grandiose full of grace. A musing mask is her immobile face". Her glorious eyes are large with "the grandeur of a sorrowful surmise" and her magnificent pose eloquently expresses "the tragedy of a mysterious mind". Then comes the sestet with its anticlimactic antithesis. The verse "Her tail is up like an unconquered flag" first stuns us into a shocked disbelief then gradually leads us through a hesitant chuckle into uncontrollable laughter. The final description of the heroine of this poem, the cat, as "A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman" is so unique that we can only wonder at it.

"Self" is a sonnet which may give rise to controversies. The convincing manner with which Sri Aurobindo states the case of the spiritual man who is "egoless, spiritual, free" but swears because his dinner is not ready, almost makes us believe that to be "unmoved within, desireless, pure" is enough and that "It does not matter / How you may kick and howl and rage and shout, / Making a row over your daily platter." But then we consider Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's own life, their infinite patience, sweetness and compassion, and realise the fallacy of the view that there need not be a harmony between the inner realisation and the outward behaviour of a yogi.

"A Dream of Surreal Science" is an excellent satire on the erroneous theory held by some scientists of the Pavlovian school that man is nothing but a purely mechanical creature, a mere parcel of conditioned reflexes, and all his achievements entirely dependent on his hormones and his glandular secretions.

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink  
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;  
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink  
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

When we try to visualise the above scenes we cannot but be struck by the absurdity of these narrow scientific theories. The last couplet of this sonnet in a light vein delivers a warning signal which is anything but light:

A scientist played with atoms and blew out  
The universe before God had time to shout.

From the humorous we soar to the sublime when we consider the serious sonnets because their substance as well as their style is of a very high order.

A grave situation is the source of inspiration of “The Godhead”. Sri Aurobindo was travelling in a horse carriage in Baroda. Suddenly the horse went mad and started galloping through the crowded streets. The driver lost control completely and a tragedy was imminent. Just then Sri Aurobindo felt the all protecting Presence of the Divine—“In me, enveloping me the body of Him”. In the lines

I sat behind the dance of Danger’s hooves  
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist’s whim,...

Sri Aurobindo has painted an unparalleled word picture where the sound effect is in perfect harmony with the image and fittingly echoes the sense. In the “dance of Danger’s hooves” we hear the drumbeats of Rudra’s dance of destruction; and “the shouting street that seemed a futurist’s whim” brings to our mind scenes from a very abstract film shot at high speed by an ultramodern director—harsh colours and lines, forms and the formless run riot with discordant music. And later on we see, superimposed on this chaotic scene

A face with the calm of immortality...

whose

...hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;  
The world was in His heart and He was I....

In the sonnet “The Divine Hearing” Sri Aurobindo describes another spiritual experience where he hears the voice of the Divine in all the sounds of the world:

...the siren’s blare

Blowing upon the windy horn of Space  
A call of distance and of mystery...

In these lines along with the very obvious mysticism there is a beautiful combination of the earthly and the unearthly. Such an unromantic and unpleasant thing as the siren of a factory becomes ethereal when it brings to him a call of distance and mystery.

It may seem that the spiritual quest is a peaceful affair where a sadhak remains immersed in yogic practices such as asanas, pranayam, meditation etc. But in actual fact it is a risky venture because the soul has to plunge all alone into the unknown. In “The Infinite Adventure” the poet’s skiff is launched “in the waters of an unknown infinite”. Everything that is earthly and human fades away. Before him there is only “the unknown

abyss and one pale pointing light". Here he gives us two very original mystic metaphors: "An unconscious Hunger's lion plaint and roar" and "the ocean sleep of a dead Eremite." He ends the sonnet with a strong certitude:

I shall be merged in the Lonely and Unique  
And wake into a sudden blaze of God,  
The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse.

The word "electron" spontaneously makes the layman think of physics and the physicist, of the subatomic particle orbiting the nucleus at a dizzying speed. But the true spiritual reality of the electron has been revealed to the seer-eye of Sri Aurobindo:

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.  
The One devised innumerably to be;  
His oneness in invisible forms he hides,  
Time's tiny temples of eternity.

I am sure that the connoisseur will not fail to recognise the spiritual truth presented in this stanza by means of striking imagery, word-arrangement and sound effect.

In "The Divine Worker" Sri Aurobindo has described the right attitude of a karma-yogi. He says:

In all are heard Thy steps: Thy unseen feet  
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front....  
  
No danger can perturb my spirit's calm:  
My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;  
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,  
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.

I am not aware if any other poet has made such a correct evaluation of success and failure in so sensitive a manner. When a toddler takes his first few uncertain steps successfully the mother is happy no doubt, but when he stumbles and falls she rushes forward, picks him up and lovingly carries him. In the same way, in the eyes of God man's effort is much more important than his success.

Finally, to wind up this part of my essay, I would like to mention the sonnet "Nirvana" about which we have Sri Aurobindo's own observation: "There is no veil or symbol there—it tries to state the experience as precisely and overtly as possible."

All is abolished but the mute Alone.  
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief  
Grow inexistent now beyond belief;  
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.

Unostentatious, unornamented, these stanzas have a Shiva-white, celestial calm which instantly pervades the heart of the reader.

By no stretch of the imagination can this tiny introduction of mine to Sri Aurobindo's poetry be considered anywhere near complete. Due to various reasons I have not been able even to mention so many marvellous poems. But the scale of incompleteness will sink lower still, if I do not name just two more poems. They are "Ilion" and "Ahana".

I have hinted earlier that Sri Aurobindo has experimented much with English prosody. "The Rose of God", "Jivanmukta", "The Bird of Fire" and many other poems are written in new metres. Some English poets too have tried their hand at various new metres but the one particular metre which has eluded almost all English poets in their attempt to adapt it to the English tongue is the quantitative metre which depends entirely on the weight or lightness of the word-sounds. Sri Aurobindo has written a long spiritual poem, "Ahana" in this metre. "Ahana" has a history of publication. Originally Sri Aurobindo had written a poem of 160 lines under the title "The Descent of Ahana". In 1915 he revised and enlarged it to 172 lines and published it in a small volume titled "Ahana and Other Poems". Subsequently, he further revised and restructured the latter part of the poem and enlarged it considerably to 520 lines before including it in his *Collected Poems and Plays* which was published in 1942. This publication history is, I feel, indication enough of the importance Sri Aurobindo had given to this poem. "Ahana, the Dawn of God" is the divine Creatrix who ushers in the New Age of the Life Divine in answer to man's ardent aspiration for transformation. Graciously She calls out to him:

Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster  
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master....  
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,  
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,  
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,  
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after.

In a footnote the spiritual significance of the Ras has been explained as "The dance-round of Krishna with the cowherdesses in the moonlit groves of Brindavan, type of the dance of Divine Delight with the souls of men liberated in the world of Bliss secret within us."

Sri Aurobindo had also begun to compose an epic poem, "Ilion", in the quantitative hexametre. Following his schema, he had written eight complete books and the incomplete ninth one, a total of nearly five thousand lines, but due to some reason, maybe lack of time, he did not complete the epic. Although, naturally enough, "Ilion" reminds us of Homer's *Iliad*, yet the planning, form and style of this epic are totally different and had it been completed it would have enriched substantially not only English literature but world literature too. Anybody who has read even a small portion of "Ilion" will surely agree with me. As an example, I shall quote the first six lines of this epic:

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,  
 Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,  
 Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the Euxine.  
 Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy vastness  
 Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and beauty,  
 All on her bosom sustaining, the patient compassionate Mother.

This description of the pale Dawn with her bright lips emerging from the chill mists of the river Euxine, does it not ring in our inner ear like a sonorous Vedic mantra? Amal Kiran rightly comments: "Sri Aurobindo's sovereign mark is his unfailing inspiration."... "Everywhere, Sri Aurobindo brings out living symbols from the mystical planes—concrete contact with the Divine's presence."

Sri Aurobindo's poetry is like the mantra, very difficult to comprehend with the intellect. One has first to still one's mind and prepare oneself to listen to the divine words and feel and store them in the heart. Whether we understand them or not, if we read them beautifully and sonorously, some time or the other they will reach our soul and there burn bright.

About the difficulty of understanding Sri Aurobindo, the Mother has said:

Who can understand Sri Aurobindo? He is as vast as the universe and his teaching is limitless... The only way to come a little close to him is to love him sincerely and give oneself unreservedly to his work.

I feel that there is a reciprocal to this utterance of the Mother. If one studies Sri Aurobindo's works wholeheartedly with total absorption, one is first wonderstruck by the height and breadth and depth of his knowledge—not just ordinary knowledge but what may be more appropriately described as Gnosis—and then gradually waking up to the underlying compassion in his words, one is spontaneously filled with respect, devotion and love for him.

*(Concluded)*

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

## REMEMBERED FIELDS OF LIGHT

WAS Arthur King of Brittany, the Bear,  
My Kin and brother in those ages past  
Or was I he who wed fair Guinevere  
Whose destiny with Lancelot was cast?

Why do the pains of centuries occur  
In moments when my heart envisions her?

Or when I listen close and hear the call  
To battle from the mouths of vanished kings,  
And know my armour's sound in that great hall,  
Aware these are no vain imaginings,

For I am there again in other space,  
On the face of time my ageless fingers trace

Crystal cities of teal and amethyst  
In glistening light before my ancient eyes,  
Appearing slowly from a silver mist  
To burn in sovereign splendour through the skies.

I smell the earth, the forests rich with peat  
And tender moss that sinks beneath my feet.

I move through these remembered fields of light  
And lands where Beauty lives and love the lone  
Companion through the labyrinth of night,  
And glimpse the past through which my soul has grown.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

*(Continued from the issue of January 2004)*

## 5. The Light Within

THE approach of the Pauranika in formulating the Bhagavata is highly commendable. No words are wasted and he goes straight to the theme of the Purana which is the cultivation of bhakti. At the very outset, Suta puts down the reasons for choosing the path of devotion. He commends the assembled rishis for their raising the questions listed earlier and proceeds to offer the first salutation to Suka who had recited the Bhagavata to King Parikshit. A brief salutation but it carries high drama and a great lesson in the philosophy of Advaitic consciousness. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu perhaps had such passages in his mind when he said the Bhagavata is itself a commentary on the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana. Suta's salutation:

“I salute Sri Suka who wandered forth from home and relatives, all alone, dutiless, from his very birth by virtue of his enlightened state, and who, when followed by his grief-stricken father Dvaipayana (Vyasa) with cries of ‘O son! Where are you?’ answered, as it were, those anxious calls through the resonance of the forest trees, of which and of everything else he was the soul on account of his realisation of the truth of Non-duality.”

This is an astonishingly accurate image of the Indwelling Universal. Suka is himself associated with a parrot (the parrot's chirping from the trees no doubt personify the trees as replying to Vyasa) and artists tend to give the sage a parrot's beak. Legends speak of Vyasa preparing for a yajna to please Shiva for being blessed with a son. While he was trying to make fire with the arani sticks, the heavenly damsel Kritasi came to him and to them was born Suka. It is said Suka spent twelve years in the womb of his mother and was thus born with total wisdom. Once he happened to converse with Rishi Narad and in a mood of self-absorption began to walk away. Vyasa followed him anxiously, crying out, “Suka! Suka!” Suka's assurance to his father that he was very much there was echoed back by the trees in the forest, for such was Suka's universal consciousness, that he dwelt in all creation. Which is an indication that the Bhagavata is the work of a universal consciousness. There is no fragmentation in the message of bhakti conveyed by the work.

Is this total consciousness possible? Our ancients have assured us that this is an enactable condition through yoga and is indeed the aim of the discipline. Sri Aurobindo's epic poem describes such a universal consciousness in several places and the image of Suka's condition is revealed in Savitri's yoga when it reaches the final stage. In that moment of the yogin's entering cosmic consciousness we have this description of Savitri:

She was a subconscious life of tree and flower,  
The outbreak of the honied buds of spring;  
She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,

She was the red heart of the passion-flower,  
 The dream-white of the lotus in its pool.  
 Out of subconscious life she climbed to mind,  
 She was thought and the passion of the world's heart,  
 She was the godhead hid in the heart of man,  
 She was the climbing of his soul to God.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the image of the responding trees in the forest at the opening of the Bhagavata assures us that here is a work which has a deep import for man since it is the voice of a universal consciousness. All the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, achievements and failures, advances and regressions of man contribute to the telling and we are given yet another chance to learn, to guard ourselves, to walk boldly on the path divine. For this is a Book for the Living, an instrument for the aspirants who seek to achieve a good and gracious life on earth.

The non-self nature of Suka has been brought out by an associated legend. Even as Vyasa was following Suka, a few heavenly damsels were seen bathing in a pond on the way. They did not try to cover themselves when Suka passed them, but hurried to robe themselves when Vyasa came upon the scene. This proved that Suka was totally detached from worldly things and the damsels knew he would not look at them with a roving eye. Suka is said to have received special instructions from Sanaka. Later, he left his shadow behind and became merged in the Surya mandala.

If Suka was a born yogi who had such total detachment from worldly things, why did he take the trouble to walk through the humdrum life of humanity surrounded by crowds of women and children, and speak at length on all the yesterdays for seven days on the banks of the Ganga? Ah, there is one thing from which even the best of yogis and the most enlightened person cannot free himself, and that is compassion. Compassion for blundering mankind which chooses the dark for the light and the poison for nectar. Compassion for mankind which toddles towards the light divine. Compassion for man who dares to rise above his ills, sorrows, mortality. It is the Matri-hridaya of Suka which has patiently set down the Bhagavata so that we may learn of the unrivalled path of devotion to gain the life divine. Suta continues his salutations:

“I salute Vyasa's son Sri Suka, the teacher even of all the contemplatives, who out of mercy for men entangled in Samsara, narrated this most profound of all the Puranas, the Bhagavata—a Text unique in its inherent power, the digest of all the teachings of the Vedas, and the one beacon light of the realm of the Spirit for those seeking guidance to get across the limitless ocean of blinding darkness constituted of primal ignorance.”

Quite a few messages are encoded in this salutation by Suta. Since the work will have a winding series of stories, we might think it ill-fitting for a sage to be dealing with such subjects. Hence it is made clear that while sages do try to keep themselves away from the corruption of material life though they live in it, Suka is the one who has achieved the state of incorruptibility. He would be giving us the histories but would have as much connection with it as water moving on a lotus leaf. This is made clear by the description,



*gurum muneenaam*; Suka is the teacher of sages who contemplate upon the Divine. It was his maternal love for creation that made him speak of the Divine to Parikshit. In this context of Parikshit's last days, the dying king is very much the soul of man caught in death and incapacity and has to be redeemed. Suka shows the path of bhakti yoga for the soul's redemption through this profound work, *puraana guhyam*.

Suta assures us that the Purana has the power to redeem mankind, for laving in its significances one does gain wisdom. It may come to us as a bunch of stories, but in truth it is the wisdom of the ages, the essence of the Vedic experience, *akhila sruti saram*. Suta's words as recorded more than one thousand years ago sound strikingly contemporary. For he describes the state of mankind today. Man is caught in the perplexities of samsara, and right now in this Century of Terrorism, life has become completely uncertain. The apt phrase comes from ancient Suta, *tamo-andham*, it is a tamasic darkness that veils the world. Tamasic because man seems to have lost even the ability to bestir himself against this darkness. The light has to come to him from elsewhere and illumine the wick within. The Purana is such a light that can chase away the tamasic darkness that surrounds us, it is *ekam adhyaatma deepam*.

Now follows the salutation familiar in the Mahabharata:

Naaraayanam namaskruthya naram chaiva narottamam  
Devim saraswatim vyasam thatho jayamudeerayet.

This is the text that gives victory, victory over darkness and ignorance. In fact, the Mahabharata is also known as Jaya, Victory. The verse salutes Nara-Narayana since, without Nara, the Supreme Being must remain unmanifest and without Narayana, creation does not exist. This is a double-vision we must carry with us throughout our study of the Bhagavata. There is action on earth but the action is moved by the Divine, while man is not denied his free will either. Sri Aurobindo has clarified this idea of Nara-Narayana by posing an eloquent question:

“What is this but the God in man, the infinite Identity, the multitudinous Unity, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, who having made man in His own image, with the ego as a centre of working, with the race, the collective Narayana, the *viśvamānava* as the mould and circumscription, seeks to express in them some image of the unity, omniscience, omnipotence which are the self-conception of the Divine?”<sup>2</sup>

Like the welcome paradox, “unity in diversity”, we come to terms with this attractive paradox of “free will in the Divine's aegis”. As we proceed with the Puranic narration, this idea would become a settled fact, for the chorus of bhakti-laden prayers will take over at the appropriate places. Meantime Suta's salutations help us gain an auspicious start as we bow to Goddess Saraswati and the sage Vyasa. Having tuned into bhakti yoga with these salutations, Suta proceeds to answer the questions that had been posed by the assembled sages earlier.

The highest duty of man lies in doing that which generates devotion for Krishna. Such devotion generates vairagya and jnana (detachment and wisdom) and helps us keep

away from sensual pleasures. Unless man learns to gain joy in transcendental knowledge which is in essence the Play of the Divine, all works turn to ashes. If we wish to draw away from the soul-energizing life-style of today, and the suicidal veering towards violence, we must needs learn to remain turned towards the Supreme. It is childish to think that man can gain supreme good by gaining wealth and desire. These are not the ends of a Dharmic life. Bhakti helps man overcome such temptations and leads to the contemplation of the Supreme.

Various the names with which we crown the Supreme. It is the non-dual consciousness, *yad jnanam advayam* (Advaita). It is also known as Brahman, Paramatman, Bhagavan. Nor need we go in search of this Supreme outside ourselves:

“The contemplatives endowed with faith, renunciation and other virtues leading to enlightenment, discover the Spirit in themselves through devotion generated and strengthened by the hearing and studying of scriptures.”

The idea that the Supreme can be discovered within by meditation went deep into Sri Aurobindo's psyche when he began to study Indian scriptures in Baroda after his return from England in 1893. Subsequently he entered the freedom movement, but the desire to discover the Supreme within (*pasyantham aatmani chaatmaanam*) remained as an unquenchable fire in his heart. In the celebrated letter he wrote to his wife Mrinalini Devi on his “three madresses” he has mentioned this aspiration to *experience* God, for the Hindu scriptures say this is possible by following some disciplines: “I have begun observing them, and within a month I have been able to ascertain that the words of the Hindu Dharma are not untrue.” Of course the going is never easy in such an endeavour, but it can be done, as the Purana says, *bhaktiyaa srutagriheetayaa* (through devotion gained by learning the scriptures). What is needed is faith and sincerity, *sradha*.

This naturally leads us to the importance of *sat sangha*. Residing in holy places and serving holy men, the aspirants get an instinctive joy in listening to Krishna's life: *Vaasudeva kathaaruchi*. Suta assures the sages:

“Krishna, the friend of devotees, purifies the hearts of those who take his name. He manifests in the hearts of those who hear the accounts of His deeds, and erases all the evil tendencies blocking their spiritual development.”

Apparently Suta is speaking of a well-tested instrument of meditation. For centuries, Krishna has already been the *atma-deepa* of contemplatives. After the recordation of the Bhagavata, more than ten centuries have passed by. Krishna continues to be the Lamp of the Spirit illumining aspirants. It could be Vedanta Desika in Tamil Nadu, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal, Kulasekhara Alwar in Kerala, Sarojini Naidu in Hyderabad, Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. Whoever takes the name, seizes infinity, seizes the Delight of Existence as Devulapalli Krishna Sastri did in his Telugu poems written fifty years ago, and their lives become one long search for the Supreme:

we've never known a singer  
like the young Krishna.  
What he plays is

Not just the flute in his hand.  
 He can make my dried-up heart,  
 My broken life,  
 Play with joy...

The dancing peacock feather on his head  
 As he plays the flute—  
 That young man—have you ever seen him?<sup>3</sup>

Innumerable scholars and critics have drawn close to the Krishna legends with an aim to decode why he acted so in the Mahabharata. Beginning with Gandhari, Krishna has also been violently cursed by innumerable persons. Till today, this streak is not quite absent. Here is a passage from Jatindra Mohan Bagchi's dramatic monologue on Duryodhana who is lying broken on the shores of the Dvaipayana lake. Written half a century ago, the Bengali poem is considered "a daring creation, flying in the face of the general opprobrium heaped on the Kaurava prince", according to Pradip Bhattacharya:

Did none have eyes in this world?  
 Alas, who is left in this wide world?  
 Bhishma, Drona, Karna gone—  
 Who will punish whom?  
 All that deceiving Krishna's work,  
 Cruel intriguer's evil counsel,—  
 Dharma-rajya, righteous rule,  
 Confusing words ever on his lips.  
 With Krishna a band of rogues,  
 Call him 'friend', serve as slaves.  
 That shame of Yadava clan,  
 Manipulates them, smiling.

Where's Balarama, generous, valorous,  
 Radiant-white, Raivatak?  
 And where the clan's shame, his brother,  
 Partisan and cheat?<sup>4</sup>

But the Krishna legend has endured. The Mahabharata hero may come under the cloud of criticism, but the Bhagavata Krishna remains the friend of the helpless and the good. It has been the experience of Indian genius that devotion to Krishna chases away the kind of egoism, jealousy, greed, lust and falsity exhibited by the Kaurava princes.

But why is Krishna Vasudeva posited as the most attractive and sure object of devotion? Here we must see to it that we do not get confused by history and sociology

while engaged in the religious-spiritual experience of the Purana literature. Though the Bhagavata does not deny the Krishna of the Mahabharata, here he is seen only as the manifestation of the Supreme. The Unknowable has come cloaked in a knowable image and on our part, we have also to rise from mere mental formulations of right and wrong to a plane above the mind to recognise the incarnation. The plane is provided by Bhakti.

Suta tells the sages that the Supreme assumes three aspects of his Shakti (also known as the Yogamaya) for the purposes of creation (Brahma), preservation (Hari) and dissolution (Hara). Of these, the Shakti of Sattva represented by Vasudeva gives a direct revelation of the Supreme (*sattvam yat brahmadarsanam*). It is sattva which brings peace and enlightenment. The sattvic form leads to salvation. Hence, yogis and munis prefer Krishna-Vasudeva's beautiful form: "The aspirants for salvation therefore avoid, but without conceit, the terrific elemental Deities and adore only the gentle and pleasing manifestations of Sri Narayana."

The inspiration for this passage goes back to Vishnu Purana which concludes with the well known conversation between Kesidhwaja and Khandikya. They were cousins who had waged a fratricidal war. Khandikya was defeated and went to live in the forest. Kesidhwaja began a sacrifice but the sacrificial cow was killed by a tiger. He came to Khandikya to learn about the prayaschitta for meeting the crisis. Khandikya gave him the right directions and Kesidhwaja completed the sacrifice successfully. When Kesidhwaja offered to pay guru dakshina to Khandikya, the latter did not ask for his kingdom or riches. Instead, he asked Kesidhwaja to enlighten him on the path of yoga.

Kesidhwaja instructs him in detail on the various steps in yoga like brahmacharya, svadhyaya and asanas. Having controlled one's breath by pranayama and senses by pratyahara, one should settle the mind in an auspicious state (subhasraya). This subhasraya is the Parabrahman which is realised in two states. The apara (lower) state has a body like Hiranyagarbha. The para (higher) state is formless. As the aspirant (yogayuk or yunjanana) cannot concentrate upon the formless which is Pure Knowledge, he should hook his mind to the universal form of Lord Vishnu which is seen everywhere in all things. The element of avidya which is indispensable when contemplating upon the apara Brahman is present in various grades in plants, birds, cattle, men, gandharvas, gods, Prajapati and Hiranyagarbha. Indeed all these are images of Vishnu.

There is yet another form of Vishnu that is an ocean of all-auspicious qualities. This is the form that acts out the divine drama in terms of incarnations so as to help mankind. Though it is everywhere, it is not affected by karmas, nor is it foiled by anyone. The sadhaka should meditate upon this form that destroys all sins. Vishnu, residing in the heart of a yogi, destroys all sins even like fire and wind when they touch a dry bush. Hence the mind should be ever associated with the auspicious form of Vishnu. Kesidhwaja then reveals the divya mangala vighraha of the Lord for whom armaments (the discus, the mace, the bow) are like ornaments and describes the glow of the beautiful form which ravishes the mind. That is the highest meditation when the mind thinks only of this sublime figure all the time and never turns to another. Presently the human becomes the divine, and Narayana and the yogi are one. Both are part of the Delight of Existence.

Suta tells his audience that yoga, yaga and the Vedas are all directed towards Him and man also has Him as the end, *Vasudevaparaa gatih*. Thanks to Krishna we have this creation brought forth by his Power (Atma Maya, Vishnu Maya) through an interplay of sattva, rajas and tamas. He is in all his creation though the Illusion veils him away from our sight. Suta uses a beautiful simile in this context:

“Just as the one fire, entering into different pieces of wood, manifests as many fires according to the fuels, so the Supreme Being, the soul of all, manifests as the many in the various forms produced by the combinations of the Gunas of Prakriti... He, the protector of all the worlds, extends His grace and help by condescending to manifest Himself as divine Incarnations born among Devas, animals and men.”

This is the very sum and substance of bhakti. The devotee and the deity are able to be tuned to the same wavelength because in essence they are not different from one another. One may ask: if it were so, why the tears, the longing, the intensity of suffering? The only answer is that for the Supreme, this creation is the leela vibhuti where the Universal Delight takes varied hues to create an Ananda consciousness. Without manifestation, how can we realise or recognise the Divine? Yet, we must not forget the Divine in this manifestation, though we deny the Supreme while in the meshes of human sorrow or despair. Commenting upon the Isha Upanishad, Sri Aurobindo says:

“Even pain and grief are seen to be perverse terms of Ananda, and that Ananda which they veil here and for which they prepare the lower existence (for all suffering in the evolution is a preparation of strength and bliss) is already seized, known and enjoyed by the soul thus liberated and perfected. For it possesses the eternal Reality of which they are the appearances.”<sup>5</sup>

To conclude with a few apt lines from Subramania Bharati’s poem on Krishna where only a very thin line divides pain and pleasure:

’tis your music, Krishna, that I hear  
in all the sounds of the world.

And I thrill with your touch, Krishna,  
When my finger feels the flame.<sup>6</sup>

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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1. *Savitri* (1970), p. 557.
2. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 15.
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## TRUE SELF

MAN or Woman  
Monarch or Mendicant  
is not my real self.  
I act in all these roles  
in the drama of life.  
Name, country, religion  
are the dresses I use,  
Prestige, Wealth, Fame are  
only the ornaments.  
When that episode is over  
I, soul, am free and boundless.  
To carry out the commands  
of the Lord, I come,  
It is my work and my Dharma.

I took birth in different bodies  
according to the demand of Nature.  
Aeons after aeons come and go...  
Everything changes  
with the footsteps of Time.  
But the Supreme Truth  
is unchangeable and immortal,  
I am a spark of that  
Light Eternal.

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

## THE DISCIPLINE OF ART

*(Continued from the issue of February 2004)*

### Seeing the Beauty in Things

SUPPOSE there is a village scene. It is a dirty village. A lot of dirt and debris have accumulated, the roofs of the houses are in disrepair, rubbish is lying in the streets; it is really a dirty village, outwardly at least. But when the artist sees it with his artistic vision, say, in the evening light, he does not see it simply as a dirty village. He looks at the colour combinations in the scene before him, he looks at the rubbish lying there, and as it catches the evening light he sees it take on a golden hue. Then, to what he sees with his aesthetic vision, he gives form. Although outwardly it may be a dirty village, the artist gives it a form that transforms it into something else. He is not concerned with the physical aspect alone but with light and shadow, harmony of colours, interesting forms and patterns,—and something beyond them.

The inner training of an art student is intended to awaken in him a sense of beauty and significance that goes beyond the outward physical form. I would ask those of you who are seriously thinking of doing any painting to make fifteen or twenty paintings of the school area within these four walls. Don't just go from one angle to another and depict things from this angle or that. Move around the room until you find something interesting, something that touches you, something that reveals itself, and then make a painting of it. This is an extremely fine exercise; I have tried it myself. Once, years ago, I did a number of paintings of the house in which I lived. I drew it from different angles—but I did not just stand somewhere and then draw what I saw from that angle. All the time I was moving about the house, going here and there, and now and then something would strike me: the light would fall in a certain way, for example; I would come home in the evening and see the house when one lamp was lit; on another occasion, there would be no light on, but the moonlight falling on some plants would create an image in my mind. All these impressions were collected inside. Then I would transfer them into a sketch book or onto a canvas.

### Nandalal Bose

I have seen this creative process in Shantiniketan, where I learned painting. We used to go out on picnics with our teacher, Nandalal Bose. We would walk about ten or fifteen kilometres and then rest somewhere. I remember one day when we had gone out like that. As we went along, Nandalal observed all that was there in Nature, the villages through which we passed, the huts, the people, the flowers and trees; anything that interested him was registered in his mind. When we reached our resting place, he sat down in a corner, took out his brush and paper and, one after another, made some twenty-five paintings. Then he presented one to each of us. You see, he gave form to whatever had attracted his attention, whatever he had noted in his mind. This is a practice he

followed throughout his life. There was no time of the day or night when he was not in this mood. The trees, the flowers, the festivals, the change of seasons, everything registered itself, and this had a profound effect on his art. He used to make sketches and paintings based on what he saw around him as he walked through life.

### **Abanindranath Tagore**

I will now give you quite a contrary example. Abanindranath Tagore was one of the founders of the Bengal School of Art; many of our well-known artists were trained under him. It is said that after he finished his training in the Indian tradition, he asked his teacher what to do. The teacher said, “Go around the world, find beautiful things; then sit down and paint them.” But he replied, “Why did I learn all these things if I have to go around the world to look for something to paint? I’m not going; I will just sit here and do what I want to do.” Now, this man painted a number of scenes of Kashmir, he illustrated a whole book on Kashmir, though he had never been there. On the basis of photographs and other suggestions, he was able to put himself in sympathy with the scenes he depicted; somehow he was able to create within himself the beauty and romance of Kashmir and then paint it.

Abanindranath once spent a great deal of time writing stories, and during this period he did not paint; for years he did not touch a brush. Then in 1930, when the Satyagraha movement gained momentum with the launching of the salt march, he took up his brush again, saying, “I will also start my march”—of course in a different direction from the political sphere. For a number of years he did a series of paintings illustrating the *Arabian Nights*’ tales, imagining all the scenes. He was a great lover of these stories and he imagined all the scenes in them. But instead of depicting scenes around Baghdad, he took life as it existed around him in the streets of Calcutta. His treatment of the subject was such that aesthetically there was nothing wanting in it. I was very amused to see his painting of a man who sold bread; the man was going about with a box of bread on his head, and the word “bread” was written in English so ingeniously on the box that it did not mar the aesthetics of the painting. The artist had a fine sense of humour, which he introduced into his works. The *Arabian Nights*’ illustrations are some of his most exquisite paintings. And he did them for years, seated in a chair, with very little reference to anything external. He painted this series with a superb sense of colour; he was a great colourist.

### **Are Artists Lazy?**

One thing often said to me is that we artists suffer from laziness. Though it sometimes seems like this, it is not always so. My teacher, for example, often sat quietly and did not paint, but he was not lazy; he was always alert and observed everything that passed before his eyes. He told me that he knew all the crows that came and sat on the windows of his room; he could distinguish between one crow and another. That keen was his observation.



These people live in an attentive atmosphere; they have created that atmosphere in themselves through self-discipline; and they are not lazy. Once my teacher was painting a fish; he found that he was not sure of the scales, the way they are arranged on the fish. So he went to the market and bought a fish, brought it home and studied it, and then finished his painting. There was no laziness in the man, not an iota of *tamas*. All that art demanded of him he was prepared to do. All great artists give themselves wholly to their art.

But it is true that *tamas* is an obstacle. We all have to face its gravitational pull. For this reason, to rise out of *tamas* and live in an inner world of beauty is the great sadhana of all artists. Unless you are awakened to this realm of beauty, unless you are thrilled by everything you see, unless you find beauty in the things that surround you, you cannot be an artist. You have to raise yourself to a certain inner status; only then can you become an artist.

We students at Shantiniketan used to observe all the seasonal changes that took place. It was a small community, the countryside was rather barren, there was very little cultivation, there were no big hills or rivers or anything of the kind. But we could feel the spring coming, the south wind blowing; we could see the rainy season clouds gather and pour down rain in a torrent; we could watch the water flowing through the streets. Thus we observed the change of the seasons, and whatever was happening we lived with it. I have found to my surprise that quite a number of Rabindranath's songs reflect the moods we experienced in Shantiniketan. His beautiful songs about the rainy season, about autumn and spring, are like sketches he drew from Nature. Whether it is visual art or poetry, the one thing necessary is to create a certain inner atmosphere in which one can live.

### **Purity and Concentration**

There are two factors which all artistic endeavours demand. One is purity and the other is concentration. Sri Aurobindo speaks of them as the feminine and masculine principles. When the inner sky of your consciousness is pure and clean, when no extraneous influences play on it, then the reflection of any thought, feeling or image is clear to you; when this takes place in you, you have achieved a certain kind of inner purity. But to hold the image and pursue the creative effort of giving it outer form, you must also have the power of concentration. These are the two necessities—purity for getting a clear inner vision and concentration for holding the vision and giving it form. If purity and concentration are there, the necessary energy comes into your eye and hand and you can go through the creative process to its end.

As you can see, anyone who wants to take this path, achieve this inner status and reach the heights has to make an effort. The whole thing demands that we be true to ourselves in pursuing our aim. No other party can play a role in it. We have to train ourselves to receive the vision of truth and beauty. We have to train ourselves to give it form.

### **The Mother and Sri Aurobindo**

This morning I was reading one of the Mother's writings. While reading it, I felt that she lives in a world of Truth in which she picks up ideas as one would pick up flowers, puts them together in a bouquet and then conveys them to us. She is stationed in a world of Truth and with her vision she gives expression to the ideas she receives, in order to express what she has to say on a particular subject. And she speaks in a way so inevitable, in a form so perfect that the ideas bring a certain light into us, a certain clarity, a certain gladness.

People should read the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother carefully. It is such a wonderful training to clarify one's mind about aesthetic principles, aesthetic values and similar things. There is never a superfluous word in what the Mother or Sri Aurobindo writes. It is a training in itself to read what they say, wondering over it, feeling it.

I will conclude by reading out to you two passages by Sri Aurobindo. In the first, he speaks of a critic who compares the image of an Indian woman with that of a Greek Aphrodite.

I have seen a comparison made between a feminine Indian figure and a Greek Aphrodite which illustrates the difficulty in an extreme form. The critic tells me that the Indian figure is full of a strong spiritual sense—here of the very breath and being of devotion, an ineffable devotion, and that is true, it is a suggestion or even a revelation which breaks through or overflows the form rather than depends on the external work,—but the Greek creation can only awaken a sublimated carnal or sensuous delight. Now having entered somewhat into the heart of meaning of Greek sculpture, I can see that this is a wrong account of the matter. The critic has got into the real spirit of the Indian, but not into the real spirit of the Greek work; his criticism from that moment, as a comparative appreciation, loses all value. The Greek figure stresses no doubt the body, but appeals through it to an imaginative seeing inspiration which aims at expressing a certain divine power of beauty and gives us therefore something which is much more than a merely sensuous aesthetic pleasure. If the artist has done this with perfection, the work has accomplished its aim and ranks as a masterpiece. The Indian sculptor stresses something behind, something more remote to the surface imagination, but nearer to the soul, and subordinates to it the physical form. If he has only partially succeeded or done it with power but with something faulty in the execution, his work is less great, even though it may have a greater spirit in the intention: but when he wholly succeeds, then his work too is a masterpiece, and we may prefer it with a good conscience, if the spiritual, the higher intuitive vision is what we most demand from art. This however need not interfere with an appreciation of both kinds in their own order. (*CWSA*, Vol. 20, pp. 262-63)

In this passage Sri Aurobindo says that the critic's appreciation of the Indian image is right, but when he speaks about Greek art he has not got the point. While appreciating the

work of Indian artists, we should not overlook what has been created by the Greek artists, the Renaissance artists, the later artists. It is necessary for us to understand the spirit of different forms of art.

And here is the second passage. In it Sri Aurobindo speaks about how to appreciate an oriental work of art:

A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things; but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one's self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life. (*Ibid.*, pp. 271-72)

In this sentence Sri Aurobindo tells us that the key to appreciating a great oriental work of art is to see it in "the solitude of one's self". And, as I have tried to show today, that same inner solitude is necessary for an artist to create a great work of art.

I think that is all. Are there any questions?

*Can you tell us something about the tallest statue of the Buddha in the world?*

Oh, that statue of the Buddha. I have not yet seen a photograph of it. But if it is merely created as a public monument that people go to see out of curiosity, with a height of some twenty or thirty metres, that is no reason to call it a great work of art. You can record it as one of the largest pieces of sculpture, but its intrinsic value depends not on its size but on whether it has been created out of some vision of the Buddha, with some feeling for what he was trying to convey, with something of his message.

In Ceylon there are a number of statues of the Buddha. There is a large one of him lying on his deathbed, maybe five or six metres long; he is lying, reclining on his right side, and his disciple, Ananda, is standing beside him. Now Ananda's head is slightly inclined. The artist has made the head a little inclined in order to show the disciple's depression, to show his sorrow. It is very significant that the artist has been able to convey by a small gesture, by the tilt of the head, a whole mood of being.

If this new image of the Buddha has been sculpted in a way that expresses the spirit of the Buddha or conveys his message, then it has significance. Otherwise the statue is an object of curiosity for the tourists who come to see it and say, "Yes, it is incredibly high" or "It weighs 750 tons." But that has no intrinsic value artistically. That is how I see it.

*(Concluded)*

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of February 2004)

THE second chapter of *The Human Cycle* deals with the period of rationalism. The social mind of man is naturally conservative and it turns towards a rational seeking of the inner Truth, only when convention has lost its vitality and the old standards have become bankrupt. Rationalism has, necessarily, to be ushered in by the individual intellect, that of the bold pioneer, who proceeds to discover the truth of his being, the truth of the world, the truth that was self-evident to his progenitor in the Symbolic Age.

The credit of bringing in the Age of Reason must go to Europe. The Orient was then plunged in deep slumber in the dark chamber of unthinking conventionalism and had no eyes for the change that was coming over mankind. It is only recently that certain Eastern people have, by contact with the West, imbibed a taste for rationalism. The tendency has been largely imitative and unconvincing, so far. One thing is certain; it is that the strength and vigour, light and progress, that mark European civilisation of today are the outcome of its passion for finding out the truth of things. The Orient can do itself no real good merely by imitation of the external features of occidental life. What is important for it is first to come out of the dark prison house of convention and thereafter follow its own bent and evolve a new social system of its own. Sri Aurobindo says, "The influence of the East is likely to be rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality". Western individualism is not the *summum bonum* of human endeavour. Its defects are so glaring that the East would do well to take warning in time. Still we must realise that the Age of Reason in the West has given to the world two things of the highest importance which cannot be eliminated by any temporary reaction. The first of them is the democratic conception of the right of each individual member of society to live a full life. The second is the fact that each individual exists in his own right and not only as a social unit. There is a truth and law of his own life, distinct from the truth and law of the life of the community. The Master has shown in this chapter how free-thought was completely stifled in the Middle Ages, how the Church laid down the law arbitrarily as to what should be taught and what should not, how every attempt at enunciating a new truth was nipped in the bud. The case of Galileo was only one of many such cases. Ultimately Truth asserted itself in the twin movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation, in the twin cries of "Back to Aristotle" and "Back to the Bible". The two movements in a short space of time took Europe by storm. All vested rights and privileges were challenged—not only of the hierarchy in the Church, but also of the King and the nobility in the State.

The Age of Individualism was at the start a revolt of reason against the shackles of convention, but in its culmination, it was a triumphal progress of Physical Science.

The new scientific discoveries of the two centuries after the Renaissance attracted man powerfully. Everything seemed so clear, so rational, so easily verifiable, that the pendulum swung completely round and men prepared to throw into the dust-bin everything

that was not directly perceptible to the five senses; soul was certainly a superstition and nothing more, even thought was a purely physical function. The Master characterises the situation thus: "The triumphant domination, the all-shattering and irresistible victory of Science in nineteenth-century Europe is explained by the absolute perfection with which it at least seemed for a time to satisfy these great psychological wants of the western mind." Only "seemed", be it noted. The need of a progressive humanity is to go ahead to a greater fulfilment. Still an age of rationalism is an inevitable stage in the cycle. The distinctive action of this period clears the ground for further progress.

In old India, throughout her history, there has been a series of attempts to get behind the veil of convention and rediscover the Truth of the soul and life. But these attempts have been of the nature of a deep subjective seeking and have rarely gone far enough to usher in a new rational outlook. It is only the present-day European impact that has set free forces powerful enough to launch a large scale attack on the fortress of blind conventions and initiate a radical revolution of ideas.

In Europe the awakened man in the first flush of his enthusiasm imagined that material science was going to do everything for him, but he discovered pretty soon that the knowledge of the material world was only a part of the whole knowledge and therefore "to find the truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth he must go deeper and fathom the subjective secret of himself and things as well as their objective forms and surroundings".

Thus did the subjective age come in. Its tendencies are yet crude and vague, but there is no doubt that they are growing stronger rapidly from year to year. In discussing this change of outlook, Sri Aurobindo discusses with appreciation Nietzsche's theory of the Will-to-Be and the Will-to Power and remarks that it is something deeper than a mere recoil from intellectualism to life and action, it is an attempt to read profoundly and live by the life-soul of the Universe and tended to be deeply psychological and subjective in its method. A new Intuitionism, whose influence for good and for evil we discern everywhere, has begun to arrive out of it. But this Intuitionism and Vitalism are without a spark of spiritual illumination and led to dire results as we shall see later. The Master closes this chapter by indicating how the ever-deepening subjectivism of the age is affecting the progress of art and music and literature.

He says that they "seem definitely to have taken a turn towards a subjective search into what may be called the hidden inside of things and away from the rational and objective canon or nature." Likewise we see the effect of the growing subjectivism of the age in the new ideas about the education and upbringing of children. It is now realised that the old method of a "mechanical forcing of the child's nature into arbitrary grooves of training" is untenable and that true "education must be a bringing out of the child's own intellectual and moral capacities to their highest possible value". This is undoubtedly a step forward as part of a more subjective system. Of course, like everything else in the age of nascent subjectivism, it falls short of the highest ideal, which is to help the child to find his own deeper self, the soul within him.

The new inward look of the human mind is at work in all directions but it is most

evident in that organic mass of man's life, that we call the nation. It is here that it has commenced to show definite results and it is here that by a careful study of these results we shall best see the drift of subjectivism as well as its defect and danger.

Individual life seeks its own self-development. Collective life, too, society or nation, seeks its own self-fulfilment. Both are manifestations of the one eternal Truth, the one cosmic Spirit. The Nation, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a developing mind and a soul. So far the two resemble, but there is also a big difference and this difference is at the root of a great part of the troubles and trials in our collective life. The individual body is made up of a number of sub-conscious cells, while the group is an association of a number of self-conscious thinking units. This makes the soul of the group a complex thing, which seems at first to be crude and slow at finding itself. Even after it has begun to find itself it is very much more objective than subjective and apt to express itself outwardly and passionately in terms of common political and economic interests. So much so, that most modern historians and some political philosophers have concluded that "objective necessities are by law of Nature the only really determining forces, all else is the result of superficial accidents of these forces". They give a complete go-by to the psychological elements of national life. The great movements that have determined and powerfully influenced the destiny of nations are movements like the Renaissance and the Reformation and the tremendous self-assertion that lay behind great religious upheavals like Buddhism and Sikhism. But the Nation's outlook is not going to remain objective for ever. There is always a greater subjective force working behind its economics and politics. It is when this hidden force of the Nation-soul comes to the surface that the nation realises its subjective self. But even today it has a mass of idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices and tendencies, but this is nothing more than, says the Master, "an objective sense of subjectivity". All this applies as much to the Nation as to the community and the society. We are quite familiar with the tremendous stress laid even today on the political and economic interests of groups other than the Nations—Hindu and Moslem; Jewish and Arab and so on—some religious and some racial. Mankind has to transcend this mentality and cultivate a subjective or inward outlook, before he gets out of the rut. There has been a clear tendency visible in this direction, especially in some new nations and in some subject peoples struggling to be free. Ireland and India have given a remarkable name—"to be ourselves"—to their freedom movement, which Sri Aurobindo says, is now more and more a generally accepted motive of national life. Both Ireland and India have since achieved freedom and are striving to regulate their lives in accordance with their subjective vision. The case of Germany a century and a half ago is astonishing. Her passionate love for the *Vaterland* found expression in the *Tugenbund* (the League of Virtue) and she pitched herself successfully against Napoleon—for it is well known that it was Blucher's German troops who really won Waterloo. How did this Germany, after gaining her freedom, so completely lose her head as to declare war practically against the world? Let us go over what the Master says.

Germany was at one time the most remarkable instance of a nation preparing for a subjective stage because it had firstly a certain kind of self-vision and the courage to

follow it and secondly because being master of its own destinies it was able to order its life so as to express that vision. But unfortunately, the vision was intellectual rather than illumined, and the courage was vital rather than spiritual. Germany's great subjective force had come from her sage philosophers and inspired musicians, like Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Beethoven and Wagner. Her politicians and statesmen like Bismarck and Wilhelm II did but precipitate her subjectivity too violently into objective form and action. There were people like Treitschke, too, who misapplied Nietzsche's teachings in such a rude way as would have shocked the philosopher himself. In Germany's development there was no pure and calm transmission from the subjective philosophy of the thinker to the objective mind of the man of action. The bridge between the two ran through a dark tunnel with a gulf underneath. We have all to make the attempt that Germany had made, but we must beware of the dark tunnel and the abyss, if we wish to avoid her fate.

*(To be continued)*

C. C. DUTT

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## THE FAITHFUL

WHEN darkness blinds, O give—I may not wail,  
 But sing: "Thy Grace, beyond the zone of Night,  
 Still waits her hour when she'll to me unveil  
 The Day of days illumined by thy Light."

If barren deserts vast and trackless seem,  
 O may I never lose my faith in flowers.  
 If thunders boom—the lightning hopes will gleam:  
 If the world is hot—the blue attends with showers.

The mountains are forbidding like sentinels  
 And loom life-hostile—sterile, bleak and stern?  
 But melt they not in streams, athrill like bells,  
 That chant: "No power dare our songs intern!"

If storm impends with stars extinct on high  
 And the alien ocean swirls, O grant—I may  
 Repeat thy mantra on soul's rosary:  
 "Who surrenders to thy Will shall find the Way."

DILIP KUMAR ROY

(Translated from his own Bengali song)

## TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

*(Continued from the issue of February 2004)*

### **The Gita and Gitanjali**

WAS Tagore aware of the fact that he was practising the Gita's gospel of love as a modern mystic? One does not know for certain. But he was, in many ways, presenting his narrator-hero as the God-lover of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the aspect of love in the Gita confirms the fact that the seeker's "God-vision does not divorce him from life, nor does he miss anything of the fullness of life..."<sup>1</sup>

I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed.  
My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.

It was my part at this feast to play upon my instrument and I have done all I could.

Now, I ask, has the time come at last when I may go in and see thy face and offer thee my silent salutation?<sup>2</sup>

If this is a very simple way of translating the philosophy of the Gita or a way of feeling it in a colourless idiom, then Tagore can also express it in his rich metaphorical style, in his typical Bengali-flavoured English. Let us listen to the last poem in Gitanjali (103):

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.<sup>3</sup>

This poet too, though not as deeply as Sri Aurobindo, seems to have realised that all life is yoga. Tagore does not use the word yoga, but the poems in Gitanjali speak of his deliberate effort at union with God. This may not be called a very methodised effort towards self-perfection. However, a certain kind of method is throughout there and that may be seen as the yoga of devotion, which aims at supernal ecstasy. "The principle of Bhakti Yoga is to utilise all the normal relations of human life into which emotion enters and apply them no longer to transient worldly relations, but to the joy of the All-Loving, the All-Beautiful and the All-Blissful. Worship and meditation are used only for the preparation and increase of intensity of the divine relationship."<sup>4</sup> Tagore wishes to increase his intensity of worship through the poems of Gitanjali, where worship is art and art is



worship. He was surely attempting to write the poetry of absolute self-giving, and even his effort has given his poetry a rare charm. Even if the total self-giving is not there, love of the Highest is a recurring theme in Gitanjali and it is precisely this that has infused in it the feel of Chapter IX of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo's commentary on the Gita gives an indication of the ultimate goal of Tagore, that towards which the poet of Gitanjali was moving in his own brittle ways:

To make the mind one with the divine consciousness, to make the whole of our emotional nature one love of God everywhere, to make all our works one sacrifice to the Lord of the worlds and all our worship and aspiration one adoration of him and self-surrender, to direct the whole self Godwards in an entire union is the way to rise out of a mundane into a divine existence. This is the Gita's teaching of divine love and devotion, in which knowledge, works and the heart's longing become one in a supreme unification, a merging of all their divergences, an intertwining of all their threads, a high fusion, a wide identifying movement.<sup>5</sup>

Who can deny this effort in the poet of Gitanjali? The exact stage of advance does not matter. His effort is enough proof for us that Tagore was a trend-setter, something like the literary transcendentalists of America, who had wished to combine vision and beautiful presentation. That relates Tagore to Emerson and Thoreau, who were steeped in the Gita. In poem after poem, Tagore expresses his Godward emotion with a distinct memory of the Gita's gospel of love or devotion or sacrifice or surrender:

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.<sup>6</sup>

Love, action and knowledge are synthesised in a supreme gesture of sacrifice, which is just a synonym for love in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. It is also a kind of replacement: the expulsion of evil and the installation of love. Throughout Gitanjali, there is a deliberate effort at what the Mother would have called a "reversal of consciousness".<sup>7</sup> Even the effort gave birth to a rare art, which shook the literary world in 1913. From Tagore's subliminal came all those finer aspirations and strivings towards a better self. And it was also an indefinable pressure of love, at least a partial opening of the psychic being. Gitanjali seems to have been influenced by the doctrine of sacrifice quite common in the Indian scriptures, which the Gita seeks to put in a capsule form. Ego creates all the intricacies. Hence, the quest for simplicity and straightforwardness in poem no. 7. Tagore knows well the distinctions between desire and love. He knows the result of desire. He knows the value of surrender, the art of feeling the best kind of relief. That is why some of the poems may be read as prefatory notes to the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*. Desires block his movement. But, he has the consciousness to feel that God is merciful in his

hard refusals. He is not frustrated by his desire and incapacity, because he loves and is confident of an answering love. Hope, faith and joy mingle with his love. To love truly is to know and work in the true spirit. Once again Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the supreme word of the Gita will throw light on Tagore's way of love:

The whole consciousness becomes full of the Godhead and replete with his answering consciousness; the whole life flows into one sea of bliss-experience. All the speech and thought of such God-lovers becomes a mutual utterance and understanding of the Divine. In that one joy is concentrated all the contentment of the being, all the play and pleasure of the nature. There is a continual union from moment to moment in the thought and memory, there is an unbroken continuity of the experience of oneness in the spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has been speaking on love up till now. Then there is a subtle turn in his argument. He brings in the other two aspects of Yoga—work and knowledge—which must be synthesised with devotion. Let us listen to that before relating the point of synthesis to Tagore's poems:

And from the moment that this inner state begins, even in the stage of imperfection, the Divine confirms it by the perfect Yoga of the will and intelligence. He uplifts the blazing lamp of knowledge within us, he destroys the ignorance of the separative mind and will, he stands revealed in the human spirit. By the Yoga of the will and intelligence founded on an illumined union of works and knowledge the transition was effected from our lower troubled mind-ranges to the immutable calm of the witnessing Soul above the active nature. But now by this greater Yoga of the Buddhi founded on an illumined union of love and adoration with an all-comprehending knowledge the soul rises in a vast ecstasy to the whole transcendental truth of the absolute and all-originating Godhead. The Eternal is fulfilled in the individual spirit and individual nature; the individual spirit is exalted from birth in time to the infinitudes of the Eternal.<sup>9</sup>

The Yoga of love is being supported by knowledge (intelligence) and action. Sri Aurobindo differentiates between love and adoration; he wants to see them fused in this way to form the integral union between man and God. As the most authentic interpreter of the Gita, Sri Aurobindo virtually clarifies the journey of another spiritual seeker aspiring to reach the goal of the human journey. In poem no. 25, Tagore echoes the Mother's prayer of 5 December 1912, where she says that even the effort becomes an obstacle in a wrong gesture of action and intelligence creating a link-failure in love:

Yes, we should not put too much intensity, too much effort into our seeking for Thee; the effort and intensity become a veil in front of Thee; we must not desire to see Thee, for that is still a mental agitation which obscures Thy Eternal Presence...<sup>10</sup>

In a sudden moment of the soul, Tagore catches something of that truth in poem no. 25. In an ideal synthesis of true love, true action and true knowledge, Tagore realises the value of trust, surrender and waiting without impatience of any kind. An Aurobindonian will be thrilled to listen to the words of Tagore: “Let me not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation for thy worship.”<sup>11</sup> The poet of Gitanjali was living the Gita.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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## ALL-PERVADING

In the rustling  
Of the breeze  
You whisper  
To my keen ear,  
In the drizzling  
Of the rain  
You shower your grace,  
And envelop me  
In the smiling sun  
While green grasses  
Gaze at me  
In endless envy.

Even if there is nothing  
And only fog or murk  
Surrounds my life,  
I stumble with  
Bleeding toes and knees;  
You pinch me jokingly  
To remind me  
Of Your never-failing warmth  
And reawaken  
My regal repose.

ASHALATA DASH

## A GAP IN PURANIC HISTORY BRIDGED

DESPITE the casual tossing away of puranic accounts by Indologists prejudiced by western historicism, the fact remains that these texts provide a remarkably detailed account of dynasties of rulers along with a picture of social conditions that need to be included in any marshalling of facts relating to ancient India.

A major puzzle that has faced scholars in this area is the absence of references to invasions by Greeks and Scythians whose historicity is substantiated through other sources. In the first year of the new millennium this gap has partly been covered thanks to the invaluable research of Dr. John E. Mitchiner, till recently the British Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata. The *Vridhdha Gargiya Jyotisha* contains just two chapters entitled “Yuga Purana” consisting of 115 shlokas referring to both Indo-Greeks and Indo-Scythians. The second edition of Mitchiner’s critical edition (published by The Asiatic Society) collates 16 manuscripts to present the text with an English translation and a lengthy discussion that provides fascinating new data.

In this *Purana*, related by Shiva in response to Skanda’s queries, there is no mention of the Manvantara tradition, of Kalki, or of Abhiras that occur in *Mahabharata* when it speaks of the coming of Kali Yuga in terms taken from the *Vayu Purana*. The Abhira reference flags the epic passage as not earlier than 250 A.D. The *Yuga Purana* predates at least this part of the epic and also the *Matsya Purana* which quotes from the *Gargiya Jyotisha*. Unlike other Puranas that record only names of dynasties of Kali Yuga, it provides accounts of reigns of specific kings. It is also the only text to speak of 12 regions (*mandalas*) that are peopled after the end of the *yuga*. It is unique in not terming these survivors as *mlechchas*. Indeed, that term is used for only a single individual, the mysterious Amrata, destroyer of castes, red-eyed and red-clothed, whom Mitchiner identifies with Kharavela. He looted the Magadhan capital after the Shaka incursion around 60 B.C. and just before the end of the Kali Yuga around mid 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. This *Purana* completely ignores the *Ramayana* and, even when mentioning Parashurama and Keshava, knows nothing of avatarhood. On this basis it can be dated as earlier than all the *Puranas* and both epics.

King Simuka Satavahana, named in inscriptions, is identical with Sishuka or Sindhuka of the *Puranas*, founder of the Andhra dynasty (as the Satavahanas are referred to in the *Puranas*). He is known to Jain accounts as Gadabhillia, father of Vikrama, who ruled over Pratishthan and Malwa. The *Yuga Purana* knows him as Satuvvara, an oppressive ruler, just before the Shakas invaded around 60 B.C. They were routed by Shri Shatakarni, mentioned in the *Puranas* and the Sanchi inscription, who is the *Yuga Purana*’s “Shata”, an abbreviation of the full name “Shri Sata” that occurs on coins from Ujjain. The era of 58 B.C. is linked to this feat, although it was founded by the Shaka king Azes and brought into use from about 150 A.D. by the Malavas of Ujjain referring to it as their Krita era (cf. the Mandasor inscription). Around 750 A.D. it came to be known as the Vikrama era.

Mitchiner convincingly argues that Shri Shatakarni was the king later renowned as “Vikrama”, the valorous one. Similarly, after defeating the Shakas, Gautamiputra Shatakarni (107-131 A.D.) took the same epithet. After Shri Shatakarni’s reign, however, Malwa

was lost to the Satavahanas. This is reflected in the legends of the rivalry between Vikrama in Ujjain and Satavahana/Shalivahana in Pratihthan. Later, the title “Vikrama” was assumed by Chandra Gupta II after defeating the Shakas, and subsequently by several Chalukya rulers.

An interesting aspect of *Yuga Purana* is its condemnation of *Bhikshukas* (beggars) clad in bark-cloth, having matted hair and those who dress in red (Buddhist ascetics). It favours active life and despises those who relax as householders. There is strong opposition to Shudras having taken over performance of *yajnas*. An interesting social commentary is provided in its deploring the excessive female population because of which men see “an extraordinary sight. Women will do the ploughing ... (they will be) warriors with bows due to the scarcity of men. Women will trade in the villages and towns, while men will be at ease as householders dressed in red.”

There is indication of the existence of a sect, information about which is lost in the dark backward and abysm of time. Shalishuka of Pataliputra—great grandson of Ashoka—“of righteous words but unrighteous conduct”, is said to have helped his elder brother, renowned as Sadhuketa (banner of ascetics), establish a righteous person named Vijaya. This seems to be a reference to a Jain religious leader as “sadhu” was a term particularly used for Jain ascetics and Shalishuka’s father Samprati was a patron of Jainism. Like the other Puranas, the *Yuga Purana* condemns the patronage of non-Brahmanical sects by the Maurya kings.

It links the end of each Yuga to a great battle: Tarakasura’s at the end of Krita Yuga; Parashurama’s 21 battles at the end of Treta Yuga (there is no mention of Dasharathi Rama); and the Pandavas’ at the close of Dvapara. The name “Bharata” or “Mahabharata” is not applied to this war although Keshava-Vasudeva with four arms is mentioned as appearing to destroy creatures. For the *Yuga Purana* the end of Kali Yuga comes with the invasion of the Shakas, followed by drought, famine and the exodus of survivors to 12 mandalas. The founding of Pushpapura (Pataliputra) is a crucial event for this Purana and it celebrates Udayin (Udayan) for this, calling him the scion of Shishunaga. According to most Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical texts, he was Ajatshatru’s successor around 460 B.C.

The Yavanas (Greeks) are stated to have demolished the mud walls of Kusumadhvaja (Pataliputra) after approaching Saketa (Ayodhya) with Panchalas and Mathuras, following which there is anarchy. The attack on Pushpapura (Pataliputra) has an intriguing reference to a “great war of wooden weapons” (shloka 49), which remains unfortunately un glossed by Mitchiner. In a personal communication he hazards a guess. “The expression used is ‘shastra-druma-mahayuddham’. ‘Druma’ means literally ‘a tree’; it is used eg by Yaska in the sense of ‘wooden’ in the expression ‘druma-maya’. ‘Shastra’ is literally a sword, knife or dagger, and is often used to denote any weapon, tool or instrument. So the overall meaning of this phrase could indeed mean a kind of caber-tossing event; or it could perhaps denote the use of wooden weapons such as bows, arrows, wooden javelins/spears and so forth.” It goes on to say that the Yavanas will not remain here but are drawn away by war in their own realm. After their departure there will be seven great kings of

Saketa. Thereafter, a mighty Shaka king raids Pushpanama (Pataliputra) and kills a quarter of the population including all the youngest men but is slain by the Kalinga king Shata and a group of Sabalas (Savaras). Patanjali mentions Saketa and Madhyamika being besieged by the Yavana. A series of Indo-Greek coins have been found at Dewas near Ujjain, supporting the Yavana presence in Malwa. The Besnagar Garuda pillar inscription of Yavana Heliiodorus as an envoy from Taxila of King Antialkidas is dated to around 140 B.C. Kharavela's inscription in Hathigumpha mentions his attacking Rajagriha and sending the Yavana king Dimita (Demetrios) packing to Mathura, showing a Greek presence in Magadha around the same time. Panchala "Mitra" coins have been found at Pataliputra and names ending with "mitra" in inscriptions at Bodh Gaya. All these substantiate the *Yuga Purana's* account of a joint expedition of Yavanas, Panchalas and Mathuras. Mitichiner suggests that this occurred around 190 B.C. between the reigns of Shalishuka Maurya (c. 200 B.C.) and Pushyamitra Sunga (c. 187 B.C.) when the Indo-Greek king was either Euthydemus (230-190 B.C.) or Demetrios (205-190 B.C. as co-regent and 190-171 as king). The Yavanas were called away by some attack on the border such as Antiochus III's two year long siege of Euthydemus in Balkh, or the secession of Sogdiana from Bactria around 190 B.C. This is also when the Maurya dynasty was extinguished by Pushyamitra.

All that remains is to explain the absence of any reference to Alexander's invasion, about which all Puranas are silent. K.D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) made a valiant effort to plug this gap in his *Ancient India in a New Light*. But that is a different story.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

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## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of February 2004)

*Collected Poems and Plays* with its rich and varied contents appeared in two volumes on Sri Aurobindo's seventieth birthday in 1942. The most unexpected item was *Ilion*. It was a portion of an epic written in quantitative hexameters. The poem as published later comprised eight books and an incomplete ninth.

The conclusion too remains unconcluded, but K. D. Sethna carefully examined the manuscript and remarked, "The last pages have somehow got lost."

A discussion on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1939, on the hexameter has been mentioned by Nirodbaran in *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. Sri Aurobindo has said that it was one of his Cambridge contemporaries, H. N. Ferrer who gave him the clue to the hexameter in English. Here is an extraction from the talk: "Ferrer came to see me in the court when the trial was going on. We, the accused, were put into a cage for fear we should jump out and murder the Judge. Ferrer was a barrister practising at Sumatra or Singapore. He saw me in the cage and was much concerned and couldn't conceive how to get me out. It was he who had given me the clue to the real hexameter in English. He read out a line which he thought was the best hexametrical line, and that gave me the swing of the metre as it should be in English. English has no really successful poetry in hexameters and all the best critics have declared it to be impossible. Matthew Arnold's professor friend and others tried it but failed.

N: I thought Yeats also has written hexameters.

Sri Aurobindo: Where? I don't know about it. I think you mean alexandrines.

N: Yes, yes.

Sri Aurobindo: That is different. Plenty of people have written alexandrines. But this is dactylic six-foot line, the metre in which the epics of Homer and Virgil are written. It has a very fine movement which is most suitable for Epic. I wrote most of my hexameters—the poem *Ilion*—in Pondicherry. Amal and Arjava saw them and considered them a success. I may cite a few lines:

'One and unarmed in the car was the driver; grey was he, shrunken,  
Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength Cyclopean  
Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,  
Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.' ”<sup>1</sup>

*Ilion* is based on Homer's theme in the *Iliad*. Only approximately four hundred and odd lines of this fragment were revised by Sri Aurobindo. In the words of K. D. Sethna, "Sri Aurobindo holds it essential for the classical hexameter's typical pace that not only a suggestive rhythmical function but also a full metrical value should be given, as in the ancient languages, to quantity, to the time taken by the voice to pronounce the vowel on

which a syllable is supported.”<sup>2</sup>

*Iliion* touches many areas of art and life and gives an insight into technical problems and psychological-cultural issues.

Sri Aurobindo’s eminence in the field lies in his fusing a deep and plenary breath of inspiration with a wide-eyed artistry that is attuned to the soul both of English and classical poetics.

In a letter written on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1942, Sri Aurobindo returned to the theme and pointed out that “...natural length in English depends, or can depend, on the dwelling of the voice giving metrical value or weight to the syllable; ... both weight by ictus (stress) and weight by prolongation of the voice...” and he concluded by affirming, “My quantitative system... is based on the natural movement of the English tongue, the same in prose and poetry, not on any artificial theory.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not in the hexameter alone that Sri Aurobindo succeeds. Many kinds of quantitative verse he has revived in forms natural in English. His hexametrical composition, however, is the most important, for, it tackles the chief knot of the quantitative problem. But Sri Aurobindo brilliantly solved the difficulties.

Sri Aurobindo categorically declares, “The hexameter is a dactylic metre and it must remain unequivocally and patently dactylic; there can be no escape from its difficulties by diminishing the dactylic beat: rather its full quantitative force has to be brought out,—the more that is done, the more the true rhythm will appear.”<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s *Iliion* has rendered an inspired use of that metre. Further, his deliberate choice of Homer’s theme in a metre reached its acme. Whatever else it may or may not be, *Iliion* is certainly a Homeric exercise in the heroic but almost out-Homering Homer in the fullness of the delineation and the geographical imagery.

Sri Aurobindo expresses more consciously and with greater explicitness than Homer. The texture of the words, is therefore, Aurobindonian without ceasing to be basically Homeric.

*Iliion* commences with a new day breaking over the besieged city:

Dawn in her journey eternal compelling the labour of mortals,  
 Dawn the beginner of things with the night for their rest or their ending,  
 Pallid and bright-lipped arrived from the mists and the chill of the Euxine.  
 Earth in the dawn-fire delivered from starry and shadowy vastness  
 Woke to the wonder of life and its passion and sorrow and beauty,  
 All on her bosom sustaining, the patient compassionate Mother.  
 Out of the formless vision of Night with its look on things hidden  
 Given to the gaze of the azure she lay in her garment of greenness,  
 Wearing light on her brow. In the dawn-ray lofty and voiceless  
 Ida climbed with her god-haunted peaks into diamond lustres,  
 Ida first of the hills with the ranges silent beyond her  
 Watching the dawn in their giant companies, as since the ages  
 First began they had watched her, upbearing Time on their summits.



Troas cold on her plain awaited the boon of the sunshine.  
 There, like a hope through an emerald dream sole-pacing for ever,  
 Stealing to wideness beyond, crept Simois lame in his currents,  
 Guiding his argent thread mid the green of the reeds and the grasses.  
 Headlong, impatient of Space and its boundaries, Time and its slowness,  
 Xanthus clamoured aloud as he ran to the far-surgings waters,  
 Joining his call to the many-voiced roar of the mighty Aegean,  
 Answering Ocean's limitless cry like a whelp to its parent.  
 Forests looked up through their rifts, the ravines grew aware of their shadows.  
 Closer now gliding glimmered the golden feet of the goddess.  
 Over the hills and the headlands spreading her garment of splendour,  
 Fateful she came with her eyes impartial looking on all things,  
 Bringer to man of the day of his fortune and day of his downfall.  
 Full of her luminous errand, careless of eve and its weeping,  
 Fateful she paused unconcerned above Ilion's mystified greatness,  
 Domes like shimmering tongues of the crystal flames of the morning,  
 Opalesque rhythm-line of tower-tops, notes of the lyre of the sun-god.<sup>5</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

*References*

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2. *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet* by K. D. Sethna, p. 98.
3. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 552-53.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 381-82.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

## GLIMPSES OF CHINA— CIVILISATION VS DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from the issue of January 2004)*

### **09 March—Shanghai**

AFTER the Opium wars and the treaty of Nanking the British moved into Shanghai in 1842, followed by the French in 1847, later followed by the Americans and the Japanese, and is still mainly known in the West for its infamous role as the base of European Imperialism. Because of its trade and entrepreneurs it was by far the most prosperous city in China and also an international port until Mao and the Communists took over in 1949. However, in the 1980s it got back its 'commercial status'. Prior to this, Shanghai was always a major commercial port of the earlier Chinese Emperors. Shanghai is currently undergoing one of the fastest economic expansions that the world has ever seen. In Shanghai I went to the house of a senior official; it was built in the old Chinese style, with sprawling gardens. I also visited a Buddhist temple. In most towns there are Buddhist temples, and monks look after them. Though most Chinese (especially the younger generation) are non-believers—a direct influence of Mao's cultural revolution—there is a percentage which believes in Buddhism. Some do believe in the Tao and the sayings of Confucius. Despite the high percentage of atheists there is no degeneration in values. The Shanghai Museum was a highlight for me, and once again I was lost gazing at porcelain in all shapes, sizes and wonderfully brilliant colours. I also saw a lot of lovely Chinese paintings which almost always have nature themes. One could see how art was a means to alleviate oneself. In the evening I went to the tourist area; this was full of bars, restaurants and music. Shanghai has a bit of glitz about it, but little soul. Even the guide was a bit arrogant and an odd one compared to all the other guides I met. Shanghai seemed more influenced by its commercial way of life than its old civilisation.

In the evening I saw a world famous acrobatic show where each performance was not only remarkable but magnificent.

### **10 March—Shanghai/Suzhou**

I took the early morning train to Suzhou. Strangely enough, there were hardly any porters available and I had to lug my luggage all over the four or five stations—a not too pleasant prospect, considering my suitcase was getting heavier by the day because of newly procured hotel brochures. This train was a double-decker and really posh. One could see the development China is making. We passed villages where farming was quite prevalent. Passengers were quiet but never unpleasant. Suzhou is an ancient and moated city famous for its gardens and silk—the silk trade was established here early and even today silk remains its main source of revenue. It is built on a network of interlocking canals whose waters feed the renowned classical gardens—a World Heritage Site. The wealthy and

powerful Chinese used to stay in these gardens which was an amalgam of a number of gardens and small houses. It is a totally different concept compared to the houses of the aristocracy in Europe where the gardens were in the front or back, whereas here we had the house in the middle with sections of the house being scattered around the gardens, thereby giving more prominence to the garden than to the house. Each small house was for a certain purpose (e.g. study or meeting visitors etc.) and had a different view of the garden.

It was the construction of the Grand Canal in 600 AD which brought great prosperity to this city—historically waterways and sea harbours have always brought trade and prosperity. In the late 13th cent. Marco Polo reported about Suzhou, “Six thousand bridges, clever merchants, cunning men of all crafts, very wise men called Sages and great natural physicians”. I also walked along the canal where there were a number of old houses and did get a glimpse of Chinese canal life.

### **11 March—Suzhou/Hangzhou**

Yet another train and this time to Hangzhou. I arrived a bit late due to some indifferent planning by the Suzhou travel office and I was a bit agitated as Hangzhou was a highlight. I expressed my annoyance to Akki my guide but she was just magnificent—calm and understanding. I had to reciprocate in a more gentlemanly way and admired her poise. Later she told me she was a practising Buddhist and we also did visit a Buddhist temple. As with almost all guides I questioned Akki about the Communist Govt, The Tiananmen Square Massacre of students and China’s conquest of Tibet. Most Chinese feel justified that China took over Tibet, as they felt it was a part of China during a time (though for a relatively short time) of its history, and of course which country would not like adding territory to its land? Akki however acknowledged that the process of the Tibet take-over was not totally fair. As regards the Tiananmen Square incident, many Chinese feel that the Govt was justified in bringing in the tanks as well as its aftermath, as at this stage they do not want protests but wish to focus on economic development which the Govt is accomplishing. Akki accepted that bringing in the tanks was not totally justified and mentioned that democracy had not yet fully seeped into China—but they are slowly progressing in this direction—and this is perhaps why the Communist Party propaganda can sometimes condition peoples’ thought. The Chinese people’s desire for political democracy has not yet fully taken place. She also accepted that even some of the political leaders are corrupt. However the corruption is far less compared to India, and the discipline and pride of the people and the focus of the leaders to bring economic growth has helped in bringing far higher development than India.

As regards Hangzhou, wow! what a place. Its huge lake and the surrounding hills and tea plantations were a nature-lover’s dream. Marco Polo exclaimed, “This is the most beautiful and magnificent place on the earth.” I don’t think he was very far off the mark. We drove around the lake and then through the rolling hills into the tea estates. I skipped the tea drinking ceremony to wander and wonder at the astounding beauty and peace.

### 12 March—Hangzhou/Guilin

Sadly, I had to leave Hangzhou by the morning flight to Guilin. I was by the lake at the crack of dawn to have one last tryst with Marco Polo's (also mine) beloved Hangzhou. Guilin was fine but difficult to define for such was the astonishing scenery. It is apparently called Kaarst topography where you have cone-like hills of all shapes and sizes. One felt one was in fairyland. In the afternoon I walked around town just to get a bit of the Chinese urban feel. I asked one young Chinese for directions, and to make sure I reached the right place he escorted and walked me down though it was a good 20 minutes away. And then he retraced his steps with equal gusto. And he spoke no English whatsoever. A good dose of Oriental hospitality, but that was a China which the average American or even a European does not know.

### 13 March—Guilin

A day of supernatural proportions—unforgettable. Did a 4-hour boat cruise on the Li river, winding through the conical (and sometimes comical) mountains of Guilin. It was like a trip in wonderland. It started raining lightly on the way and all the tourists (mainly Japanese) took shelter, but I remained on the top of the deck (only sheltering my camera) for this was a trip of one's life, where the surrounding mountains were an enveloping and elevating experience. There was an unending series of ranges of these conical green mountains and one dared not take one's eyes away for fear of missing a magical mountain or an exquisite mystical moment. Nature's diversity was well established, for who could have imagined that there were thousands and thousands of these conical mountains,—and yet no two were alike. I had never photographed half as much in a such a short span though the urge to record such beauty was more to experience it than to photograph it.

At the end of the cruise we reached the quaint town of Yangshao. We were greeted by the Cormorant fishermen who train the birds to fish for them. On arrival we were still surrounded on all sides by the queer-shaped mountains, and our amazement had not waned even a bit,—in fact, it only increased. I set off on the most exciting motor-rickshaw ride through the muddy and puddled (remember, I told you it was raining) countryside. Here I saw the mountains from near and far and everything was greener than the grass and in this unending oscillation of the ranges I saw a small plain, it was like a green plateau in Tibet with the mountains overlooking it, surrounding it and caressing it. This unforgettable ride was like an angel's flight, the most beautiful of wonders, when one dared not blink for an ethereal fleeting moment might just disappear in a flash.

Needless to say, the guide in Guilin was also excellent.

### 14 March—Guilin/Kunming

This morning I flew into Kunming, the capital of Yunan in south western China. Kunming lies at an altitude of 2000 metres. People were exiled here during the Cultural Revolution

and later refused offers to return home, preferring Kunming's more relaxed life, better climate and friendlier inhabitants. Historically Kunming profited from its position on the caravan route through to Burma and Europe and was visited in the 13th century by Marco Polo who found the locals using cowries as cash and eating their meat raw. Neighbouring countries like Thailand trace their ancestry to Yunan. People in Yunnan are exceptionally warm and friendly. There are 26 different ethnic minorities in Yunnan. Went for a half-day sightseeing trip, visiting Buddhist temples on a mountain which had a good view of a huge lake.

Yet again the guide was friendly and helpful. It speaks a lot about the hospitality of the Chinese. Even guides in India are not so good, as they are always looking for a way to make a fast buck.

### **15 March—Kunming**

Went on an excursion to the Stone Forest. A rather unusual name but a very apt one. This was a lake created 270 million years ago when the earth's crust came up along with limestone which eroded over time. It's a wide area full of huge stones of all shapes and sizes—many standing proudly in a Stonehenge kind of way. The Stone Forest was intriguing, not only for its formations but also because in places one had to crawl through cavelike formations. The greenery supplied the contrast to the grey stones. Yunan's ethnic minorities looked just marvellous in their local colourful costumes, apart from setting the Stone Forest on fire.

### **16 March—Kunming/Dali**

Went deeper into Yunan. Flew into Dali, a lovely picturesque town in the mountains. The local inhabitants are Bai, an ethnic minority with the most wonderful of costumes. My Bai guide, Minsha, met me in local costume. She introduced herself by saying she was the warm-hearted one and I soon learnt it was so. I took a 2-hour boat ride on the huge unending Er Hai lake and we also visited an island which was a fisherman's village. I met a group of Taiwanese tourists on the boat. As you may know, the Taiwan issue is an extremely sensitive point between the Chinese and the Taiwanese. The Chinese feel that Taiwan was part of China and must come back to China at all costs. My Taiwanese co-passenger explained that while the older generation of Taiwanese (who lived earlier in China) is keen that there is a rejoining or at least an understanding, the new generation is cautious and does not want to be bullied into uniting. And then we were off to the Chang Shan range by cable car. Had a most wonderful walk along the ridge.

### **17 March—Dali/Lijiang**

Drove to Lijiang, visiting a lovely old buddhist monastery with a spectacular setting, hidden deep on a rock face with a ridge across. Minsha who had by now become a good

friend, left me here to return to Dali. Lijiang is yet another lovely mountain town with an array of snow-capped peaks. This is the headquarters of the Naxi people who are supposed to be descendants of Tibetan nomads. Tibet, by the way, is close. It has a lovely traditional shopping area all in traditional Chinese architecture, interspersed with alleyways, streams, squares and lovely restaurants.

### **18 March—Lijiang/Kunming**

Morning. Drove to the Chang Shan mountains and went up the mountain by cable car. Wandered around the mountains which gave one great solace. Late in the afternoon, flew back to Kunming.

*(To be concluded)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

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### **STORIES TOLD BY THE MOTHER**

Part 1, 131 pp., Rs.60.00, ISBN 81-7058-645-3

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Almost all of these stories have been culled from the Mother's "Questions and Answers", the English translation of her "Entretiens" in French. The anecdotes were published in French in 1994 under the title "La Mère Raconte", and are now brought out in English, in two volumes. The compiler's note states, "These stories are not just stories; they are revelations of living truths conveyed to us by the Mother." "If they bring the reader closer to the Mother, their purpose will be well served."

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## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**The Practice of the Integral Yoga**, by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee. Published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Price: Rs. 150; pages: 348.

At the end of its wonderfully short and content-packed opening exposé on the essence of cognition and Self, the *Kena Upanishad* concludes with a charmingly ironic remark: “But if you now think you’ve got it, you’ve certainly missed it.” In a similar vein, Sri Aurobindo writes near the end of his booklet *The Mother*: “But be on your guard and do not try to understand the Divine Mother with your little earthly mind that loves to subject even what is beyond it to its own norms and standards...” This warning is, of course, not an exception in Sri Aurobindo’s works, and the Mother was as clear when she gave as motto to an old student who wanted to publish a book of poems: “speaking is silver, silence is golden”! One may wonder why such remarks do not keep us, who claim to be their disciples, from writing and publishing. But perhaps we are right to go ahead undauntedly. Birds must sing!

And Jugal Kishore Mukherjee does sing, freely and happily with a contagious enthusiasm. He is, moreover, not exactly timid regarding the scope of his book. In his introduction he describes it as a decision to “humbly ... attempt the impossible” and adds that he has “sought to encompass the entirety of their teachings on Yoga and Sadhana in the span of roughly three hundred and fifty pages”. He is also happy with the result, for in the next paragraphs he assures the reader not only that “all that is noted down in this book is authoritatively based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother”, but also that “any sadhak-reader facing any problem or question at any time during his life of sadhana may conveniently refer to the topic in question and receive the needed answer therein.”

This is something! But it may be too early to throw away all the long and difficult books Sri Aurobindo wrote himself. In the first chapter called “Eleven Basic Attitudes”, the sixth one is, “Right Attitude at All Times”. As Jugal-da quite rightly admits, the hitch here is the question “how should the inexperienced sadhaka come to discern the right attitude?” As he explains, the real answer can come only from the psychic, but the difficulty is that a full, undistorted access to the psychic cannot be expected from beginners. The solution, which Jugal-da offers, though correct, seems to undermine at least to some extent, the *raison d’être* of the book he is writing. “Fortunately for us,” he states, “both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given in their extensive writings sufficient indications as regards what attitude to keep in what particular situation. A perspicacious study of these writings will surely solve the problem for any seriously inquisitive sadhaka.”

There are some minor glitches in the book. In the second chapter, called “The Ninefold Daily Sadhana”, the otherwise useful and impressive summary at the end lists only eight. If one reads back one discovers why. The missing element—nothing less daunting a job for daily sadhana than “To Integrate the Being”—is somehow of a different nature than the other eight. The others all deal with the need for constant self-observation,

control and surrender, and the need “To Integrate the Being” seems to have been a later addition. Amongst the hundreds of easy to remember “to-do” lists in the book there are some others as well that don’t seem to be perfectly balanced. The “Eleven Basic Attitudes” we already mentioned from the first chapter deal, for example, almost all with facets of persistent “cheerful endeavour”, but other essentials like sincerity and humility don’t receive the same stress. Near the end of the book, there is a description of five stages of mental concentration on the Mother, of which the first four are given in convincing detail, but the description of the last stage is rather dry. The overwhelming Presence, Joy, Gratitude that engulfs anyone who reaches a state of one-pointed concentration on the Mother is missing.

But gaps like these are easily overlooked and still easier to forgive, as they are compensated for by an incredible wealth of beautiful quotes that are strung together with a remarkable flair and ease. Amongst all the writing and publishing birds of the Mother and the Master, Jugal Kishore Mukherjee certainly belongs to the class of nightingales. The same introduction at which some of my earlier notes were targeted, ends with a wonderful and clearly inspired phrase: “The twenty-six chapters of this book are like twenty-six garlands offered with love and devotion at the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All the flowers have been culled from the celestial gardens of the Master and the Mother: the author’s modest role has been that of a conscientious weaver of the garlands only.” And conscientious this artistic weaver of garlands has certainly been. I don’t think one will easily find anything in this guidebook of Integral Yoga that directly or indirectly contradicts what the Mother and the Master have written and as such the book can be recommended without any hesitation. As Dr. A.S. Dalal says in his insightful introduction, it is “an outstanding vademecum for the practice of the Integral Yoga”.

There will be some, no doubt, who prefer to scale the heights on their own. But there are bound to be many others who will be inspired by this book to take up the long and arduous road with Jugal Kishore Mukherjee’s encouragements in their ears. This book is based on the classes he has given to several generations of students in the Higher Course of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. I’m sure that students who enjoyed Jugal-da’s classes, as well as many others will be thrilled by his joyous and confident style, and they can confidently begin the exploration of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in his good company. Just as compilations should guide the reader back to the original, this book too will find its fulfilment when the unique quality of the many flowers in Jugal-da’s 26 garlands will inspire his readers to look for the unsurpassed beauty, joy and wisdom that can only be found in the “celestial gardens” themselves, from where he has so lovingly culled them.

MATTHIJS CORNELISSEN