

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE HIDDEN PLAN

However long Night's hour, I will not dream  
That the small ego and the person's mask  
Are all that God reveals in our life-scheme,  
The last result of Nature's cosmic task.  
A greater Presence in her bosom works;  
Long it prepares its far epiphany:  
Even in the stone and beast the godhead lurks,  
A bright Persona of eternity.  
It shall burst out from the limit traced by Mind  
And make a witness of the prescient heart;  
It shall reveal even in this inert blind  
Nature, long veiled in each inconscient part,  
Fulfilling the occult magnificent plan,  
The world-wide and immortal spirit in man.

26.7.1938

21.3.1944

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 132)*

## EVOLUTION IN THE VEDANTIC VIEW

WE must not however pass from this idea,<sup>1</sup> as it is easy to pass, into another which is only a popular error,—that evolution is the object of existence. Evolution is not an universal law, it is a particular process, nor as a process has it any very wide applicability. Some would affirm that every particle of matter in the universe is bound to evolve life, mind, an individualised soul, a finally triumphant spirit. The idea is exhilarating, but impossible. There is no such rigid law, no such self-driven & unintelligent destiny in things. In the conceptions of the Upanishads Brahman in the world is not only Prajna, but Ishwara. He is not subject to law, but uses process. It is only the individual soul in a state of ignorance on which process seems to impose itself as law. Brahman on the other hand has an omnipotent power of selection and limitation. He is not bound to develop self-conscious individuality in every particle of matter, nor has He any object in such a colossal and monotonous application of one particular movement of things. He has nothing to gain by evolving, nothing to lose by not evolving. For to Him all being is only a play of His universal self-consciousness, the will so to exist the only reason of this existence and its own pleasurable its only object in existence. In that play He takes an equal delight in all, He is sama in ananda—an equal delight in the evolved state, the unevolved & the evolving. He is equal also in Being; when He has evolved Himself in the perfect man, He is no more than He already was in the leaf & clod. To suppose that all existence has one compelling purpose of growth, of progress, of consummation is to be guilty of the Western error and misunderstand the nature of being. Existence is already consummate, all change & variety in it is for delight, not for a gain or a development. The Vedantist cannot admit that anything is really developed in the sense of something new emerging into existence by whatever combination or accident which had no previous being. *Nasato vidyate bhavah*. That which was not cannot come into existence. The play of Brahman is not in its real nature an evolution, but a manifestation, it is not an adding of something that was wanting or a developing of something that was non-existent, but merely a manifesting of something that was hidden. We are already what we shall become. That which is still future in matter, is present in spirit.

We say, then, in the Vedanta that if the human form appears on earth or the tree grows out of the seed, it is because the human form already exists in the seed that is cast into the womb and the form and nature of the tree already exists in the seed that is cast into the earth. If there were not this preexistence as idea or implied form in the seed, there would be no reason why any seed should bring forth according to its kind. The form does not indeed exist sensibly in the form of consciousness which we see as matter, but in the consciousness itself it is there, and therefore there is a predisposition in the matter to produce that form & no other, which is much more than tendency, which amounts to a necessity. But how came this preconception into unintelligent matter? The question itself

1. It is not known what "idea" Sri Aurobindo is referring to here, or whether the writing in which he discussed it has survived. — Editorial note in CWSA.

is erroneous in form; for matter is not unintelligent, but itself a movement of conceiving Spirit. This conceiving Spirit which in man conceives the idea of human form, being one in the mind of the man, in his life principle, in every particle of his body, stamps that conception on the life principle so that it becomes very grain of it, stamps it on the material part so that it becomes very grain of it, so that when the seed is cast into the woman, it enters full of the conception, impregnated with it in the whole totality of its being. We can see how this works in man; we know how the mental conceptions of the father & mother work powerfully to shape body, life & temperament of the son. But we do not perceive how this works in the tree, because we are accustomed to dissociate from the tree all idea of mind & even of life. We therefore talk vaguely of the law of Nature that the tree shall produce according to its kind without understanding why such a law should exist. Vedanta tells us that the process in the tree is the same as in man, except that mind not being active & self-conscious cannot produce those variations of delicate possibility which are possible in the human being. The supramental conceiving Spirit stamps, through unconscious mind, on the life principle in the tree and on all matter in the tree the conception of its nature & kind so that the seed falls into earth with every atom of its being full of that secret conception and every moment of the tree's growth is presided over by the same fixed idea. Not only in thinking man & living tree but in substances in which life & mind are inactive, this conceiving Spirit presides & determines its law & form. So 'rthan vyadadhach chhaswatibhyah samabhyah.

We must not for a moment imagine that Brahman of the Upanishads is either an extracosmic God entering into a cosmos external to Him or that last refuge of the dualising intellect, an immanent God. When Brahman the conceiving Spirit is said to be in life & mind and matter, it is only as the poet is said to be in his own thought and creations; as a man muses in his mind, as the river pours forward in swirls & currents. It would be easy, by quoting isolated texts from the Upanishads, to establish on them any system whatever; for the sages of the Upanishads have made it their business to see Brahman in many aspects, from many standpoints, to record all the most important fundamental experiences which the soul has when it comes into contact with the All, the Eternal. This they did with the greater freedom because they knew that in the fundamental truth of this All & Eternal, the most varied & even contradictory experiences found their harmony & their relative truth and necessity to each other. The Upanishads are Pantheistic, because they consider the whole universe to be Brahman, yet not Pantheistic because they regard Brahman as transcendental, exceeding the universe & in his final truth other than phenomena. They are Theistic because they consider Brahman as God & Lord of His universe, immanent in it, containing it, governing & arranging it; yet not Theistic because they regard the world also as God, containing Himself & dwelling in Himself. They are polytheistic because they acknowledge the existence, power & adorability of Surya-Agni, Indra and a host of other deities; yet not polytheistic, because they regard them as only powers and names & personalities of the one Brahman. Thus it is possible for the Isha Upanishad to open with the idea of the indwelling God, Isha vasyam jagat, to continue with the idea of the containing Brahman, Tasminn apo Matarisva dadhati, and at the

same time to assert the world, the jagat, also as Brahman, Tad e jati, sa paryagat. That this catholicity was not born of incoherence of thinking is evident from the deliberate & precise nicety [of] statement both in the Gita & the Upanishad. The Gita continually dwells on God in all things, yet it says Naham teshu te mayi, "I am not in them, they are in me"; and again it says God is Bhutabhrit not bhutastha, and yet no cha matsthani bhutani pashya me yogam aishwaram. "I bear up creatures in myself, I do not dwell in them; they exist in me, & yet they do not exist in me; behold my divine Yoga." The Upanishads similarly dwell on the coexistence of contradictory attributes in Brahman, nirguno guni, anejad ekam manaso javiyo, tadejati tannaijati. All this is perfectly intelligible & reconcilable, provided we never lose sight of the key word, the master thought of the Upanishads, that Brahman is not a Being with fixed attributes, but absolute Being beyond attributes yet, being absolute, capable of all, and the world a phenomenal arrangement of attributes in Intelligent Being, arranged not logically & on a principle of mutual exclusion, but harmoniously on a principle of mutual balancing & reconciliation. God's immanence & God's extramanence, God's identity with things & God's transcendence of things, God's personality & God's impersonality, God's mercy & God's cruelty & so on through all possible pairs of opposites, all possible multiplicity of aspects, are but the two sides of the same coin, are but different views of the same scene & incompatible or inharmonious to our ideas only so long as we do not see the entire entity, whole vision.

In Himself therefore God has arranged all objects according to their nature from years sempiternal. He has fixed from the beginning the relations of his movements in matter, mind and life. The principle of diversity in unity governs all of them. The world is not comprised of many substances combining variously into many forms,—like the elements of the chemist, which now turn out not to be elements,—nor yet of many substances composing by fusion one substance,—as hydrogen & oxygen seem to compose water,—but is always & eternally one substance variously concentrated into many elements, innumerable atoms, multitudinous forms. There are not many lives composing by their union & fusion or by any other sort of combination one composite life as pluralistic theories tend to suppose, but always & eternally one Life variously active in multitudinous substantial bodies. There are not many minds acting upon each other, mutually penetrative and tending to or consciously seeking unity, as romantic theories of being suppose, but always & eternally one mind variously intelligent in innumerable embodied vitalities. It is because of this unity that there is the possibility of contact, interchange, interpenetration and recovery of unity by & between substance & substance, life & life, mind and mind. The contact & union is the result of oneness; the oneness is not the result of contact & union. This world is not in its reality a sum of things but one unalterable transcendental integer showing itself to us phenomenally as many apparent fractions of itself,—fractional appearances simultaneous in manifestation, related in experience. The mind & sense deal with the fractions, proceed from the experience of fractions to the whole; necessarily, therefore, they arrive at the idea of an eternal sum of things; but this totality of sum is merely a mental symbol, necessary to the mind's computations of existence. When we rise higher, we find ourselves confronted with a unity which is transcendental, an indivisible

and incomputable totality. That is Parabrahman, the Absolute. All our thoughts, perceptions, experiences are merely symbols by which the Absolute is phenomenally represented to the movements of its own Awareness conditioned as matter, life, mind or supermind.

Just as each of these tattwas, principles of being, movements of Chit, conditions of Ananda which we call life, matter, mind, are eternally one in themselves embracing a diversity of mere transient forms & individual activities which emerge from, abide in & one day return into their totality, material form into the substance of the pancha bhutas, individual life into the oceanic surge of the world-pervading life principle, individual mind, whenever that is dissolved, into the secret sukshmatattwa or sea of subtle mind-existence, so also these three tattwas & all others that may exist are a diversity embraced in an eternal unity—the unity of Brahman. It is Brahman who moves densely as the stability of matter, forcefully as the energy of life, elastically in the subtlety of mind. Just as different vibrations in ether produce the appearances to sense which we call light & sound, so different vibrations in Chit produce the various appearances to Chit which we call matter, life & mind. It is all merely the extension of the same principle through stair & higher stair of apparent existence until, overcoming all appearances, we come to the still & unvibrating Brahman who, as we say in our gross material language, contains it all. The Sankhya called this essential vibration the kshobha, disturbance in Prakriti, cosmic ripple in Nature. The Vedanta continually speaks of the world as a movement. The Isha speaks of things as jagatyam jagat, particular movement in the general movement of conscious Being steadily *viewed* by that Being in His own self-knowledge, atmani atmanam atmana, self by self in self. This is the motion & nature of the Universe.

This then is matter, a particular movement of the Brahman, one stream, one ocean of His consciousness fixed in itself as the substance of form. This is life, mind; other movements, other such streams or oceans active as material of thought & vitality. But if they are separate, though one, how is it that they do not flow separately—for obviously in some way they meet, they intermingle, they have relations. Life here evolves in body; mind here evolves in vitalised substance. It is not enough to say, as we have said, that the conception of Brahman is stamped in grain of mind, through mind in grain of life, through life in grain of matter & so produces particular form. For what we actually start with seems to be not life moulding matter, but life evolving out of matter or at least in matter. Afterwards, no doubt, its needs & circumstances react on matter & help to mould it. Even if we suppose the first moulding to be only latent life and mind, the primacy of matter has to be explained.

(*Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 414-20)

[Note on the text from CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 448:

Circa 1912. Editorial title. It is evident from the first sentence that the piece was written as part of a larger work, which either was not completed or has not survived.]

## মহাকাল

(এই বৎসরের মার্চ সংখ্যার ক্রমানুবৃত্তি)

নিজ আত্মা নানা ভাবে ভোগ কর ঋষি।  
সংবৎসর তব আত্মা। হরিৎ বসনা  
পৃথিবী নর্তকী তব সূর্য্যে করি কেন্দ্র  
ঘুরে প্রেমাবেশে সদা উন্মত্ত ঘুরণে,  
কৃষ্ণকরস্পর্শে মত্ত গোপী যেন ঘুরে  
অনন্ত উষ্ণম নৃত্যে অফুরন্ত হর্ষ,  
প্রেমাবেশে প্রিয়মুখে স্থাপিত নয়ন,  
তাঁরে জানে, জানে প্রেম, নাহি কিছু আর।  
সেই নৃত্যকলা শিখি ভ্রমিছে জীবন  
নৃত্যের মণ্ডলাকৃতি তব চক্রে, প্রভু।  
বসন্ত কোকিলরবে একতানা সুরে  
অখিল মাধুর্য্য ঢালি কুসুম দোলায়  
অনন্ত যৌবনে মত্ত দুলিয়ে শরীর  
ডাকিছে উল্লাস ভরে। অঙ্গুরার হাসি  
আধ দেখা ধরাধামে বৃক্ষ-অন্তরালে  
রক্তশ্বেত পুষ্পাচ্ছলে মৃদু পরিহাসে  
টানে যেন প্রাণ সদা তার সঙ্গে যেতে  
অচেনা অনন্ত রাজ্যে মনের ওপারে।  
গ্রীষ্ম যবে রাজবেশে, মহাসমারোহ,  
স্বর্ণদীপ্তি পরিধান, বনে ক্ষেতে মাঠে  
ছড়িয়ে উজ্জ্বল সেনা দমিছে পৃথিবী,  
বিজিত বন্দিনী তার নত প্রভুপদে  
নিঃশ্বসি রুদ্ধদমনে উগ্র সুখে ভরা  
তপ্ত নভঃস্বলে চাহে শায়িতা পৃথিবী।  
বিদ্যুৎ নয়নপাতে খুঁজি বধ্যপ্রাণী  
বর্ষা দৈত্যক্রোধ চিন্তে ছুটে বজ্রনাদে।  
হাহাকার রব শুনি আক্রান্ত বনের  
নৃত্য করে ধমনীতে প্রচণ্ড বিলাস।  
বৃষ্টির প্লাবনশব্দে হরষিত কর্ণ।  
এই আবেগের মধ্যে জাগিছে বাসনা  
মিশিতে প্রবল আত্মা, নৃত্যসহচর  
ঝটিকার সমপ্রাণ ঝঙ্কারায়ু সাজি  
এ নিষ্ঠুর অত্যাচারে অত্যাচারী হতে,  
যুঝি অসীমের দিকে করিতে প্রয়াণ।  
অবসন্ন ধরাধামে ধীরে অগসর।  
শরৎ শান্তির দূতী দেখা দেয় পরে



পদ্মানেত্রে মঞ্জুহাসি চারু পদক্ষেপ  
 অলস নাজুক শুভ্র মৃদু গৌর পদে।  
 ফুটায় শান্তিকুসুম ক্লান্ত প্রাণে পশি  
 হেমস্তের শীতবক্ষে লুটিয়া প্রকৃতি  
 জুড়ায় শিথিল গাত্র মহা পরিতোষে।  
 সরসীর জলে যেন  
 ক্লিম্বস্ত স্নিগ্ধগাত্র শিশির পরশে  
 স্নাত ধৌত ধরা উঠে কম্পিত অধর।  
 হাসে দীপ্ত সূর্য্যকরে এই ছয় সুরে  
 শেষ করি তব চিন্তা পুনঃ সেই চক্রে,  
 অশ্রান্ত দেবতা কাল, ঘুরাও জগতী।  
 অফুরন্ত যুগ গেল, অফুরন্ত যুগ  
 এসে যাবে, বসি সদা মনের উল্লাসে  
 যাহা ভাস্ত তাহা গড় পুনঃ তুষ্টি মনে।  
 দীর্ঘ কাল মানুষের কৰ্ম্মধ্বংসকারী  
 শতযুগ সমাবেশে মাপা যেই কাল,  
 সনাতন দেবতার আঁখির নিমেষ।  
 শ্রান্ত হয় নর দুঃখে, শ্রান্ত হয় সুখে।  
 শ্রান্ত নহ কভু তুমি। ভেঙ্গে যায় দেহ  
 অল্প কৰ্ম্মে, ভেঙ্গে যায় মন অল্প দুঃখে।  
 মরণ বিশ্রাম তার আসি বন্ধু সম  
 মহৎ বৈরাগ্য তার চরম শরণ।  
 কোথায় বৈরাগ্য তব। পুরাতন ভাব  
 নূতন নূতন সদা আনন্দ-আত্মায়  
 কর\*  
 কে তব খেলার যোগ্য সহচর ছিল  
 এই বিশ্বধামে কভু। অনাসক্ত মনে,  
 সৃষ্টি কর মহোল্লাসে ধ্বংস কর হর্ষে।  
 হাসি-মেশা দয়া তব, কবি যেন দেখে  
 কাব্য তব জীবসৃষ্টি সুখ দুঃখ রচে  
 করুণ রসের প্রীতি ভোগ করে চিন্তে।  
 সংহারে আনন্দ তব, রুদ্র মহাকাল।  
 জগৎ লেহন করি জঙ্কলন্ত বদনে  
 গ্রাস কর বিশ্ব আত্মা অতৃপ্ত ক্ষুধায়।  
 মানুষ খেলানা তব নাচি দুইক্ষণ  
 অচেনা ধরায় এসে  
 অল্পদিনে অচেনায় কোথা গেল চলে।

হাসিকান্না ডুবে তার অনন্তের রোলে  
 লুপ্ত তার পদচিহ্ন ধরার ধূলায়।  
 তুমি কিন্তু, তুমি, ওহে সুন্দর ভীষণ  
 হাস সদা মহোল্লাসে গড়ি ভাঙ্গি সুখে।  
 আনন্দের তীর স্ফুর্তি অতল হৃদয়ে  
 পুষিয়া খেলিতে বস, বালক ঈশ্বর।

(সমাপ্ত)

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

## TIME

*(Continued from the issue of March 2004)*

In varied moods and measures you enjoy  
 Your single self, O Seer—your self of Time  
 Incarnate in the year. For you the earth,  
 A green-robed dancer, whirls around the sun  
 For ever in an ecstasy of love,  
 As touched by Krishna's hand the Gopis whirl  
 In an unending reckless dance of joy,  
 Eyes fixed in rapture on their lover's face,  
 Aware of him and love and nothing more.  
 Initiate of that revelry, life moves  
 In the charmed circle of your dance, O Lord.  
 Spring in the flush of his perpetual youth,  
 Dallying on his flower-swings, pours forth  
 All sweetness in the one exultant note  
 The coil sings. Half-seen on earth through leaves,  
 The Apsara's enchanting smile is glimpsed,  
 Disguised in white and crimson blooms; its lure  
 Ever invites the soul to fly with it  
 To an unfading realm beyond mind's ken.  
 Then Summer in a royal blaze of gold,  
 Triumphant, leads through wood and field and plain  
 His brilliant legions, conquering the world,  
 Till earth lies prostrate at her captor's feet  
 Thrilled by the violence of his assault,  
 Panting beneath the burning gaze of heaven.

But now, with Titan fury in his breast,  
Casting a lightning-glance in search of prey,  
Monsoon comes thundering. Hearing the wild moan  
Of forests under the relentless siege,  
A fierce excitement surges through the blood  
And the ear revels in the roar of rain.  
Amid this tumult, the strong soul is seized  
By a desire to plunge into the fray,  
To be a wind that dances with the storm,  
In a harsh world of tyrannous misrule  
Opposing force with force, to take up arms  
And, fighting, pass into the infinite.  
Then all subsides; the year with tranquil steps  
Moves onward. Smiling from her lotus-eyes,  
Autumn glides in, the messenger of calm,  
On delicate white feet of languid grace.  
Stealing into the weary breast of life,  
The charm of Nature lolling in the lap  
Of Winter's coolness soothes the aching sense  
And in the heart makes bloom the flower of peace.  
Last, as if fresh from dipping in a pool,  
Lips shivering, with wet and clinging dress  
The earth emerges from her Dew-time bath,  
Washed clean and sparkling in the sun's bright rays.  
When you have sung your thoughts with these six notes,  
O tireless Time, you recommence your theme,  
In the old circle turn the world once more.  
So have unnumbered ages passed away  
And still shall pass. Unmoved, you sit content  
And what you break, remake with equal zest.  
Long time that swallows up the works of man,  
To which a hundred aeons are a day,  
Is but a blink of the Eternal's eye.  
Man tires of grief, he tires of happiness;  
You never tire. His body's strength breaks down  
Under a little strain; his mind breaks down  
Under a little pain. In death he finds  
A friend who brings him respite from his toil;  
A vast world-weariness is his high road  
To peace. When will you weary of the world?  
All things you make perennially new,  
Steeping them in your spirit of delight.

Who on this earth is strong and free enough  
 To be a partner in your game, partake  
 Your thrill when you create, when you destroy?  
 Pity and laughter mingle as you gaze  
 Upon your creatures; so a poet views  
 His work and relishes its happy scenes  
 And tragic with the same artistic joy.  
 Exulting in destruction, ruthless Time,  
 You lick up all into your flaming mouth;  
 Insatiably your hunger gnaws the world.  
 Man is your marionette who for an hour  
 Diverts you with his dance. Out of the unknown  
 Arriving on an enigmatic globe,  
 He disappears one day in the unknown.  
 His laughter and his lamentation drown  
 In the ocean murmur of infinity;  
 His footprints' trail is lost in the earth's dust.  
 But you, O beautiful and dreadful god,  
 Laugh ceaselessly with an unbounded mirth,  
 Creating and dissolving worlds in sport.  
 Moved by an overpowering rapture's urge  
 That wells from your unfathomable heart,  
 You sit and play, O Child, O Lord of Time!

*(Concluded)*

(Translated by Richard Hartz)

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Everyone who is turned to the Mother is doing my Yoga. It is a great mistake to suppose that one can "do" the Purna Yoga—i.e. carry out and fulfil all the sides of the Yoga by one's own effort. No human being can do that. What one has to do is to put oneself in the Mother's hands and open oneself to her by service, by bhakti, by aspiration; then the Mother by her light and force works in him so that the sadhana is done. It is a mistake also to have the ambition to be a big Purna Yogi or a supramental being and ask oneself how far have I got towards that. The right attitude is to be devoted and given to the Mother and to wish to be whatever she wants you to be. The rest is for the Mother to decide and do in you.

## THOU EVERYWHERE AND ALWAYS

November 26, 1912\*

WHAT a hymn of thanksgiving should I not be raising at each moment unto Thee! Everywhere and in everything around me Thou revealest Thyself and in me Thy Will and Consciousness express themselves always more and more clearly even to the point of my having almost entirely lost the gross illusion of “me” and “mine”. If a few shadows, a few flaws can be seen in the great Light which manifests Thee, how shall they bear for long the marvellous brightness of Thy resplendent Love? This morning, the consciousness that I had of the way Thou art fashioning this being which was “I” can be roughly represented by a great diamond cut with regular geometrical facets, a diamond in its cohesion, firmness, pure limpidity, transparency, but a brilliant and radiant flame in its intense ever-progressive life. But it was something more, something better than all that, for nearly all sensation inner and outer was exceeded and that image only presented itself to my mind as I returned to conscious contact with the outer world.

It is Thou that makest the experience fertile, Thou who renderest life progressive, Thou who compellest the darkness to vanish in an instant before the Light, Thou who givest to Love all its power, Thou who everywhere raisest up matter in this ardent and wonderful aspiration, in this sublime thirst for Eternity.

*Thou* everywhere and always; nothing but *Thou* in the essence and in the manifestation.

O Shadow and Illusion, dissolve! O Suffering, fade and disappear! Lord Supreme, art Thou not there?

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 5)*

\* Sri Aurobindo's translation.

## HUMANITY CAN BE EXCEEDED

### THE MOTHER'S CONVERSATION OF 16 APRIL 1958

*“In the previous stages of the evolution Nature’s first care and effort had to be directed towards a change in the physical organisation, for only so could there be a change of consciousness; this was a necessity imposed by the insufficiency of the force of consciousness already in formation to effect a change in the body. But in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness, through its transmutation and no longer through a new bodily organism as a first instrumentation that the evolution can and must be effected. In the inner reality of things a change of consciousness was always the major fact, the evolution has always had a spiritual significance and the physical change was only instrumental; but this relation was concealed by the first abnormal balance of the two factors, the body of the external Inconscience outweighing and obscuring in importance the spiritual element, the conscious being. But once the balance has been righted, it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body. It has to be noted that the human mind has already shown a capacity to aid Nature in the evolution of new types of plant and animal; it has created new forms of its environment, developed by knowledge and discipline considerable changes in its own mentality. It is not an impossibility that man should aid Nature consciously also in his own spiritual and physical evolution and transformation. The urge to it is already there and partly effective, though still incompletely understood and accepted by the surface mentality; but one day it may understand, go deeper within itself and discover the means, the secret energy, the intended operation of the Consciousness-Force within which is the hidden reality of what we call Nature....”*

*“If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the Spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at Supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature.”*

*The Life Divine, pp. 843-44; 846-47*

Anyway, we have now reached a certitude since there is already a beginning of realisation. We have the proof that in certain conditions the ordinary state of humanity can be exceeded and a new state of consciousness worked out which enables at least a conscious relation between mental and supramental man.

It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of superman who will still have the qualities and in part the nature of man, that is, who will still belong in his most external form to the human being with its animal origin, but will transform his consciousness sufficiently to belong in his realisation and activity to a new race, a race of supermen.

This species may be considered a transitional species, for one can foresee that it will discover the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method, and these beings—who will have a truly spiritual birth—will constitute the elements of the new race, the supramental race.

So we could call supermen those who, in their origin, still belong to the old method of generation but in their achievement are in conscious and active contact with the new world of supramental realisation.

It seems—it is even certain—that the very substance which will constitute this intermediate world that is already being built up, is richer, more powerful, more luminous, more resistant, with certain subtler, more penetrating new qualities, and a kind of innate capacity of universality, as if its degree of subtlety and refinement allowed the perception of vibrations in a much wider, if not altogether total way, and it removes the sensation of division one has with the old substance, the ordinary mental substance. There is a subtlety of vibration which makes global, universal perception a spontaneous and natural thing. The sense of division, of separation, disappears quite naturally and spontaneously with that substance. And that substance is at present almost universally diffused in the earth atmosphere. It is perceptible in the waking state, simply with a little concentration and a kind of absorption of consciousness, if this is retracted, withdrawn from the ordinary externalisation which seems more and more artificial and false. This externalisation, this perception which formerly was natural, now seems false, unreal and completely artificial; it does not at all answer to things as they are, it belongs to a movement which does not correspond to anything really true.

This new perception is asserting itself more and more, becoming more and more natural, and it is even sometimes difficult to recapture the old way of being, as though it were vanishing into a misty past—something which is on the point of ceasing to exist.

One may conclude from this that the moment a body, which was of course formed by the old animal method, is capable of living this consciousness naturally and spontaneously, without effort, without going out of itself, it proves that this is not one single exceptional case but simply the forerunner of a realisation which, even if it is not altogether general, can at least be shared by a certain number of individuals who, besides, as soon as they share it, will lose the perception of being separate individuals and become a living collectivity.

This new realisation is proceeding with what one might call a lightning speed, for if

we consider time in the ordinary way, only two years have passed—a little more than two years—from the time the supramental substance penetrated into the earth atmosphere to the time the change in the quality of the earth atmosphere took place.

If things go on advancing at this speed, it seems more than possible, almost evident, that what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter is a prophetic announcement: The supramental consciousness will enter a phase of realising power in 1967.<sup>1</sup>

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1957-58, CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 312-15)*

1. "4-5-67 is the year of complete realisation." (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 35)

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The only really important thing modern science has discovered is that from the purely outer and physical point of view things are not what they seem to be. When you look at a body, a human being, an object, a landscape, you perceive these things with the help of your eyes, your touch, hearing and, for the details, smell and taste; well, science tells you: "All that is illusory, you don't see things at all as they are, you don't touch them as they really are, you don't smell them as they really are, you don't taste them as they really are. It is the structure of your organs which puts you in contact with these things in a particular way which is entirely superficial, external, illusory and unreal."

From the point of view of science, you are a mass of—not even of atoms—of something infinitely more imperceptible than an atom, which is in perpetual movement. There is absolutely nothing which is like a face, a nose, eyes, a mouth; it is only just an appearance. And scientists come to this conclusion—like the uncompromising spiritualists of the past—that the world is an illusion. That is a great discovery, very great.... One step more and they will enter into the Truth. So, when somebody comes and says, "But I *see* this, I *touch* it, I *feel* it, I am sure of it", from the scientific point of view it's nonsense. This could be said only by someone who has never made a scientific study of things as they are. So, by diametrically opposite roads they have come to the same result: the world as you see it is an illusion.

The Mother

*(Questions and Answers, CWM, Vol. 9, p. 239)*



## THE MOTHER—WHO BINDS MAN TO THE SUPREME\*

This year we are celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of the Mother, the collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, generally known as the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. The world at large has not evinced much interest either in knowing her or in finding out what she stood for. A few who have shown some interest in the matter have been baffled by her because they tried to understand her by their “little earthly mind that loves to subject even the things that are beyond it to its own norms and standards, its narrow reasonings and erring impressions, its bottomless aggressive ignorance and its petty self-confident knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> One such attempt ended up in the discovery that the Mother was a French tourist who went to the Ashram in Pondicherry and discovered that she was a Goddess! The Mother’s personality is too vast and her vision too complex for the human reason to comprehend her. Something of her real nature can be understood by those who have opened their soul to her and tried to feel her with the psychic nature and see her with the psychic vision.

Among those who have tried to do so, some have seen her as an extraordinarily gifted spiritual personality, a Yogin who has arrived at the highest summits of spiritual realisation. Some others have seen her as an Avatar, a Power and Part of the Divine incarnated in human form. Then there were yet others like Kapali Sastriar, who had spent a lifetime in *Mantra Upasana*, *Puja Aradhana*, and in spiritual practices under such a great Guru as Kavya Kantha Ganapati Sastry and a Rishi of the order of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Kapali Sastriar “saw and recognised in Her a conscious embodiment of the whole Divine, a living *Murti* in whom are present all the Four Personalities of the *Adya Sakti* spoken of by Sri Aurobindo as presiding over the course of the Earth’s Evolution.”<sup>2</sup>

Speaking for myself, I have not found a better characterisation of the Mother than the one provided by Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Mother*. It reads as follows: “The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness force of the Supreme and far above all she creates.”<sup>3</sup>

For most people following one or the other spiritual discipline, to regard their own Guru as the Divine is quite legitimate and something sanctioned by tradition as well. Now is this all that we mean when we use terms like the “embodiment or personification of the Divine Consciousness” to describe the Mother? Is she merely a cult figure, great and even “divine”, but only if you belong to that cult? Or did her life on earth have a significance for humanity at large? And if it did, what is it? This essay is a small effort in answering this big question.

One of the reasons why it is difficult for most people to understand the Mother is

\* This is the revised version of a paper first published in *Srinivantu*, 125th Birth Anniversary of the Mother & Golden Jubilee Special Number, 2003.

indicated by Sri Aurobindo: "In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of Darkness and Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life."<sup>4</sup>

The second reason for the difficulty in understanding her is that the age in which we live understands philanthropy, charity, social service and social work but has no understanding of genuine spirituality, and the Mother was, as we have seen from the testimony of people like Kapali Sastriar, primarily a spiritual person. Now it is possible to give a fairly impressive portrayal of the Mother in terms of purely non-spiritual, secular terms. Thus we can talk about her as an accomplished painter, a musician, a writer of exquisite prose in French, a management genius who set up and ran a unique institution such as the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry with over two thousand inmates, a great thinker on education and finally, a great practical idealist who set up the well-known international township, known as Auroville, to give a chance for the ideals of human unity and oneness to be established on earth. But to limit our view of the Mother to the details of her external life would be to miss the essential person of the Mother and to concentrate on the incidental details of her external life.

The third reason and the major stumbling block for the modern mind in its understanding is that in talking about her real person, one cannot help bringing in terms like the "Divine" and "divine consciousness" which I have used so freely in some of the preceding paragraphs. This may irk people of certain intellectual persuasions because they associate these terms with the popular and crude notion of God or Gods. The modern educated Indian mind, being Western in its basic cast, has a peculiar view of God; it is imbued with the Christian conception of "God the creator". It is difficult for it to understand the Gita's concept that everything is the Divine; in other words, it cannot get the idea that this world itself is the becoming of God.<sup>5</sup> The modern educated person is shocked that God has created such an imperfect world with many things in it which he does not approve of, and with certain other things in it which he finds outrageously shocking. He has therefore rightly decided that he has no use for such Gods.

For the modern rationalist, God or Gods of the religions do not really exist. For them Gods are fictitious beings or powers that superstitious people have set up and whom they worship, hoping that their desires will be fulfilled through their good offices. It is even claimed that we make our Gods in our own images and foist them on gullible people and exploit them. These Gods are supposed to possess miraculous powers which defy the laws of physical nature and which they are supposed to use to placate their devotees. And for that reason alone, we tend to deify people who exhibit similar miraculous powers.

One doesn't have to be an atheist to concede that these Gods of popular religions have proved on the whole pretty ineffectual to humanity in real terms. It will be readily granted that they have done very little so far in bringing about any radical change in the quality of human life or in human nature, in cleansing human hearts of selfishness, greed,

lust, pettiness and callousness. Therefore, no matter how many temples and religious institutions we build, no matter how much effort is made through religious preaching, moral exhortation, education and through similar programmes to improve man's disposition, the basic selfish and self-centred nature of man does not seem to change. Thus, for example, the exploitation of the weak by the strong has continued unabated and in full vigour down the ages. It existed during feudalism, it continued during capitalism and was equally vigorous in socialist and communist countries and regimes. In other words, in spite of all our Gods and Goddesses, human nature today is intrinsically what it was during, say, the times of the Buddha, who lived more than two millennia ago.

God or Gods, even if they exist, seem to live in their exclusive heavens and paradises totally oblivious of us and insulated from the excruciating experience of tears, failure and suffering that we humans have to go through. Most religions, except some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, try to captivate you by enticing you with the glitteringly comfortable life that you will find waiting for you after death in their Paradise if you obey their principles, and terrify you with eternal punishment if you do not. This is in brief the rationalist's case against Gods.

While one must commiserate with the rationalist's feeling of moral outrage against God or Gods, one must also point out that his understanding of the phenomenon of Gods is entirely wrong and misconceived. From the view of spiritual and occult truth, it is simply not true that Gods do not really exist and that they are created by man. It may however be conceded that man does seem to envision them in his own image. This is because what takes shape in human consciousness as God or Gods is a reflection in his yet ignorant and dense consciousness of certain powers and truths in the cosmic consciousness. These powers and truths are much greater in their light, power and beauty and in their force and range than what the present human consciousness is capable of manifesting. Man in his present state of evolution can only receive or reflect in his consciousness a limited part of these powers in the cosmic consciousness. Gods have existed even prior to man; they are not created by man. Fundamentally he formulates as best he can what truth he receives about them from the cosmic Reality. Thus Gods are as real and more permanently real than the men they influence, but they belong to a higher plane, are part of the cosmic consciousness and act here on earth by shaping the human consciousness on which they exercise their influence.<sup>6</sup>

If Gods are beings or powers that dwell on a higher plane and shape the human consciousness through their influence, then the influence they are able to exert on us which determines the nature of our consciousness should concern us more than the perfection and the glory of the beings on the higher planes. This is because the world around us depends on the nature of our consciousness. Therefore, to what extent our consciousness is able to reflect the power and light of the Gods, or how much of the Divinity we can incarnate in our consciousness should be our primary concern.

Our consciousness is an arena open to various kinds of influences, all of them not from the Gods alone. There are also hostile forces in the occult worlds which often act upon the human consciousness and corrupt it. Again, our consciousness has arisen out of

the Inconscient and so it has on it a large stamp of the source from which it has arisen. Our own subconscious contains “dark caverns” as the Rigveda describes them, a mental, a vital, and a physical subconscious ending in what Sri Aurobindo has called the Nescient. These regions harbour a multitude of brutal forces and forms, including finally the forces of death and disintegration, and these forces rise and contaminate the human consciousness in various degrees. The influence received from the Gods of the higher planes is thus ranged against all these various elements, some of them decidedly hostile. Thus man’s consciousness is a battleground on which the forces of good and evil contend for supremacy.

As noted earlier, the world we create around us depends very much on our consciousness, and the world we have managed to create around ourselves happens to be still corrupt and imperfect. That shows that the consciousness we possess today is itself imperfect and corrupt. Not only is this corruption and imperfection reflected in the life all around us in the form of human suffering and human depravity but it has also shown itself capable of harbouring the great perpetrators of evil in our midst, such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Idi Amin, and Osama Bin Laden. These are not just autonomous beings unrelated to us, and we cannot just shrug our shoulders and disown responsibility for the monstrous forces they unleash. They are merely the concrete and objective forms of certain tendencies we ourselves harbour and nurse in our consciousness; and therefore they feed on us. When we think of the century we have just left behind, the harm done by these personifications of evil mentioned above eclipses all the good that our saintly Gandhis, Florence Nightingales and Martin Luther Kings have done. Our world is what it is—so full of imperfections, corruption, and suffering caused by man’s cruelty to man, as well as by death and incapacity because our consciousness is still not capable of reflecting the divine influences in sufficient measure, and because the Gods that have so far descended into this creation are not powerful enough to counter through their influence and action the effects of what may be called the evil or asuric tendencies in our consciousness.

Now, it must be realised that the world which we inhabit is not a static world, it is a world that is slowly but surely progressing towards perfection; we call this an evolutionary world. What is in fact evolving, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, is consciousness. As consciousness evolves, it progressively manifests the Divine to a greater and greater degree. As Schumacher<sup>7</sup> pointed out, when we move from inanimate Matter to the next higher level of being, there is an ontological discontinuity and we call this level “Life”, as in a living plant. There is nothing in the laws, concepts and formulae of physics and chemistry to explain or even to describe what we call “life”. Then there is the next evolutionary step from the living plant to the animal, and this involves another ontological discontinuity which Schumacher calls “consciousness”. The next higher level of being is found in man, who has powers like the plant, powers of consciousness like the animal and evidently something more—another ontological discontinuity. We may call this “self-awareness” or “consciousness recoiling on itself”. It is quite obvious that with each upward step on the evolutionary ladder, there has been a greater progression from passivity

to activity, from necessity to freedom, from non-integration to integration and unity, from a totally visible mineral to the largely invisible<sup>8</sup> man. Are there powers higher than self-awareness, levels of being above the human? Mankind throughout history has believed that the chain of being extends beyond man to a perfect level of Being and called it “God”.

Before we proceed, it must be pointed out that Sri Aurobindo regards these four levels of being as four levels of the manifestation of the same basic reality, namely, the Supreme Consciousness, for which the Vedantic term is Brahman. The great Chain of Being, as he sees it, has seven principal levels—Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, and Sat-chidananda consisting of Sat, Chit and Ananda.

Ever since the mental consciousness started operating in our world man has made a tremendous progress. Science and technology have been the primary engines driving this progress. And yet this huge juggernaut of civilisation seems to be tottering and floundering and this has made many perceptive observers of the human scene doubt whether the human species has a future at all. Koestler despaired of man because he found in him an incurable paranoid streak and a technological capacity to destroy his own species. Sri Aurobindo diagnosed the basic malady of our present civilisation in these words in the second decade of the last century; none has come up with a better diagnosis of what is ailing man today. He said: “Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it.”<sup>9</sup>

Now, in whichever way we choose to describe the maladies of our age, we have already diagnosed their root cause. It is that on the battlefield which is our consciousness, the forces of evil and falsehood have not yet been vanquished. This is primarily because the Gods that we have incarnated in our consciousness are still too weak to contend successfully with the asuric forces which dominate it. Our consciousness does not yet have in it in sufficient measure the spiritual qualities of Love, Harmony, Compassion and Unity to combat our disposition for selfishness, jealousy, greed and self-centredness.

This is because these spiritual qualities, which I just mentioned, are not natural to our mental consciousness. Induction and deduction, which have given us our science and technology, and an innate capacity to acquire human language are the natural propensities of the human mind which have enabled the human species to be at the apex of this creation. No species which lacks the mental consciousness of the kind man has is capable of performing mental operations known as induction and deduction or of acquiring a communication system as complex as the human language. But the mental consciousness is still not innately spiritual to a sufficient degree. The various religions, educational systems, moral preachings, exhortations, and the like have tried repeatedly and over the span of several centuries but have failed to give to the human mind a strong enough and permanent enough spiritual orientation. As long as there is no radical change in the human

consciousness making it spiritually strong, it is a chimera to expect permanent solutions to human problems.

There is a consciousness (“a level of being”, in Schumacher’s terminology) humanity has yet to acquire, and to which, among other things, spiritual qualities like love, compassion, harmony, truth and beauty are natural. Talking about the new consciousness in this way is likely to give the impression that it is somewhat analogous to the consciousness of a saint, since I have described it as a consciousness to which qualities such as love, compassion, harmony, etc. are natural. The Supermind which Sri Aurobindo discovered and to which he gave this name, is not some kind of a magnified and nobler mind; it is beyond the mental level altogether. It is knowledge which is real because it is total. It is a divine power of immediate, inherent and spontaneous knowledge. The supermind is not only the knower but also the creator. It has the power to manifest what it knows in form and in movement, unlike the mind which does not always have the power to manifest what it knows. The efforts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were primarily aimed at bringing this new consciousness down on earth and at developing the modality called Yoga by which humanity would be able to acquire it.

*(To be concluded)*

MANGESH NADKARNI

#### *Notes and References*

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 38.
2. M. P. Pandit, *Flame of White Light*, p. 8.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
5. The Mother, *The Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 10, p. 65.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 424.
7. E. E. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Harper and Row, 1977.
8. We can see a person’s body directly, but the person himself is invisible; the person is made up of his thoughts, emotions, feelings, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, etc.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 1053.

## WHEN WERE THE NAMES “SRI AUROBINDO” AND THE “MOTHER” FIRST USED?

BARRING a few exceptions [which are dealt with in the note that follows], it was only towards **the end of 1926** that the disciples in Pondicherry began referring to “Aurobindo Ghose” and “Mirra” as “Sri Aurobindo” and the “Mother” in their diary notes, etc. “Aurobindo Ghose” was first referred to as “Sri Aurobindo” before “Mirra” came to be known as the “Mother”, and there was a period of transition (longer for the Mother than for Sri Aurobindo) when some of the disciples used both names simultaneously.

A.B. Purani’s handwritten notes of Sri Aurobindo’s Evening Talks show this change of name. This is not apparent from the published text, nor sometimes from the typed copies of the handwritten notes, because “A.G.” and “Mirra” had become “Sri Aurobindo” and the “Mother” by the time the typed copies were made and the book published. The former names were replaced by the latter for the sake of consistency. Purani first used the abbreviation “Shri A” in his rough notes of Sri Aurobindo’s Evening Talk of **16 September 1926** after using “A.G.” **until that date**. Haradhan Bakshi, another sadhak of the time, began using the name “Shri Aurobindo” in his diary on **19 September 1926**. Both then went through a short period of transition during which they kept switching between “A.G.” and “Sri Aurobindo” (sometimes even on the same day), and finally settled for the latter by **October 1926**.

In the case of the Mother, Haradhan Bakshi referred to her as “Mother” for the first time on **24 September 1926**. Until then he had referred to her as “Mira” or “Mira Devi”; he would also use the variant “Shri Mirra Devi” after the Siddhi Day. Though by **the beginning of 1927**, Haradhan mostly referred to her as “Mother”, it was not until **the end of 1928** that he stopped using altogether the name “Mira”. For Anilbaran Roy, there was no period of transition at all. After coming back from Bengal on **10 December 1926**, he wrote in his diary, “Sri Aurobindo has retired and Mirra Devi has taken charge of creating a new world.” The following day Sri Aurobindo instructed him in an interview to surrender himself to “Mirra Devi”. The very next day, that is, on **12 December 1926**, Anilbaran referred to the Mother as “Mother” and never again as “Mirra Devi”. Other documents show that Barin, Amrita and Bejoy also started using the name “Mother” by the beginning of **1927**.

### Early Instances

(1) Mme Potel (a French lady who was renamed “Ila” most probably by Sri Aurobindo) addressed “Mirra” as “Mother” in **1913** in Paris. She was at first a friend before she felt a deeper relation with the Mother and became her earliest disciple. Mme Potel came to Pondicherry with her husband in **March 1926** and left in **March 1928**.

(2) Motilal Roy, who opened a centre for sadhana at Chandernagore, first used the name “Sri Aurobindo” in the *Standard Bearer* of **27 August 1920**. There followed a

period of transition during which he used other variants such as, “Sri Aurobindo Ghose”, “Aurobindo”, “Mr. Ghose”, and even “A.G.”—the last in a letter to Nolini Kanto Gupta in **1923**. But it was not until **1925** that he consistently referred to Sri Aurobindo as “Sri Aurobindo” in his correspondence with Nolini. However, Sri Aurobindo himself signed as “A.G.” (when he did not sign as “Kali” or “K.”) in his letters to Motilal Roy from **1912-1920**.

(3) The case of Tirupati, a Telugu disciple from Vizianagaram, should also be mentioned. He addressed Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as “Sri Aravindaya” and “Ma Mirra” in his letters to them in **February 1926**. Sri Aurobindo signed for the first time as “Sri Aurobindo” in his reply of **22 March 1926**. But it was an exceptional case, as he generally did not sign in this way at that time. As a matter of fact, Sri Aurobindo referred to himself as “A.G.” in a letter written only four days later (**26 March 1926**) to Daulat Ram Sharma. Tirupati also had the privilege of being addressed as a child by the Mother when the other disciples still knew her as “Mirra Devi”. Her letter to him written around the same time began, “Tirupati, my child” and ended with “My blessings are with you.” Tirupati had lost his mental balance and was sent away from Pondicherry to his native place. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother showed great love and concern for him and addressed him in the manner of Gurus to a disciple, a relationship which afterwards became so natural in the Ashram that it was difficult to think otherwise.

(4) Sri Aurobindo was referred to as “Srijut Aurobindo Ghose” in the *Bande Mataram* (**1906-1907**) but the “Srijut” should be treated as a mere honorific which was used for other names such as “Srijut Deepnarain Singh”, “Srijut Motilal Ghose” and “Srijut Bepin Chandra Pal”. The *Arya* (**1914-1921**) was published in the name of “Sri Aurobindo Ghose” though the author in the contents page is given as “A.G.”. The first edition of *The Mother* (**1928**) had likewise “Sri Aurobindo Ghose” as author. The first book published in the name of “Sri Aurobindo” was *Kalidasa* in **1929**, but it was not until **1933** that this final form of his name was consistently used for his publications.

### When did “Aurobindo Ghose” sign as “Sri Aurobindo”?

As mentioned above, Sri Aurobindo first signed as “Sri Aurobindo” (and not “Aurobindo Ghose” or “Sri Aurobindo Ghose”) in a letter written to Tirupati on **22 March 1926**. However, it was under exceptional circumstances. The next known letter signed by him “Sri Aurobindo” is dated **1 August 1927**—this was later published as Chapter 3 of the book *The Mother*. Though there are a few more letters signed similarly in **1927** after this date, it was not until **1928** that Sri Aurobindo consistently signed his letters as “Sri Aurobindo” and even referred to himself in the third person as such. The final form of his name was continued into the last decade of his life, during which he made several public declarations. His support for the Allies during World War II (**1940**), the Independence Day Message (**1947**), the messages to the Andhra University (**1948**) and America (**1949**), were all issued in the name of “Sri Aurobindo”. However, Sri Aurobindo retained his original name “Aurobindo Ghose” to sign legal deeds such as property titles, etc.



## Jaya Devi’s Reminiscence

[August—October 1926]

I used to visit him [*Sri Aurobindo*] every day. He would make me sit near him and listen to everything carefully. **After four or five days** I asked A.G. : “Why are these chairs here?” “They are for people who listen to my words and practise meditation—they sit in these chairs.” Somehow I didn’t like the idea. So I said: “Lord, this doesn’t look proper. That the sadhaks, your disciples, should be sitting in the chairs along with you doesn’t look nice. Better to have mats or carpets on the floor. While you sit in the chair, the rest can sit below.” He only smiled a little and kept quiet. **Two days after**, I noticed that the chairs had been removed and a *durrie* spread out on the floor.

In those years the Ashram was less crowded and I used to go and see him every day. One day I asked him: “Lord, why do they call you A.G.?” “A.G.? Who says A.G.?” he counter-questioned. “These sadhaks speak like that, I have heard it.” Then he said, with a smile: “Well, it’s a good idea of yours.” Seven or eight days later, I found on the notice-board: “Sri Aurobindo.” I was told the Mother had given that name. This made me rather happy.

After two days, I went to see him with a pair of garlands which I had woven with my own hands and rolled inside a handkerchief. Looking at the hidden object in my hands he asked: “What is it you have brought?” “A pair of garlands,” I answered. “What will you do with garlands?” “One I shall place round your neck and the other at your feet,” I chirped gaily. Pleased with my reply, he said: “Well, give me one, and there, within the house, is your Mother, go and give her the other garland.” “Lord, where is the Mother? In which room? I do not know anything; please guide me a little.” He then explained: “As you go up the inner staircase you will find a room in front. The Mother lives there. You will give the garland to her.” “Lord, permit me to go there,” I said. Smilingly he agreed: “Yes, now go.”

I came down, wondering with whom to go. But, I also thought, what was there to worry about in going to the Mother? “Oh my mind, take me there. When the Lord has said so, I will certainly be able to meet her.” On reaching down with this thought, I found Purani’s wife, Lilavati, standing in front. I said to Lila: “Dear sister, please accompany me a little,” “Where to?” inquired Lila. “First let us go up the inside staircase. Then I shall tell you,” I said. “Then let us go,” she answered. After we had gone up the stairs we saw a room in front. I went inside with the garland in hand. Then I saw the Mother standing, in a red-bordered sari. She came a little closer to me and I offered the flowers and made my pranam to her. The Mother had a veil on, and when I gave her the garland she was smiling, but since I didn’t know any English I couldn’t speak with her. After a while, I came away. Lilavati followed suit. When she had come we went to our respective places....

It was the month of Asvin in 1926. At the time of Sri Aurobindo’s daily darshan I said: “Lord, the month of Asvin is here. Every year I celebrate **Mahashstami** puja.

I am wondering what to do now; shall I return home or what?" "Why, won't there be puja here?" he asked. "Yes, it's possible: the worship of Shiva-Durga. If I can perform your worship and the Mother's, then perhaps I need not go from here. That is why I am wondering..."

"Well, you can do that."

On the day of Mahashtami Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat in two chairs side by side. With the usual offering I performed the puja. I put garlands round both. Oh, it was as if Shiva and Durga had come down to accept the worship! It is impossible to describe all that I felt. It was ineffable, beyond thought.

(*Mother India*, August, November 1970, pp. 403-04, 623)

Jaya Devi's story is so beautiful that a historian might doubt its authenticity. How is it that such an important event as the Mother writing Sri Aurobindo's name on the notice board was missed out by the more well-known sadhaks of the time, namely, Purani, Nolini and Champaklal? The chronology in the story is also vague — no precise dates, except that of the Siddhi Day<sup>1</sup>, have been given by her. But the dates can be found with a little effort. According to old records, Jaya Devi (Nonibala renamed) and her younger brother, Dr. Upendranath Bannerji (Dr. Babu) arrived in Pondicherry on **7 August 1926**. Jaya Devi met Sri Aurobindo the following day. Taking into account her objection to the chairs "four days" later, and their removal "two days" after that, we arrive at the date **14 August 1926**. The next available date is that of the **Mahashtami**, which was on **14 October in 1926**. Between these two dates, the Mother wrote Sri Aurobindo's name on the notice-board, urging the disciples to address him henceforth as "Sri Aurobindo" instead of "A.G.". That it had the desired effect is shown by Purani's notes of the Evening Talks and Haradhan's diary, which reflect the same period of transition with regard to Sri Aurobindo's name. Jaya Devi's story becomes at once credible, and, perhaps, the lesson that we learn is that beautiful stories need not be untrue.

RAMAN REDDY

1. The date of the *Siddhi Day* is not there in the above extract. Read the full story in *Mother India*.

### Addendum

In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as Mira. For some time afterwards (this may have extended over a period of years) we could notice that he stopped at the sound of M and uttered the full name Mira as if after a slight hesitation. To us it looked rather queer at the time, but later we came to know the reason. Sri Aurobindo's lips were on the verge of saying "Mother"; but we had yet to get ready, so he ended with Mira instead of saying Mother. No one knows for certain on which particular date at what auspicious moment, the word "Mother" was uttered by the lips of Sri Aurobindo. But that was a divine moment in unrecorded time, a moment of destiny in the history of man and earth; for it was at this supreme moment that the Mother was established on this material earth, in the external consciousness of man. (From Nolini Kanta Gupta's *Reminiscences*, pp. 82-83)

## POOL OF LONELINESSES

(Amal's poem with Sri Aurobindo's comment)

I HAVE become a secret pool  
Of lonelineses mountain-cool,  
A dream-poise of unuttered song  
Lifted above the restless throng  
Of human moods' dark pitchers wrought  
Of fragile and of flawed thought.  
Now never more my tunes shall flow  
In moulds of common joy and woe;  
But seraph hands reveal wide jars  
Cut from the solitudes of stars  
And stoop across the sky to fill  
The perfect shapes of their calm will  
With musical obedience  
From my pellucid time-suspense;  
And in their crystalline control  
Of heaven-mooded ecstasy  
Carry the waters of my soul  
Unto God's sacred thirst for me!

### Sri Aurobindo's Comment

“It is a very fine poem. It comes from the intuitive plane—belonging to the Intuition proper which brings with it a sort of subdued inspiration—I mean inspiration of the more quiet, not the more vivid kind and a great felicity of language. The meaning is not obscure but deep enough to make one reflect before getting the whole of it.”

“The poetry of the Illumined Mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the truth vivid—it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have a play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them—it may be quite bare; it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The Illumined Mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.”

[*The Secret Splendour—Collected Poems*: K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) pp. 72-73]

## ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS

Q. Tell us a little about your early childhood and parents. Was the turn towards spirituality inspired by your parents or family and how did they react when you wanted to join the Ashram?

A. My grandfather was an orthodox Zoroastrian, sticking even to the formality of having a cap on his head while praying, and he used to spend several hours a day in a series of prayers from the Khorday Avesta which is the common prayer book of the Parsis. My father was unorthodox yet with a true religious instinct. In my early school days I was very devout but during their last part I was already exposed to anti-religious influences, mainly the works of Joseph McCabe, an ex-Jesuit who had started writing profusely in a soberly critical vein against Roman Catholic Christianity and popularising the books of the arch-Darwinist Ernst Haeckel. My father was a little put out when he found me poring over Haeckel's famous *Riddle of the Universe*. My turn towards spiritual things came with my reading Swami Vivekananda's books and close friendship and afterwards marriage with Daulat Mistry, afterwards named Lalita by Sri Aurobindo. She had long been in contact with an old Bengali devotee of Krishna, known as "Pagal" ("Mad") Harnath. Harnath brought me a living sense of a Mystery beyond the mind's range of knowledge. My spiritual search started. Harnath died soon after—but the search went on—and ended at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the Pondicherry Ashram of "Integral Yoga".

Q. What inspired and motivated you to join the Ashram?

A. The basic inspiration and motivation were, of course, my spiritual search, but what made me feel that at the Ashram I had reached my goal were two facts. On the one hand, there was the intellectual power and range of Sri Aurobindo's writings where I found not only direct spiritual knowledge but also a wide illumination by it of all the fields of human endeavour, including literature and poetry. On the other hand, I found the profound as well as enchanting personality of the "Mother" of the Ashram who was the direct Guru, Sri Aurobindo having withdrawn into seclusion for a more concentrated spiritual work.

Q. Please give some of your earlier experiences at the Ashram.

A. The most central early experience was the opening of the subtle heart centre to the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was as if a wall had broken down in my chest and laid open a source of deep devotion towards the Divine and at the same time an inexhaustible fountain of self-existent bliss. In the course of time there was also the experience, repeated again and again, of getting out of the body in a subtle form and moving about in a non-material yet absolutely concrete plane full of non-human beings and various interesting objects.

Q. Was dedicating yourself to a full-time spiritual life a way of opting out of the world we know as real?

A. In the spiritual life as practised in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, we were specifically told that our aim was not to desert the known world and get locked up more and more in a trance-state: our aim was to get centred in a deeper and higher consciousness than the usual mental state but ultimately in an open-eyed life occupied with doing all that we ordinarily do.

Q. As you went along, did you find yourself being a misfit in the normal world?

A. In the first flush of self-dedication to the Yogic life I developed an aversion to and even a fear of getting in touch with the world of common living but, though we were asked to be vigilant, we were never made to shun all contact with it. What is true is that we were expected to find occupation for ourselves within the framework of the Ashram life. As this framework is fairly broad we cannot be said to develop any misfitting with regard to the normal world. Actually, as we went along, we got more and more stabilised in the spiritual pursuit and thus more confident of facing all sorts of situations and circumstances. Moreover, the practice of equanimity—one of the basics of Yoga—would tend to render us more fit than ever to tackle whatever complexities might arise in the course of our occupations, outer or inner. It is true, however, that we would not like to get out of the special Ashram atmosphere of a wide and luminous-seeming peace. But it is also true that gradually this atmosphere would become a matter of inner feeling and state, so that wherever we may be we would participate in this peace and our actions would spring out of our deep sense of the Divine's inherent poise in the True, the Right, the Vast (the ancient Rigveda's phrase: *satyam ritam brihat*).

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

## SECULARISM, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

A NEW word has recently been cast into the shifty language of politics,—a language of self-illusion and deliberate delusion of others, which almost immediately turns all true and vivid phrases into a jargon, so that men may fight in a cloud of words without any clear sense of the thing they are battling for,—it is the word “secularism”.

The Late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, introduced this word into the Indian Constitution in the mid-seventies, during the Emergency. Since then, the word “secularism” has become the battle cry of political parties, intellectuals and opinion-makers in India; it has been used as a tool and a stick to attack anyone with a different viewpoint and has created more confusion than understanding and harmony. So the terms now being bandied about by the media are “secularists”, “pseudo-secularists”, and “non-secularists”. As a consequence, there is a great confusion in the minds of the average Indian as to what secularism really means.

It will therefore be both useful and interesting to try to trace the origin, history, and meaning of the word “secularism”. This exercise might help in clearing the misunderstandings and pave the way for a more harmonious polity. The word “secularism” is not essentially of Indian origin; rather it is a product of modern Western history and civilisation and has now become a part of the vocabulary of all governments in the world.

### **The Western Mind**

Let us therefore take a look at modern Western history and the mindset of its people in order to understand its psychological roots. The first point to note is that it was during the reign of Constantine in 324 A.D. that Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Before that there was no state religion anywhere in the world. Another point to note is that the first religious wars in history were fought between the Christians and the Muslims—the Crusades in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Let us analyse the characteristic trends of the Western mind. There are two things especially that distinguish the general European mind.

First, the cult of the inquiring, defining, effective, practical reason and second, the cult of life.

All the great developments and the high tides of European civilisation, Greek culture, the Roman empire before Constantine, the Renaissance, and the modern age with its two colossal idols, Industrialism and physical Science, have come to the West on the strong ascending urge of this double force. Whenever the tide of these powers has ebbed, the European mind has entered into much confusion, darkness, and weakness. Such was the period of the Middle Ages; it began from the time of Constantine when Christianity was made the State religion and continued right up to the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. During that period the Church was the dominant power in Europe. The Roman Empire was in a state of decay, disorder, and lawlessness, and it was the Christian religion that brought light into that period of darkness. Appealing to

the poor, the oppressed and the ignorant, it captured the soul and the ethical being, but cared little or not at all for the thinking mind; it was content with the mind remaining in darkness if the heart could be brought to feel the religious truth. Later, in the fifth century, when the barbarians captured the Western world, it was in the same way content to Christianise them, but made it no part of its function to intellectualise them. Distrustful even of the free play of intelligence, Christian ecclesiasticism and monasticism became anti-intellectual; it was only when the Arabs came in contact with Europe that the beginnings of scientific and philosophical knowledge were reintroduced into a semi-barbarous Christendom; and it needed the spirit of the Renaissance and a long struggle between religion and science to complete the return of a free intellectual culture into the re-emerging mind of Europe. Thus, although the Christian religion humanised Europe in certain ethical directions, it failed to spiritualise Europe; and this happened because it ran counter to the two master instincts of the European mind—the cult of reason and the cult of life. The Christian religion denied the supremacy of reason and suppressed the urge for a satisfied fullness of life. The natural consequence of this denial was a revolt which began by questioning the external and conventional forms that religion imposed; it then went on to challenge the authority of the Pope and the priesthood as the sole mediators between the human soul and God and the Scriptures; and finally it turned into a battle against all supernaturalism and religious beliefs. One may thus say that in the West, atheism and secularism were the inevitable end of this revolt and the movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation overthrew Christianity.

Since then religion was put into a corner of the soul and was forbidden to interfere in the activities of the human being and this was done on the ground that the interference of religion in science, thought, politics, society, life in general had been and must be a force for retardation, superstition and oppressive ignorance. That was the beginning of the modern age of Europe; and undoubtedly it was an age of great progress in all the fields of human activity. It was a time of great activity, of high aspiration, of deep sowing, of rich fruit-bearing; it was also a time when humanity got rid of much that was cruel, evil, ignorant, dark, odious, not by the power of religion, but by the power of the awakened intelligence and of human idealism and sympathy. It was from this time onward that the predominance of religion has been violently attacked and rejected by that portion of humanity which was then the standard-bearer of thought and progress, Europe after the Renaissance, modern Europe.

The tendency to secularism is a necessary and inevitable consequence of the cult of life and reason when it is divorced from their inmost inlook. The early Christian religion in its origin and essence, like all oriental religious thought, claimed to make religion commensurate with life; it aimed at spiritualising the whole being and its action. But the later version of Christianity as it was practised was a secular institution which did not look beyond a certain supraphysical sanction and convenient aid to the government of this life. And even then the tendency was to philosophise and reason away the relics of the original religious spirit in order to get into what they called the clear sunlight of the logical and practical reason. But modern Europe after the Renaissance and the Reformation

went farther and to the very logical end of this path. In order to shake off the obsession with the Christian idea, modern Europe separated religion from life, from philosophy, from art and science, from politics, from the greater part of social action and social existence. And it secularised and rationalised all human activity so that it might stand by itself, on its own basis; it had no need of any aid from religious sanction or mystic insistence. In this evolution religion was left aside, an impoverished system of belief and ceremony to which one might or might not subscribe with very little difference to the march of the human mind and life. Its penetrating and colouring power had been reduced to a faint minimum; a superficial pigmentation of dogma, sentiment and emotion was all that survived this drastic process.

### **The Indian Mind**

But in India there has been neither this predominance of reason and the life-cult nor any incompatibility of these two powers with the religious spirit. Reason and life were not opposed to religion and spirituality. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "In Indian civilisation philosophy and religion, philosophy made dynamic by religion, religion enlightened by philosophy have led, the rest follow as best they can. This is indeed its first distinctive character, which it shares with the more developed Asiatic peoples, but has carried to an extraordinary degree of thoroughgoing pervasiveness."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the life force has not been suppressed by religion in India; it rather encouraged it and gave it full play and raised it to greater heights, not by suppression but by elevation. In a reference to Indian religion, Sri Aurobindo says: "Certain religious disciplines have understood this truth, have taken up these relations boldly and applied them to our soul's communion with God; and by a converse process they can, lifted out of their present social and physical formulas, become for us, not the poor earthly things they are now, but deep and beautiful and wonderful movements of God in man fulfilling himself in life."<sup>2</sup> A beautiful illustration of this can be found in the relationship of the devotee with Lord Krishna. To some like the gopis, he is the eternal lover; to others like Arjuna, he is the friend, companion and guide; to still others like the mothers in India, he is the naughty child, and so on. All these relationships were powerful means of spiritualising the individual through human relationships. Religion thus became a powerful motivating factor in Indian life and has been the springboard of all the great movements and eras of Indian culture. The great ages of India, the strong culminations of her civilisation and culture, the high Vedic beginning, the grand spiritual stir of the Upanishads, the wide flood of Buddhism, Vedanta, Sankhya, the Puranic and Tantric religions, the flowering of Vaishnavism and Shaivism in the southern kingdoms—have come in on a surge of spiritual light and a massive or intense climbing of the religious or the religio-philosophic mind to its own heights, its noblest realities, its largest riches of vision and experience. The ebbing of spirituality brought in always, on the contrary, the weakness of these other powers, periods of fossilisation or at least depression of the power of life, tracts of decline, even beginnings of decay. Even in its period of decline, the religious spirit saved it. And this was proved



vividly in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it seemed that Indian civilisation was going down under the onslaught of the Muslim and British rule respectively. We can therefore say that all great awakenings in India, all her periods of mightiest and most varied vigour, have drawn their vitality from the fountainheads of some deep religious awakening. Wherever the religious awakening has been complete and grand, the national energy it has created has been gigantic and puissant.

This is a clue we have to keep in mind if we would understand the great lines of divergence between the East and the West.

We thus see that the Indian temperament is radically different from the Western temperament. What is good for the West is not necessarily good for India. Neither is there any question of superiority or inferiority. They are only two orbs of the same world culture.

The question now arises as to what is the place of secularism in India. If by secularism is meant the separation of religion from life and all its activities, then it goes contrary to the natural Indian temperament. Such secularism cannot have any place in India; for the religious power and instinct is too strong and powerful here; further, as already seen, it has been the central motive force behind all Indian development. It will therefore be impossible to separate religion from life and all its activities. If, on the other hand, secularism means that all religions have an equal place, that is nothing new; it did not need the political class or the intelligentsia to reveal this truth. For this concept has been the very essence of all Indian religious thought right from the Vedic times till today. Indian religion has always given equal importance and place to every approach to God and that is the reason why all the religions in the world find a place in India. No other country in the world has all the religions being practised with as much vigour and freedom as in India. A very important point to note in the political history of India is that despite the very strong religious and spiritual tendencies, a theocracy was never created here.

We may conclude therefore that the word "secularism" is quite irrelevant and out of place in the Indian context.

### **Religion and Spirituality**

Religion, then, has been one of the dominant motivating forces of Indian culture. The governing force of Indian culture was not religion but spirituality. A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of Indian culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. It not only made spirituality the highest aim of life, but it also tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole of life towards spirituality. But since religion is in the human mind the first native, if imperfect form of the spiritual impulse, this predominance of the spiritual idea necessitated the casting of thought and action into the religious mould and a persistent filling of every circumstance of life with the religious sense; it demanded and created an all-pervading religio-philosophic culture. It is true that the highest spirituality moves in a free and wide air far above that lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma. But man does not

arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation and, if it were demanded from him at once, he would never arrive there. Therefore Indian culture created a strong religious base with the intention of leading man gradually from religion to spirituality.

But at the same time it was aware of the serious limitations in the practice of religion. Let us then see the limitations of religion and what we have to guard against.

The first and most serious limitation of religion is when it becomes creedal and insists on the existence of one God only, one sacred book, and one approach. This leads to narrowness and to fanaticism.

Another serious defect is that religion often lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they are unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, man needs them because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law. An intellectual formula is often needed by the thinking and reasoning mind, a form or ceremony by the aesthetic temperament or other parts of the infrarational being, a set moral code by man's vital nature in their turn towards the inner life. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence; precisely because they belong to the rational and infrarational parts, they can be nothing more and, if too blindly insisted on, may even hamper the suprarational light. Such as they are they have to be offered to man and used by him, but not to be imposed on him as his sole law by a forced and inflexible domination. In the use of them tolerance and free permission of variation are the first rule which should be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold onto and subordinate to it every other element or motive.

We also see that religion has often stood violently in the way of philosophy and science; it has burned a Giordano Bruno, imprisoned a Galileo, and so generally acted in this matter that philosophy and science had in self-defence to turn upon religion and rend her to pieces in order to get a free field for their legitimate development; and this because men in the passion and darkness of their vital nature had chosen to think that religion was bound up with certain fixed intellectual conceptions about God and the world which could not stand scrutiny, and therefore scrutiny had to be put down by fire and the sword; scientific and philosophical truth had to be denied in order that religious error might survive.

Another shortcoming of religion is that a narrow religious spirit often oppresses and impoverishes the joy and beauty of life, either from an intolerant asceticism or, as the Puritans attempted it, because they could not see that religious austerity is not the whole of religion, though it may be an important side of it, is not the sole ethico-religious approach to God, since love, charity, gentleness, tolerance, kindness are also and even more divine, and they forgot or never knew that God is love and beauty as well as purity.

In the field of politics too, religion has often thrown itself on the side of power and resisted the coming of larger political ideals, because it was itself, in the form of a Church,

supported by power and because it confused religion with the Church, or because it stood for a false theocracy, forgetting that true theocracy is the kingdom of God in man and not the kingdom of a Pope, a priesthood or a sacerdotal class.

Similarly religion has often supported a rigid and outworn social system, because it saw its own life bound up with social forms with which it happened to have been associated during a long portion of its own history and erroneously concluded that even a necessary change there would be a violation of religion and a danger to its existence. As if so mighty and inward a power as the religious spirit in man could be destroyed by anything so small as the change of a social form or so outward as a social readjustment! This error in its many shapes has been the great weakness of religion as practised in the past and the opportunity and justification for the revolt of the intelligence, the aesthetic sense, the social and political idealism, even the ethical spirit of the human being against what should have been its own highest tendency and law.

These are the limitations of religion and we must become aware of them.

### **The Solution**

Where, then, is the solution? The solution lies not in getting rid of religion but, in the words of Dr. Abdul Kalam, in graduating from religion to spirituality. This is beautifully illustrated in the following passage from Sri Aurobindo: "India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create. Religion has been a central preoccupation of the Indian mind; some have told us that too much religion ruined India, precisely because we made the whole of life religion or religion the whole of life, we have failed in life and gone under. I will not answer, adopting the language used by the poet in a slightly different connection, that our fall does not matter and that the dust in which India lies is sacred. The fall, the failure does matter, and to lie in the dust is no sound position for man or nation. But the reason assigned is not the true one. If the majority of Indians had indeed made the whole of their lives religion in the true sense of the word, we should not be where we are now; it was because their public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking, materialistic that they fell. It is possible, that on one side we deviated too much into an excessive religiosity, that is to say, an excessive externalism of ceremony, rule, routine, mechanical worship, on the other into a too world-shunning asceticism which drew away the best minds who were thus lost to society instead of standing like the ancient Rishis as its spiritual support and its illuminating life-givers. But the root of the matter was the dwindling of the spiritual impulse in its generality and broadness, the

decline of intellectual activity and freedom, the waning of great ideals, the loss of the gust of life.

“Perhaps there was too much of religion in one sense; the word is English, smacks too much of things external such as creeds, rites, and external piety; there is no one Indian equivalent. But if we give rather to religion the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the all-embracing unity and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was not too much of religion, but rather too little of it—and in what there was, a too one-sided and therefore an insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is, not to belittle still farther the age-long ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense. This is the direction in which the philosophy, poetry, art of the West is, still more or less obscurely, but with an increasing light, beginning to turn, and even some faint glints of the truth are beginning now to fall across political and sociological ideals. India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge. Whether she will rise or not to the height of her opportunity in the renaissance which is coming upon her, is the question of her destiny.”<sup>3</sup>

KITTU REDDY

### *References*

1. *Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 107.
2. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 166.
3. *Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 38-40.

## LAND OF THE GODS\*

SITTING on the verandah Amal watches the stormy wind at play. It rocks the slim body of the eucalyptus while her long, dishevelled hair soughs as it sways in the wind! Near the horizon the sky is dark blue but the scattered fleecy network of the gray clouds covers the upper air.

In such a listless evening old memories of his childhood and early youth began to surface in Amal's mind. He recalled with wonder how a couple of chance remarks by a young girl had given a decisive turn to his life and its wheel had rolled over many a strange, unimaginable path before coming to a stop at a village in this hilly area. Was it some hidden power in a woman, or the restless fire in his own heart or some other force that had thus influenced him?

The town of Chittagong was astir with excitement. The shooting incident at Chandpore, the strikes called by the coolies in Assam and in the Railways had led to the arrest of Jatindramohan Sengupta.<sup>1</sup> The rail traffic was at a standstill in Chittagong, Chandpore and Goalanda. With a lot of clever manoeuvring Amal had managed to get a police pass and had reached Calcutta in a roundabout way to attend college. But then, within a few months, the Non Co-operation Movement began in Calcutta. Meetings and strikes became a daily affair. In these disturbed times Amal paid a courtesy call to a distant cousin of his. She too was a college student, attending classes from her aunt's house.

"Halloa, Amal-da! Wherefrom? To what do I owe this pleasure? Just tell me after how many years I'm seeing you. You had come for Paru's marriage. After that you just vanished into thin air. And now you appear all dressed in khadi!"—all this Sutapa said without pausing for breath.

—"I'm studying in a college here," Amal replied.

—"That means after being in Calcutta all these months you've at last found time to pay us a visit! Still as shy as ever!"

—"I've been thinking of coming for a long time but just couldn't make it. You know how explosive the present situation is. The British are arresting all the leaders. Any moment now the students will be called to join in the agitation."

—"Oh, is that so? Then you too will answer Mother India's call, won't you? Proudly we shall announce to the world, 'Our Amal-da too has courted arrest!' ... But for the time being let's go upstairs."

Sutapa took him by the hand and led him to her aunt.

—"Auntie, look who is here! I've been telling Amal that if he goes to jail ..."

—"What sort of inauspicious talk is that?" said the aunt, looking at Amal as though he held the answer.

\* Translation by Aniruddha Sircar of a piece, *Debabhumi*, taken from Nirodbaran's Bengali book, *Rachana Bichitra*.

1. Jatindra Mohan Sengupta (1885-1933), well-known national leader. Born in the village of Barama in the Chittagong district. Studied law in England and became a barrister. In 1921 he gave up his lucrative practice and joined the Non Co-operation Movement. He was imprisoned many times. His European wife, Mrs. Nellie Sengupta, too worked for the independence of India.

—“Amal says that when the leaders call them, the students will have to go to jail. So...”

—“Why should he go to jail, when there are so many others? He’s his mother’s only son. Do you think her grief will add to your glory? Now stop teasing him. And how dare you call him Amal? Isn’t he older than you?”

—“Not all that older. This is how I used to call him when we were small. In any case, it was I who brought him up. Sometimes I called him elder brother, sometimes stupid ass or by some other mode of address—didn’t I?”

Amal smiled, charmed by her spontaneity and saucy affection. When he got back to his hostel after doing justice to his aunt’s lavish hospitality, it was late in the evening. On the way back Sutapa’s shadow was constantly with him, her easy camaraderie, her pure, bubbling *joie de vivre* and above all, the ardour in her voice when she had said, “You too will answer the Call, won’t you?” He just could not ignore her expectation. But what of his mother? She who could not bring herself to let him come to Calcutta, if now she heard that he was in jail, what a terrible shock it would be for her! His mental conflict kept him awake till late at night. At last, resolving not to worry about the uncertain future, he fell asleep; but even in his sleep the conflict persisted. He dreamt that he was threading his way through utter darkness and the road had no end and it was impossible for him to stop. On both sides of the road shadowy figures stood crowding. If he stopped, he would fall in their clutches. Far ahead, high in the heavens glowed a huge diamond.

In a week or two the city of Calcutta was in a ferment. A stunned ocean suddenly went berserk. Highly popular leaders such as Basanti Devi, Chittaranjan Das, Subhash Bose were all arrested. War drums sounded in the student camps. One of the student leaders came to Amal’s hostel and announced, “Our duty is clear. We must accept the Government’s challenge. Are you ready?” A meeting was held on the spot. It was proposed that all those intending to join the strike must sign their names in a register. A notebook was passed round. Amal, the youngest member of the group, firmly signed his name. It just did not occur to him that it could be a vow not strictly meant to be fulfilled.

Next day he packed his books and clothes, wrote a letter to his mother, and then went to meet his friends in their hostel. He was about to embark on a very risky venture where nothing was certain. So he must bid his friends farewell; also, he would leave the letter to his mother with one of them to be delivered to her at a later date. When he revealed his intention to his friends, a young boy said, “Amal-da, I shall go with you.” Amal did not pay any attention to him but when the boy insisted on accompanying him, he had to give in.

After registering their names at the Congress Office in Amherst Street, batch after batch, the volunteers emerged, wearing the party badge on their chest and holding the khadi flag in their hand. Singing the mantra, “Whom you have chosen as your standard-bearer, give him the strength to carry your flag...”,<sup>1</sup> Amal’s batch marched forward to start their picketing. They shouted slogans in Hindi, “Wear only handloom cloth”... “Boy-

1. The 20<sup>th</sup> poem in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Naivedya*.

cott the Prince's visit"... "We want self-rule"... and advanced towards Howrah via Harrison Road and Burrabazar. Their hearts see-sawed between anxiety and enthusiasm. Whenever they noticed a white police sergeant, their hearts sank only to rise again soon after crossing him. There was no telling where his heavy truncheon would land. Rice-eating timid Bengali! Overnight he cannot become a Col. Suresh Chandra Biswas<sup>1</sup> or a Khudiram. The presence of the massive crowds was certainly encouraging, but in the face of a lathi charge, they would be the first to take to their heels. Amal was more concerned about his young companion, but the latter was fearless, quiet, self-absorbed. The people were ecstatic. From the terraces and verandahs, women showered flower-petals and puffed rice on the volunteers to the accompaniment of ululation, which was echoed by the throngs on the road. In the midst of it all marched the volunteer brigades. It was as though "The Mother had emerged from the heart of Bengal..."<sup>2</sup> and was directing her sons towards the battlefield. Such a day had come in 1905 when Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo were the seers of the Fire-Mantras that had set the hearts aflame. Now it was Chittaranjan. The cry of "Vande Mataram" was ringing once more, shaking the earth and sky and agitating the water of the Ganges.

In this manner Amal's batch returned triumphant after the first round, without being challenged by the police. Who knows why their fate turned out to be different from that of the others? On returning to the hostel he learnt that except for one person, all the other picketers were hale and hearty. Later, lying in bed, Amal relived the intoxicating experience of that day. From where did he get the courage, the strength? Sutapa's divinely inspired words, the respectful glances from his friends, the felicitations of the people filled him with pride; but on the other hand, his mother's sad countenance tried to dissuade him. But now there was no turning back, for now he was the anointed son of the Motherland.

Next day, after attending all his morning classes, he set out for the picketing, accompanied by his young friend. This time a couple of ordinary labourers joined their group. He had a premonition that soon they were going to be arrested. Marching fearlessly and shouting their slogans in a firm voice, they reached Strand Road. Two or three sergeants in their dazzling white uniform, shining brass buttons, polished boots, their batons resting on a table before them, were sitting on a park bench, drinking something. Hearing the cry of "Vande Mataram", they rose and asked gruffly, "What are you shouting?" Not at all pleased with the reply, they said, "Fine, come along!" They led them to a narrow lane, threw them into the lock-up and disappeared. For a while Amal was shocked, but soon the company of the prior arrivals and the soothing smile of his young friend dissipated his gloom. However, except for the "Gandhi agitation", he did

1. Col. Suresh Chandra Biswas (1861-1905), famous Bengali army officer. Born in the village of Nathpore, Nadia district. Joined the Brazilian army and because of his exceptional bravery was soon promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He became a colonel a few days before his death.

2. From a song by Rabindranath Tagore:

When didst thou emerge, O Mother,

In Thy aspect of Beauty, from the heart of Bengal?

"Swadesh"—21<sup>st</sup> song

not find any common link with the others.

Towards evening, a sumptuous meal was delivered to their cell, sent by the generous Marwari community. Needless to say, they did full justice to this unexpected, mouth-watering dinner. Late at night they were packed like sardines into a dark van and driven away. The full-throated cry of “Vande Mataram” shook the sleeping streets. This madened the white policemen but they refrained from using their heavy batons. At last the van stopped before the historical Alipore Jail.

As soon as Amal’s party had crossed the main gate and entered the compound, “the prison welcomed”<sup>1</sup> them with the sweet sounding chorus of “Vande Mataram” that reached them, piercing the darkness. Then the news was broadcast that Chittaranjan Das, Subhash Bose and many other leaders were also lodged there. In the light of a dim electric lamp a ghostly corridor could be discerned where behind bars stood many, many shadowy figures, who began to ply the newcomers with questions about their friends: “Ashok, Tamohar, are you there?” Amal’s group too reciprocated with their questions. Suddenly there came a peremptory command, “Sit down, sit down everybody.” It was suppertime. Each one made a token gesture of washing the iron dish set before him but after that who served them and what was served remained a mystery. The stuff smelt of meat but was completely devoid of anything remotely resembling meat. It was nothing but watery gravy. However, their hunger lending the required taste, they devoured it, and then entered the dim corridor. Loudly the padlock clanged shut. The hall where they now found themselves was already half full. Some three to four hundred souls had assembled there. In the dim light it seemed that people from all walks of life had come together, swept by the flood of nationalist sentiment. Teachers and students, labourers and employers, Hindus and Muslims, Biharis and Bengalis, had all been exiled in the island of Alipore. But instead of being sad, all were exulting because the call of the Motherland had brought them together. “*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*”—the whole world was one family.

In the morning the clanging sound of doors being unlocked woke them up. Daylight brought them closer still to one another. Somebody remarked, “You know, this is the jail where Sri Aurobindo was imprisoned for a year. And Satyen and Kanai<sup>2</sup> too were here. Who has not heard of them? We are truly fortunate that we have come here following in their footsteps.” Another person announced a most unexpected discovery: Mahatma Gandhi’s eldest son was their fellow prisoner!

After breakfasting on a strange concoction called “lapsi”, they set out for Lalbazar for their trial. A large portion of the population of Calcutta had voluntarily entered the net spread by the British government. The judge was sorely pressed for time. He asked only a few questions, considered the responses and pronounced the judgement—acquittal

1. From Rabindranath Tagore’s famous poem, “Namaskar”, addressed to Sri Aurobindo:  
 The hampering shackles  
 Touch your feet in obeisance—  
 Reverently the prison welcomes you.

2. In the Alipore Bomb Case, one of the arrested revolutionaries, Naren Gosain, turned approver. Satyen Bose and Kanailal Dutta shot and killed him in the jail itself as punishment for his treachery. They were awarded the death sentence.



or punishment. Time passed. In the afternoon, Amal looking outside could see many of his friends. Was Sutapa among them? Some busybodies tried to persuade them to give up their idealism. More time passed. They were told that it was too late for the judge to examine them that day. After enjoying a grand feast supplied by a kindred spirit they went back to jail. And next morning when at last they appeared before the judge, each volunteer, as instructed beforehand, gave the same unvarying reply to every question asked by his honour, "I have nothing to say!" Visibly angry, his honour pronounced the sentence: seven months' imprisonment with hard labour!

Their incarceration began. But this sort of prison life was rare indeed. It was all a glad turmoil, great enthusiasm, close friendships with total strangers and insight into their thought, their way of life. This billowy flood of youthful exuberance created no end of problems for the authorities. Hundreds of gentlemen prisoners! Where to lodge them? What kind of work to give them? How to treat them? The high officials paid just a quick visit in the morning. The prisoners patiently waited to be inspected by the apple-cheeked English officers, but as soon as their back was turned, the wave of pent up energy broke out boisterously. In no time the tiny little garden in the jail got crushed underfoot and disappeared. The neem tree, totally devoid of twigs (being used as toothbrushes), complained bitterly. On the other side, from the prisoners there were complaints galore regarding the "lapsi" boiled perhaps with cockroaches, once in a while even with mice; the indigestible vegetable; the stinking, stale rice; and the dish-water serving as dal. Soon these complaints reached the ears of the Government as well as those of the national leaders. There was an immediate enquiry resulting in unimaginable changes. Basketsful of carp and mackerel, potato, cabbage, broken wheat and ghee made their welcome appearance! Some of the volunteers themselves were appointed cooks. For the time being truce was declared. The Government applied the Chanakya policy and established peace by appeasing the "belly's hungry god"—the root cause of all strife! In the age of the Mahabharata the Kauravas were ignorant of this policy and so they perished. However, this generosity, accorded to the "sons" of Mother India, was not extended to the ordinary convicts. Once, when from a heap of fried fish one was pinched by a convict, a nationalist volunteer reported him. The convict-warder gave the thief a sound thrashing. Seeing the magnitude of the punishment for such a minor offence, the volunteer genuinely repented his tale bearing.

Among these noisy, restless youngsters, Hiralal Gandhi's calm, fair figure, pleasant voice and faraway eyes brought to mind the idea of a god in exile. Being Gandhiji's son and moreover an elderly, respected leader, he received plenty of gifts from his admirers. But it was unthinkable that an ascetic like him could enjoy mangoes, litchis and the mouth-watering chutneys. In the blink of an eye they used to find themselves where they would be properly appreciated.

This kind of royal treatment could not go on for long—even a king's treasury would soon feel the pinch. Apart from that, the authorities feared that contact with the nationalists might make the ordinary convicts unruly. Soon a rumour gained currency that a plan was afoot to reduce the sentence of the nationalists and set them free. From seven months,

Amal's jail-term came down to two. The number of the volunteers began to decrease. The atmosphere in the prison quietened and a feeling of idealism emerged. There were many serious discussions, even regular meditation and spiritual guidance.

The accounts of the great sacrifices made by Chittaranjan Das and Subhash Chandra Bose, Satyen and Kanai's unforgettable love of the Motherland, Sri Aurobindo's imprisonment and his inconceivable spiritual experience of seeing Vasudeva in everything, animate and inanimate, inspired Amal's group. They organised a Saraswati Puja and invited Subhash Bose to participate in it. Punctually he came, a true Aryan, tall, fair, and clad in homespun dhoti and chaddar. His spontaneous intimacy won them over, one and all.

On the other side, the more they came into close contact with the ordinary convicts, the more the hidden mystery of the prison-world, the tortured life-stories, were revealed to them: the back-breaking labour, the food and treatment unfit even for animals, the tyranny of the convict-warders, the straitjacket discipline and the cruel punishment meted out even for a small offence. As a result the air was poisoned with mutual distrust, fear, suspicion. Theft and cheating were rampant and with the connivance of the policemen themselves there was regular undercover gambling. One of the convicts showed them how he could secrete money in a corner of his gullet without its affecting his normal speech. Another convict's back was lacerated with regular whippings, but he had remained as recalcitrant as ever. The tragic tales of many more "Kabuliwalahs" and "Jean Valjeans" were constantly flowing in unsuspected underground streams.

Enriched by his varied experiences Amal came out of jail, a much changed person. His appearance as well as his character showed a calmness and strength. He stood straighter, with steady nerves and bright looks. His friends greeted him with a new respect. Sutapa and her aunt were wonderstruck. After hearing his stories, Sutapa commented teasingly, "Oh, how brave of you! We too can show that sort of bravery. We expected to see you a bag of bones whom we'd greet with a garland from New Market, but you disappoint us returning as you do after being treated like a cherished son-in-law!" The aunt rebuked him mildly for neglecting his mother of flesh and blood for the sake of the Motherland. Sutapa's younger sisters repeated Amal's curt statement, "I've nothing to say" to prove that although they had not gone to the court, they had followed the proceedings attentively. Amal felt as though he had achieved something.

Returning to his hostel he thought, "Now what?" First he must go home, his mother was waiting for him. With his young companion he set out. The boy was really like a brother to him. In the jail he was always with him like a shadow, washing his vessels, sharing the same blanket that served them for a bed. His gait, speech, and behaviour were always quiet and soothing. On the uncertain journey of life, a companion of a few days brings the light and fragrance of the distant horizon. In the train Amal asked him, "What will you do now? Join school?"

—"That life of drudgery? Not again. What are your plans?"

—"I've not thought about them yet."

—"Then why are you concerned about me?"

Amal was embarrassed. He said, “Don’t forget me. Again come to me in my hour of need.” But he had a feeling that this would be their last meeting.

His mother hugged him as though she had recovered a precious jewel; as though her own Nachiketa<sup>1</sup> had come back to her from the Abode of Death. After resting for a few days he began to work for the welfare of their village. He had gone to jail urged by a sentimental excitement. He returned with a genuine love for the Motherland. Through his work he now came to know his country intimately. He saw the havoc wrought by poverty, illiteracy, disease and lack of medical care. He remembered his own younger brother, a strong, healthy boy, who died because a qualified doctor was not immediately available. Amal now knew his goal.

*(To be concluded)*

NIRODBARAN

(Reproduced from *Nirodbaran: Divinity’s Comrade*, Sri Mira Trust, 2003)

1. A highly inspiring figure in the Kathopanishad. While performing the Vishwajit Yajna, Nachiketa’s father was giving away all his wealth to the Brahmins. The boy Nachiketa thrice asked his father, “To whom are you giving me?” Annoyed, the father replied, “To Yama.” Obediently, Nachiketa went to the Abode of Death and fasted for three nights until he met Yama. Yama gave him the supreme knowledge before sending him back to the earth.

# LIVING LABORATORIES OF THE LIFE DIVINE

(A Talk for AUM 2003 Conference)

*(Continued from the issue of March 2004)*

YESTERDAY we heard about the conditions of the earth and about the earth as the Ashram, the Ashram of the world. Ron Jorgensen spoke of the entire world as the home of the Lord and the circumstances that come to us in the world as provided by the Lord for our yoga. Indeed it is the Ashram of the world that all humanity can be said to inhabit today and in a profounder sense than that of providing materials for the growth of consciousness in those who have chosen to grow in consciousness. It is the ashram of the world because the world itself has been moved into a world yoga. This is the meaning of the New Age.

I would like to draw your attention at this point to an ancient story, a story from the Puranas, a story which talks about an occult event that happened in eternal time, an eternal event. It is a story about the churning of the ocean—there is a great churning of the cosmic ocean and the purpose, the objective, is for the pot of Amrita, the ambrosia of Immortality that is at the bottom of the ocean, to be brought to the surface, churned up from the bottom. And it is the gods and the demons who together undertake this churning. And it is the great world mountain—Mount Meru, which is also in each of us—*Meru-danda*, the spine—this world axis, *Axis-Mundi*, the pillar of the world, that is used as the rod for doing the churning. And it is the great serpent, base and bed of the evolutionary fountain of avatarhood, Vishnu, the serpent Ananta, the coiled infinite potential of Time, Eternity on one side and Perpetuity on the other, eternally changing, never changing, that becomes the churning rope. And Vishnu himself, as the Tortoise avatar, becomes the base on which the churning rod, Meru is stationed.

The first thing that happens with the churning is the rise of the poisons of the ocean. The poisons of the ocean are so dense, so acrid, so corrosive, that even the demons can't continue. Both, the gods and the demons, are completely stalled. The sky turns black with poison. What we today call pollution is nothing compared to that condition. Man cannot even envisage that condition of poisonous darkness. Neither the gods nor the demons can cope with it. And it is at this point that the great Lord Shiva himself comes to the rescue by drinking the poison and holding it, by his yoga-power, in his throat, which is therefore stained blue and which is why Shiva has as one of his names, Nilakantha, the blue-throated.

A number of mystics had experiences around 5<sup>th</sup> December 1950, at the time when Sri Aurobindo left his body and several of them saw a vision of the great Shiva drinking the cup of poison. Indeed, the departure of Sri Aurobindo can be understood in this light. The myth of the churning of the Ocean is an image of the world yoga initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo has prepared the process, he has initiated it and he has sacrificed himself so that our unprepared nature may be able to bear the intense difficulties of the beginning. It is the first stage of this world yoga that he has

made possible by drinking the acrid poison that rose up from the depths. He has held the Supramental light in his body and he has broken the backbone of earthly karma, which would have otherwise made it impossible for us to move into this New Age. This is why the Mother has addressed Sri Aurobindo's "material envelope" and said "...before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

All that we see today, experience today are the physical repercussions of occult events of this kind. The pollution that we see is inevitable. It is the result of our collective consciousness. It is the poison-fruit of our world karma facing us as we take our first steps in the New Age. It is necessary. It will pass. It has already been dealt with by the Lord himself.

But this world yoga, though much quicker than the processes of Prakriti, is still a process of collective preparation which is impersonal and relatively slow, because it is a process of bringing consciousness to the unconsciousness. It is awakening it, but awakening it over time, slowly. People receive ideas. We heard a whole spate of names yesterday from Savitri, names of people he believes are doing the work of the Mother without knowing that they are the Mother's instruments. Indeed, they are, and yet the purpose has not yet become conscious in them, the fullness of divine intent has not dawned on them. They are serving the world yoga. The work of the Supermind, the work of the supramental consciousness is not merely at the universal level of the world yoga. It is at the individual level, it is at the cosmic level and it is at the level of several other possible experiments that are being conducted all simultaneously and in an interrelated fashion too complex for the human mind to comprehend. As Sri Aurobindo says in the book *The Mother*, the Mother's steps are too complex, "one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence"—which is why the surrender is demanded of us. It is only through this surrender that we can progressively become more enlightened instruments of her workings and in the process find ourselves more and more a part of Her. By this means, we are to rise to a consciousness one with her consciousness, a state from which our present condition will seem indeed very embarrassing. In this progression of the world yoga, we have to be open to the vast, complex, global and minute working of Her supramental Shakti, that reality which is here among us. And this is why for this experiment, the living laboratory is not just the individual, nor is it merely the work to ameliorate world conditions, it is these and a variety of other experiments that are going on at the same time.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were in Pondicherry, the Mother had said that there was a question whether they would do the yoga with just a handful of disciples, intensely try to accelerate the process of the descent of the supermind, bring it down and then radiate it. She said the other option was to go slower, but to gather around them representative specimens of humanity that would be able to bring a much wider possibility of the manifestation of supramental consciousness on earth. She says the decision was not made mentally. The Lord made the decision. It happened by itself—and it is the second course that was followed. This was how the Ashram developed, the Sri Aurobindo

Ashram. You and I and all of us here who have been touched by the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken maybe a few faltering steps in the direction of the life that they have shown, the goal that they have shown, have inevitably felt at some point how privileged we are, how fortunate we are, what a Grace we have received. Let us not be fooled that it is due to any credit of ours that we have been chosen for this Grace. It is a process which has selected us, and again the phrase 'living laboratories' is very relevant here. We are 'cultures' both in the sense of social expressions as spoken of by Dr. Vyas as well as in the biological sense. We are cultures on petri dishes, we are cultures that are being experimented on. We have been chosen because we are representative of something, something which goes far beyond our own understanding. We are here to serve a purpose that will be revealed to us not today, but only when the work is done. Today or tomorrow, all the earth, every individual, will receive this blessing, this Grace, because this is the condition of the world yoga. The world yoga progresses through smaller collectives, not only as the entire body of the earth, but much quicker, much more consciously, through the conscious intention of people who awake to the reality of what the supramental force is bringing. As with the Ashram—the growth of the Ashram was around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's ascension, it was around their attempt to reach the supermind and bring it down for humanity, so the roots had to extend far into the possibilities of terrestrial manifestation. Diverse specimens of humanity gathered around Mother and Sri Aurobindo at the Ashram, as we all know—a tremendous variety, tremendous diversity. And yet, each individual formed, as Aster was saying, personalities that were moulded into their highest possibilities of individuality by Sri Aurobindo, by the Mother—as possibilities of manifesting the yoga force.

The Mother did not stop with this process. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo had been physically present at the centre of the Ashram community as a laboratory of the supramental experiment. But in 1968, She started another such community, a community with an even wider, more global, planetary basis that would not have them physically at its centre, that would have to open to them internally, that would have to be the conscious collaborators in the inner sense, no longer externally guided in the material details of their existence, no longer capable of dragging them down, of pulling at the hem of their robes and soiling them, but who would have to receive the problems of humanity and open to them from within and re-ceive the Grace of the transformation through collaboration with the Para-prakriti, with the supreme Mother Force. This is Auroville. Auroville today is continuing in this work. It is also a sphere of churning. These are other spheres of the churning of the waters, but these are more conscious spheres—these are spheres, cradles, crucibles, birth-places of the superman, of the overman.

And yet, this is not all. In a conversation of December 1938, Sri Aurobindo said that a few hundred people in the Ashram would not be sufficient to make the supramental effective for mankind. Thousands of people doing the yoga sadhana in many walks of life across the world would be needed for that. Individually, and collectively, across America, across Europe, across Asia, across the world, we are all invited to be participants in the purpose of the supramental manifestation. The supermind is interested in us. We're

not here merely to make conscious efforts, to make titanic endeavours, to fling ourselves from this orbit to the higher orbit. We can be heartened by the fact, but we should also be extremely attentive to the fact that the supermind is interested in us. It is a Force that is seeking us out. It is an agency, an active power. And in seeking us out, it is seeking us not merely as individuals because its purpose is a divine life on earth. A 'divine life on earth' is not manifested by one person. A divine life is a context, a divine life is an opening up of a world of phenomena that make for a rich collective existence in all its forms. And if we cannot provide it with the conditions for this, its work is to that extent hampered or deprived of the cooperation that it seeks. We need to be conscious of this, because it is only to the extent that we are conscious of this that we can be its collaborators. We need to gravitate together; we need to unite our wills; we need to form collective individualities. We need to form collective flames of aspiration—integral collective flames of aspiration that will be able to invoke that higher Consciousness and call down that Light, that Power to work among us, to form itself in us, to radiate through us in our acts, in our bodies.

That, indeed, is what it seeks. The power of the Supramental Shakti, here on earth, seeks unity, seeks integration and seeks perfection. It seeks these in an integral way. We are first called in consciousness to these experiences of integrality. This is the pressure. Can we be integral within? Can we integrate ourselves? Integrate our mind, life and body around the psychic being? Can we feel whole, become one? This is the pressure and the help that's coming. But again, it's not merely at the individual level. Can we experience the unity of collective consciousness? In Aster's talk before this, we were very fortunate in receiving a message which I've heard for the first time—very refreshing—the fact that the signs of the supramental manifestation are not to be sought primarily in the breakdown of the Berlin Wall or the Fall of Soviet Communism, but within us, in the change in the modality of consciousness that is going on. Are we aware of this? Let us become aware of it. Today, we live in God. Are we aware of this? It is the consciousness that has to turn within and see what is being done by the supramental shakti inside first, not outside. This means an awareness of the process of integration of the being and it also results, as Aster was saying, in the recognition of the fact that unity manifests when you least expect it, it manifests in and through us. We experience it and we don't know it.

There is a form of experience which the Supermind is calling us to have, to feel, which is new—a new form of spiritual experience. Individually, great yogis have experienced the Divine, have experienced the Oneness, the One Being there is, and yet when they've come out of it, they've seen that every individual has remained in the Ignorance that they always were in. Why? Even when they had the oneness experience, it was only they who had it. When the Mother experienced the manifestation of the Supermental force upon the earth at the Ashram Playground, it was such a powerful experience, she felt that when she would open her eyes she would see that everybody was flat on the ground. But nobody except for a handful, a very few, even knew what had happened. The Ignorance encases us so densely that we are unaware of what is going on within. But the experience, the new spiritual experience to which we are called by the Supermind, first in symbolic form, in collectives, and finally as a world phenomenon, is that of Collective

Oneness.

Collective oneness seems at the outset to be a trivial phrase, one of those catch-alls of the New Age. But it isn't that. Collective oneness is arriving at a poise of consciousness above the mind, not individually, but collectively, where a number of people can experience at once that they are the One Being. They look at each other and they know themselves simultaneously as one and yet irreducibly different—a difference because this One Being is not a finite being, it is the Infinite One. The Infinite One wonders at its own infinity. It is one and yet infinite. It has no limits. Its own potentialities come to it from its own infinity, and it wonders, it is wonderful. This is the content of the experience of collective oneness that the Supermind is calling us towards as a possibility of being.

But the possibility of being is not the only aspect of the Supramental invitation. There is also the possibility of becoming, integral becoming, becoming integral, an integral per-fection in becoming. And for this we need collectively not merely to aspire to the Supermind to be manifest through us, not merely for those few rare experiences where we rise above ourselves and become privy to a consciousness beyond ourselves moving us as a collective, but where we participate collectively in an expressive field, an integral field, a field of knowledge, a field of work, a field of love and of the emotional life, a field of physical labour and activity. We offer it an integral field collectively. But the whole consciousness of this offering is that we are doing this work, not to create an edifice that others will marvel at as some kind of institutional radiation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother but to allow the Supermind the conditions that it seeks through our cooperation. In the works of knowledge, in education, in the works of will, in business, in politics, in the works of culture, of the emotional life, of the refinement of the sensations, in the works of the body, of labour, of service, *dāśya*, let us give all our parts of being fully and collectively because that is what the Supramental force is interested in. I call upon all of us to meditate on this invitation, if we are to be conscious collaborators.

We are called upon to be conscious collaborators, but even more importantly, we are the living laboratories of the divine life. We are living laboratories individually, collectively, and in more ways than one. To be conscious of this, to hold these possibilities in our being, to be always receptive, this is the call. To have a will is good. To surrender the will is better. But to be receptive to the messages of the scientist who is using us as the site of Her experiment, as the living laboratory, is perhaps the best. Thank you.

*(Concluded)*

DEBASHISH BANERJI



## IN TIBET

WHEN I first read about the butter lamps  
I could smell the smoke that filled the spacious halls  
And darkened tapestries on temple walls.  
I heard the sound of bells in far-off camps

And stars like candles in the frozen night  
Appeared as on a table of a King,  
I knew the song the spinning prayer-wheels sing  
And recognized this strange familiar site

As one who passes through a childhood town  
Remembers lanes forgotten by the rest,

Knows secrets no adult has ever guessed  
And every path his feet have travelled down.

I saw in vision's clear awakened eye  
The coloured flags flapping in the wind  
The saffron robes native to my kind  
And awesome statues of the Deity.

I lived and loved in that transparent air  
And rode beneath her skies of ideal blue,  
I died in fields where orange lilies grew,  
Upon my lips an ancient Buddhist prayer.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

# HISTORY AS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

HISTORY is the story of Man, his civilisation and his progress—“His-story” the story of Man’s evolution and development. Not many historians viewed history in this evolutionary or developmental perspective. Even those historians who saw in history the progressive march of humanity, focused only on the outer progress and ignored the inner dimensions of history. In this article, we present the basic principles of a psychological and developmental vision or approach to history based on Indian insights and Sri Aurobindo’s vision. This requires an organic vision of the individual and the collectivity as evolving and developing organisms.

### I. Individual and Collective Development

Human society and history are the result of the interaction between the individual and the collectivity. And human development in the mass is the result of the complex mutual interaction and interdependence between the development of the individual and the collectivity. So a psychological and developmental approach to history requires a clear understanding of the psychological structure of the individual and the collectivity.

#### The Individual and the Collectivity: The Psychological Structure

The individual human organism has a physical dimension made of his body; a vital dimension made of sensations, emotions, desires, vital-energy and will; a mental dimension made of the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical beings and their thoughts, perceptions, intuitions, ideas and ideals; and beyond all these, a soul dimension which is a spark of the Divine within. But there is one more important psychological factor which is ignored in most of the psychological classifications; it is the Ego-factor. For, in most of the human mass, except for a few spiritual personalities, the physical, vital and mental beings are organised not around the soul, but around the ego. Until we realise our true soul, it is the ego which centralises all the experiences and activities of our body, vital and mind and gives us the sense of personal identity as someone distinct and separate from others. The Ego is the source of that obstinate self-interest in man which is one of the most dominant psychological factors that has driven human history in the past and it continues to do so in the present. We will come back to this Ego-factor a little latter. Let us now move on with the inner and outer structure of the collectivity.

Similarly, a collectivity or group has a body made of its geography and ecology; a vital dimension made of the collective emotions, desires, life-energy and will of its people, expressing itself in the economic, social and political life of the community; a mental dimension made of the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic temperament and energy of its people expressing itself in the cultural life of the community; a spiritual dimension which

contains the essential purpose and genius of its soul and its mission or contribution to the fulfillment of the human destiny. This spiritual dimension of the individual and the collectivity is also the source of all higher values and the aspiration of humanity for truth, beauty, goodness, harmony, unity and perfection. And as in the individual we have to include here the ego,—the collective ego,—which serves more or less the same function as the individual ego.

But we must note here that the consciousness of the collectivity is not merely the sum of the consciousness of the individuals belonging to the collectivity at a given period of time. The collective consciousness taken as a whole contains not only its present consciousness; it also contains in its subconscious memory, the impressions of all the thoughts, experiences and realisations of its past history, and in its superconscious or spiritual self, in a sort of future memory, the intuition of its future destiny. The other important aspect of this psychological and spiritual heritage of a collectivity is its unique and inherent temperament and genius. Each major group or civilisation or culture, in its course of historical evolution, develops a certain distinct inclination for and competence in a particular field of human activity or knowledge, for example, the religious and spiritual temperament and genius of India, the aesthetic and philosophic genius of the ancient Greek mind, the robust and strong practicality and organising genius of Romans, the finely balanced ethical and intellectual temperament of the ancient Chinese mind, and the austere ethical temperament of the Hebrews. For nothing which happens in the psychological realm is lost or disappears. Every experience, realisation, or achievement or the capacities developed, leaves a subconscious impression, recorded or retained in our subconscious memory. This applies to the individual as well as the collective psychology. This subliminal part of the collective psyche has a subtle and invisible influence on its outer life and history. It tends to repel alien influences from other cultures which are contrary to its inborn temperament or harmful to its natural growth and to assimilate influences helpful to its own natural temperament and genius.

### The Perfect Individual in a Perfect Society

We are now in a better position to understand the ideal of individual and collective human development through history. If the integral development of the body, life, mind and soul suggests itself as the most logical and highest ideal of human development in the individual then the integral development of the body, life, mind and soul of the collectivity suggests itself as the most logical and highest ideal of human development for the collectivity. This is probably the plan and purpose of Nature in human history. The march of history may be viewed as a progressive education of the human race towards a gradual awakening to and realisation of the ideal.

The ideal of integral development for the individual involves:

- i. the full development of all the powers, potentialities and faculties of the physical,

vital and mental being;

ii. the realisation of the spiritual soul or self which means to become conscious of the spiritual soul or self and unite with it;

iii. the organisation of the physical, vital and mental beings around the soul and moulding them into harmonious and integrated instruments and self-expression of the Spirit.

Similarly, the ideal of integral development of the collectivity involves:

i. the full development of the ecological, economic, social and cultural potentialities of the group;

ii. the increasing awareness of and living in the consciousness of the group-soul which is an integral part of the global consciousness of the Spirit;

iii. the organisation of the ecological, economic, social, political and cultural life and energies of the group around the consciousness of the group-soul and making them into a conscious, harmonious and integrated expression of the group-soul.

The ideal for humanity as a whole is to inwardly realise the global consciousness of the Spirit and to make the entire external life a harmonious and integrated expression of the global consciousness of the Soul and Spirit of Humanity. The ideal may be expressed in many different words or formulas, for instance, “integrated individual in an integrated or unified society” or as Sri Aurobindo puts it “perfection of the individual in a perfected society”<sup>1</sup> or a “global civilisation on the foundation of a global Consciousness”. The entire history of human civilisation is perhaps a more or less unconscious or half-conscious groping attempt of the human mind and life toward this ideal, impelled inwardly by the spiritual and psychological forces of our own self and universal Nature, and outwardly by the pressure of external circumstances and environment.

### The Group-soul and the Nation-unit

Each major nation or civilisation has to contribute or has contributed something to the realisation of this ideal or a part of it. And each major nation or civilisation is endowed by Nature with a unique genius or capacity which corresponds to its mission or contribution to the fulfillment of human destiny. But in our approach, a nation or civilisation is in its essence a psychological and spiritual entity and only secondarily a geographic or a political organism. Each major nation-unit or civilisation is an expression of some inner spiritual, mental, ethical, aesthetic and pragmatic qualities, tendencies, potentialities or faculties of the global consciousness of the human species.

An ideal nation-unit is a group of people sharing a common spiritual heritage but with a unique stamp of their own, distinct from other units; expressing harmoniously this

1. *Social and Political Thought*, SABCL, Vol. 15, p. 269.

inner heritage which is also its inner and higher self through a single political entity in its outer material, economic, social and political life, and located in a well-defined geographical space or boundary. Seen from this psychological perspective very few modern nations are ideal nation-units. For in our age nations are formed not according to psychological or spiritual principles but on political consideration. So the soul or inner self of a nation-unit may be scattered or spread over many geographical or political entities. This would mean that the recognition of the nation-units based on their inner spiritual and psychological realities is probably an important part of the integral ideal of human development through history.

## II. Inner Dimensions of History

We have discussed so far the principles of a developmental vision of history. We may now examine the inner dimensions of the various aspects of history.

### The Fourfold History of Man

We may broadly classify history into four categories: spiritual and cultural history; political and military history; economic, industrial and commercial history; and social history. Each of these aspects of human history is the self-expression of a part of the human consciousness. Thus the four aspects of history are the self-expression of the four major powers of human consciousness.

There is a power or part in human consciousness which seeks for knowledge and values. We may call this power or part the Mentor and its expression in life, Culture. There is another power or part of human consciousness which seeks for power, strength and mastery. We may call this power the Marshal and its outer expression in life, Polity. There is a third power of human consciousness which seeks for pragmatic skill and mutuality. We may call this power the Merchant and its outer expression in the economic, industrial and commercial life, Economy. And finally, there is a fourth power with an inclination for work, service and community. We may call this power the Worker and its outer expression, Society.

Thus, in our terminology, Mentor, Marshal, Merchant and Worker are respectively the inner dimensions of the cultural, political, economic and social history of humanity.

But we would like to point out here that the four inner powers and their self-expression in the outer life is a process of complex interaction and should not be viewed in a simplistic, rigid and compartmental perspective. For the four inner powers are the powers of human consciousness and therefore they are present in every human being. All these four inner powers of man act in various forms of combination and development through each individual and collective activity of the human being. It is the predominance of a particular power which determines the unique nature of the power or the activity. For example, there is the play of the Marshal faculties wherever there is a forceful exercise of power and leadership. This can happen not only in politics or in war but also in business,

industry and commerce or even in culture, when a new idea fights against and displaces an old idea with a critical and combative force, or when totally new horizons of knowledge are conquered. But when a particular power dominates the human consciousness we have a unique type of personality, for example the Marshal type, and when this power expresses itself predominantly in a section of the society we have a specific social organ, Polity.

Let us now examine the implications of these inner powers for history and for human development.

### The Mentor and the Cultural History

The spiritual and cultural history of humanity is the result of the seeking and self-expression of the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic mind and the inner soul in man for the higher values like God, truth, knowledge, beauty, goodness, harmony and unity. We can see in this part of human history the progress of the higher self in man and its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual faculties and values.

But when we speak of the spiritual history of humanity we are not referring to the history of organised religions. The history of organised religions belongs to the cultural history of humanity. The dogmas, philosophies, literature and the art-work in temples and churches belong to the cultural history of humanity. But when religion becomes an organised institution and tries to gain secular power through force or conversion it is no longer a spiritual or even a cultural institution but a political organism.

The spiritual history of humanity lies first in the inner spiritual experiences of the founders of the religions of the world; then in the inner experiences of the great mystics in whom these original experiences which gave birth to the religions are more or less relived; next in the intuitions of some great thinkers whose minds are in living contact with their deeper soul, for example, Socrates, who always talked of an inner Daemon as his guide; and finally in the inner experiences and intuitions of later mystics who might have made some new spiritual discoveries.

The Soul of a Nation or civilisation expresses itself through its Mind in the cultural life of the group. So, the cultural history of a nation or civilisation, the history of its religion, philosophy, science, art and literature gives an indication of its unique genius and the nature of the mission or contribution it has to make for the fulfilment of the evolutionary destiny of humanity.

The spiritual and cultural history contains another important aspect of the human march: the March of Ideas. For man is predominantly a mental being; so the thinking faculty of man and his ideas and ideals are the main instruments of his evolution and development. Most of the advance in the outer life of man, especially in the later part of human history were effected by great ideas or ideals. So, in our approach to history, the study of the march of Ideas will be an important part of the research. We will study the inner and outer source of ideas and ideals, and the process of their birth, growth, impact and decline in history.

In a developmental perspective, the importance of these spiritual and cultural dimensions of history are obvious. A nation or civilisation may be great in wealth, technology, political and military power; but if it is spiritually and culturally weak and underdeveloped, which means the outer physical life of the nation is not chastened and guided by some higher mental, aesthetic, ethical or spiritual values and ideals, then such a nation has not yet risen from barbarism, whatever may be its economic, technological, political and military achievements. If these barbarous tendencies are not checked, if they are allowed to persist for long, it leads to a quick and reckless exhaustion of the vital energy of the nation in a mindless pursuit of material and sensuous enjoyment, or in violent internal conflicts or external aggression or war-mongering.

### The Marshal and the Political History

The political and military history of humanity is the expression of that part of the vital force and the will in man seeking for power, conquest, mastery, expansion, law, order, and unity in the outer life. We can see in this part of history the growth of the qualities, faculties and values of the Will and one part or aspect of the vital force in man, for example, leadership, courage, heroism, sense of honour and justice and the capacity for organised force and collective unity. A full development of all the potentialities of this part of the collective consciousness is also an important aspect of the integral ideal of development. A nation or civilisation may be great and noble in its culture with lofty ideals, or efficient, productive and prosperous in its economic life, but if it is weak in this part of its being, it is susceptible to frequent barbarian invasions from nations which are politically and militarily stronger.

Every creative and successful handling of a difficult or adverse challenge posed by nature or the environment, for example, natural calamities, foreign invasion or civil war, helps in the development of the will and vital force of a Nation or civilisation. So what may appear outwardly as a negative or painful event for a nation may turn out to be a blessing in disguise. For example, constant external aggressions from barbarian nations may provide the impetus for a peaceful and cultured nation to gird up its loins and develop its political and military capabilities, which means taking a step forward to a more integral development of the community. Similarly, foreign invasion or occupation may awaken the dormant political consciousness or cultural identity and the urge toward political unity in a hopelessly divided or indolent or slumbering civil people.

### The Merchant and the Economic History

The economic, commercial, industrial and technological history of humanity is the expression of the second part of the vital force and the pragmatic mind in man, with a keen intuition into the changing, relational and practical aspects of life and seeking for efficiency, productivity, skill and prosperity in the outer life and action. We can see in this part of human history the growth of those faculties of human consciousness which

come into play in organisation, adaptation, execution, innovation, craftsmanship and the harnessing of the human, economic and material resources of life for the material realisation of the Idea.

A nation or civilisation may be great in culture, turning out great ideas and lofty values; it may develop a strong and powerful political or military organisation; but without the capacity for organised efficiency in the economic and social life and a keen vital intuition into the ways of harnessing the economic and material resources, it will be lacking in the capacity to quickly convert its ideas into material reality.

### The Worker and the Social History

The social history of humanity or a civilisation, the history of the family, group, clan and the community, is the expression of the physical, instinctive and emotional being in man seeking to fulfill its basic material, biological and emotional needs for survival, security, enjoyment, the need to love and to be loved and the necessity of a harmonious life with others. We can trace in this part of history and in the contents of popular literature like the folklore and the novel which mirror society, the growth of the mass-consciousness. This part of human consciousness is also the other source of economic history. For economy is made up, not only of the entrepreneur or the Merchant but also the consumer and his needs which the Merchant seeks to fulfil. And the consumers constitute the masses. Their needs for survival and enjoyment are some of the major shaping factors of economic history.

A very large portion of the human population, especially the work-force in the lowest levels of the social and organisational hierarchy, lives in this part of the human consciousness. Most of them may not have sufficient intellectual, ethical, vital, volitional or pragmatic capabilities to occupy positions of leadership. So, ancient Indian thought viewed this part of humanity as fit only for obedient work and service to the other sections of the society. But this ancient Indian concept is only a partial truth and does not conform to our ideal of integral development. But there is an important truth behind this Indian concept: this part of human consciousness has the highest potential for hard work, patient execution and selfless service. So we may also call this part of human consciousness, the Worker.

These last two parts of the human consciousness, the Merchant and the Worker are important for realising the aim of integral development. A nation or civilisation may be great or strong in its Merchant or Marshal consciousness and their faculties and capacities; but if it is weak and underdeveloped in its Merchant and Worker consciousness, it will remain as a top-heavy civilisation and whatever its gains or achievements in its culture and polity, these will be confined to a few elite classes and will not percolate to the whole of society and the masses.

Most emotional interactions between people happen within the family, community and the work-place. So the emotional condition or development of a community depends to a large extent on the nature of the values and the organisation of the family and com-



munity life which is the source of society and that of the work-place and the work-life which is the source of the economy.

### The Ego-factor

As we have indicated earlier, that which is common to all these inner dimensions of history is the Ego-factor. In fact, the history of the past and present was and is, the Age of the Ego.

Since the dawn of human civilisation, most of human life, of the individual or the collectivity, has been driven by the ego and its self-interest, either openly and consciously or covertly and subconsciously, with some specious idealistic, moral or spiritual justifications. In fact, human history until now has worked out mainly through a clash of competing individuals and collective egos, each trying to enjoy and aggrandise itself at the expense of other egos.

There are modern philosophies and social systems which openly and frankly proclaim this ego-driven life centred around self-interest as the best and the most efficient path to progress. There are other philosophies and systems which may not openly support the self-interest of the ego but mouth high ideals like individual liberty or pursuit of happiness. But, in actual life what rules is the ego masking itself with lofty ideals. Some other philosophies and systems oppose ego-centric individualism and hold aloft the ideals of collectivism, co-operation, fraternity, equality, nationalism or patriotism. But in actual practice, the collective ego takes over, and demands the total subordination of the individual ego to its own interest, ambitions and expansion. Wars are the extreme material result of this conflict of egos. So we cannot understand the deeper sources of human history, especially its tragedies and failures, without understanding this important psychological factor, the ego, and its influence on human life. The ego is the arch-villain; it is against all moral and spiritual progress. It is also the factor which dilutes and distorts all great ideals and pulls them down from their shining and ethereal skies into the mud of self-interest, desire and greed.

But this does not mean that the human ego is all black and bad and that there is nothing positive in it. The ego has also a positive role to play in the evolution of the individual and the collectivity. Nature uses the human ego to accomplish two evolutionary tasks. First, it prods the human organism from the indolent and prone inertia of its physical being and its bodily needs to its higher vital and mental needs and potentialities. And second, it impels it to progress from a condition in which it is sunk in a subconscious tribal mass and driven by subconscious instincts of the group to a status of self-conscious individuality governed by its individual reason and will.

*(To be concluded)*

M. S. SRINIVASAN

## WHAT THOU WILLEST

WHAT should I always do?  
What Thou willest;  
What the Mother wants me to do,  
That I must do, always.

What should I always speak?  
What Thou willest;  
What the Mother wants me to speak,  
That I must speak, always.

What should I always think?  
What Thou willest;  
What the Mother wants me to think,  
That I must think, always.

What should I always see?  
What Thou willest,  
What the Mother wants me to see,  
That I must see, always.

O Mother, never may I  
do, speak, think or see  
What is not what Thou willest—  
but may I ever be  
What Thou willest, always.

SATADAL

## THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of March 2004)

### 6. The Incarnations

THE concept of the Supreme's incarnation on earth seems unique to Vaishnavism. Shiva is not seen as incarnating, though there is the myth of his donning the form of Sarabamurti to bring Narasimha himself under control. In the legends of the Tamil Nayanars, Shiva is also seen stalking his devotee by putting on the dress of a devotee, known as the 'Sivan-adiyaar', having matted locks, wearing a garland of rudraksha and the entire body smeared over with Holy Ash. This is always for 'testing' the devotee, and the tests call for utter devotion for the Shiva ideal. The devotion generated for these symbols marking the figure of the Sivan-adiyaar is truly unparalleled in religious literature; devotees who wore this triad were considered as holy as Shiva himself.

Sekkizhar recounts in his hagiological work *Peria Puranam* the life-story of sixty-three Nayanars to record this phenomenon. Thus, Enadinathar, a great hero, was challenged to a contest by a jealous rival, Atisooran. During the duel, Atisooran had come holding his shield high to cover his face. At some point when Atisooran was losing, he lowered his shield and revealed his face. Enadinathar saw that his enemy was dressed in the symbols of Shiva. The devotee in him would not kill an enemy whose forehead was aglow with the Holy Ash. He stood inactive, his mind full of Shiva consciousness and became a willing prey to the deceitful enemy. When Shiva appears to the devotee at the conclusion of such tests, he comes invariably on the Nandi Mount, accompanied by Parvati.

It is only Vishnu of the trinity who is seen as incarnating on earth much like any other living being which is born in nature. Krishna himself gives a reason for this concept of Avatar in the oft-repeated slokas of the *Gita* (Ch. IV, verses 7-8):

“Whenever there is decline of Dharma and ascendance of Adharma, then, O scion of the Bharata race! I manifest (incarnate) Myself in a body.

“For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil, and for the establishment of Dharma, I am born from age to age.”<sup>1</sup>

What are these incarnations, then? Suta has created an interest in the minds of his listeners by referring to the Divine's incarnating variously among devas, animals and men (*leelaavataaraanurato deva-tiryang-naraadishu*), and their alert faces now inspire him to begin with the beginnings. How did the creation come about? The Supreme Lord was in his yogic sleep in the oceanic waters when he decided upon creating the universe. When his creative will was stirred thus, a lotus rose from the Lord's navel. In the lotus was seated Brahma, the Demiurge, who would take charge of creation. Many of the temples of Vishnu (Srirangam, Kumbakonam and Koviladi for instance) have a literal portrait of this vision of the Lord in creative mood. The Lord is fashioned as sleeping on the snake Adishesha and a lotus with Brahma seated on it would be portrayed as rising

from the navel of the Lord.

However, there is also the intuitive perception of the Lord as the Master of Creation. People working from the ordinary mental plane cannot perceive it as it is a form which is made up of pure Sattva with no trace of rajas or tamas. Narayana Bhattatiri who wrote a condensed version of the *Bhagavata* as *Naaraayaneeyam* mentions this important point at the very opening decad of his narrative:

“Sage Vyasa has repeatedly stated that Thy form is constituted of Suddha-sattva (pure Sattva) without any admixture of Rajas and Tamas. Because of this absolute purity, Thy form gives an unobstructed revelation of its underlying essence of Consciousness-Bliss, and therefore enlightened men delight to contemplate on this, Thy Divine formful manifestation, which is easy to grasp and which is all sweetness to those who think or hear about it.”<sup>2</sup>

This is, no doubt, the reason why the very thought of the Divine gives the human being comfort and joy at once, and devotees enjoy repeating and reciting the various names of the Lord trying to gather into their heart an experience which by its nature is inexplicable except by the term, “brahmananda”. To perceive it as it is, is not possible for the ordinary devotee though it is possible for the enlightened sages. What they perceive is known as the Purushavatara which the Unknowable Universal Being assumed by his creative will to bring the universe into being. According to Suta, this is the forerunner avatara of all the future incarnations. We do have a description of the cosmic Purusha in the Purushasukta hymn. Sri Aurobindo has also given us a descriptive image of the Supreme in his yoganidra waking up to manifest as his creation:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
 Has called out of the Silence his mute Force  
 Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush  
 Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep  
 The ineffable puissance of his solitude.  
 The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
 Has entered with his silence into space:  
 He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;  
 He has built a million figures of his power;  
 He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;  
 Space is himself and Time is only he.<sup>3</sup>

Suta says that all these innumerable created beings originate from the Supreme, for Brahma creates the Prajapatis, the Devas, men and sub-human beings. Each aeon of Brahma sees a new creation with its own incarnations. Technically speaking, each created being in all the aeons is an avatar of the Supreme, since it is a manifestation of the Supreme. However, though all manifestation is that of the Lord, some manifestations come to be known as incarnations. Suta lists twenty-three such lilavataras in this context. In the Kaumara Yuga, Brahma created Sanaka and others Kumaras, all of whom undertook

tapasya. Holding on to brahmacharya, they did not increase the line of manifested beings. Later on, when Brahma created Manu, creation went apace. The incarnations mentioned by Suta are:

Sanaka, Varaha, Narada who taught Pancharatra, Nara, Narayana, Kapila who taught Sankhya philosophy, Dattatreya who instructed Prahlada in the knowledge of Atman, Yajna who ruled as Indra during the period of Swayambhuva Manu, Rishabha who showed the way of Paramahansa, Prithu who milked the earth of her hidden treasures, Matsya, Kurma, Dhanvantari, Mohini, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashara, Vyasa, Rama, Balarama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki.

Suta then hurries to tell us that in truth the Lord's incarnations are limitless. As "innumerable as waterways streaming out of a perennial lake", these avatars only bring a portion (kala) of the Supreme in their manifested state. Now comes Suta's important announcement regarding the subject of the *Bhagavata*:

"While all these are the parts and particles of the Supreme Being, Krishna is He, the Bhagavan Himself. Krishna is the full revelation of the Lord, while others come from age to age for the relief of the world from the sufferings caused by particular sets of Asuras. Whoever reflects devoutly on this most inscrutable mystery of manifestation of Hari as Incarnations, will attain freedom from the misery of Samsara."

*Krishnastu bhagavaan svayam*: Krishna is He, the Bhagavan Himself. The other incarnations come to give us relief from misery. Krishna came to give us not only relief, but positive Ananda. Though the *Mahabharata* is a rich source to know about the exploits of Krishna avatara as the central intelligence that moves the story, it is the *Vishnu Purana* which gives us information about the childhood, boyhood and youth of Krishna. In the course of the first four Amshas we hear of Krishna now and then (the killing of Shishupala, the Syamantakamani episode) and the entire fifth and penultimate Amsha of the work is devoted to the story of Krishna. Maitreya requests Parashara to speak in detail of this particular manifestation of the Supreme. And Parashara begins at the beginning with the marriage of Vasudeva and Devaki.

The *Vishnu Purana* then moves swiftly through the birth of Krishna in the prison, his growing up in Nanda's cowherd settlement, the killing of Putana and Shakatasura, the uprooting of the Arjuna trees, the humbling of Kaliya, the destruction of demons like Dhenuka, Pralamba, Kesi and Arishtasura, the raising of the Govardhana Hill, the Rasa dance, the killing of Kuvalayapitha, Chanura, Mushtika and Kamsa, the restoration of Sandipini's children to life, the building of Dwaraka, the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini, the ending of Narakasura and the bringing of the Parijata tree to the earth. We even move down the generations to watch the humbling of Banasura.

The *Vishnu Purana* was thus the main basis for the creative exuberance that sprang up in the hymns of the Alvars. It is this Purana which is referred to as the authority by commentators on the hymns of the Alvars. Whereas all the earlier avatars had exhibited very well various powers of the Divine, none had yet been projected as being close to the human heart. Even Rama remains a little distant. We admire him, we wish to emulate him, we bow our head in gratitude for all that he has been and for all that he did to rid the

earth of evil forces. But are we able to move with this avatar with the natural ease we have when we think of Krishna? Consider Perialwar's Tamil hymns that describe Krishna's childhood: O such a tiny babe!

“Devaki, sweet as nectar  
That is found within the cool sea,  
Allowed this babe to reach Yasoda  
Of flower-decorated tresses.  
This babe sucks its toe.  
Look at the lotus feet,  
O women with coral lips!”<sup>4</sup>

A baby sucking its toe! So close to our everyday experience! Hence, every baby we see becomes holy too. The effect of the sounds of Krishna's flute were never described as realistically and as soulfully as Perialwar:

“As the tiny fingers stroked the flute,  
The red face grew intent on the stops  
And the eyelashes held drops of sweat.  
Varieties of birds flew out of their perches  
And lay around Govinda like dried-up plants.  
The cattle spread out their legs,  
Bent their heads and stood  
Quite still, the ears unmoving.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus Krishna, among the incarnations, had already gained the near-total attention of the devotees when the *Bhagavata* came to be written. The *Bhagavata* phrase, *Krishnastu bhagavaan svayam* and the apportioning of the entire Tenth Book for Krishna naturally led to his becoming the Darling of Humanity and this approach has been the basis of the Chaitanya Movement. The followers of Chaitanya feel the presence of the Supreme in the presence of Krishna who is, of course, inseparable from Brindavan according to them. Such is the magic of the Puranic presence in the twenty-first century:

“While discussing the excellence of Vrindavan, the Chaitanya School holds the view that Krishna's presence in Vrindavan is eternal. Being a part of Krishna and as such it is impossible to think of Krishna without Vrindavan. Likewise, it is equally impossible to visualise Vrindavan without Lord Krishna. It is also held that Krishna eternally stays in Vrindavan and does not move even a step out of it.”<sup>6</sup>

It may be safely said that by the time the *Vishnu Purana* was written, the Krishna cult was widespread. Epigraphists assure us that the Garuda column in Besnagar erected by Heliodorus, the Greek Ambassador to King Kasiputra Bhagabhadra has an inscription which refers to Vasudeva as the Devadeva, the Supreme God.<sup>7</sup> All the same, in spite of identifying Krishna Avatar with the Supreme, still the question remains: how do the

avatars come to be from what is pure Sattva and by its very nature formless and boundless? Suta proceeds to explain how the Lord uses his own quiescent power (“his mute Force” in Sri Aurobindo’s language) to become active in creation. The image he uses quiets the nonce our doubts about pure Sattva taking on forms:

“In the Supreme Being, who is the pure and formless Spirit, His own power of Maya fabricates all forms with her evolutes, like Mahatattva and the other categories. Just like passing clouds against the sky and formations of dust against the wind, objectivity (of which one’s own gross body is a part) is attributed to the Pure Subject by the ignorant.”

So we see the physical body on earth but not the Jiva within which is made of the subtle essence of matter and move from one life to another. When one knows this is done by Ignorance (the physical body which has been fabricated around the subtle), one gains Brahma-knowledge. While the image of “passing clouds against the sky and formations of dust against the wind” is surely effective within the limited context, the passage insinuating Advaita does appear strange in a context when Suta is describing the varied Incarnations of the Lord with much exuberance. Fortunately, such sudden turns do not put any impediments on our way to *experience* the *Bhagavata* narrative. Primarily, the work is full of *rasaanubhava*, an experience of the sap of life. Each reader has to meditate on what the Purana has to tell, and allow the context to blend with his own experiences in the outer world and inner spaces of his mind. In that meditative mood, the answers will be revealed to him on their own. Suta himself gives us this assurance presently:

“In Him who is resident in the heart of all beings, who is birthless and actionless, these births and activities as Incarnations are described by the wise as a mystery which only revelation can explain. Without getting in the least attached or involved, He creates, sustains, and withdraws this universe in sheer play as far as He is concerned, but not without a cosmic purpose.”

So what could be the mystery (*Veda-guhya*) of that cosmic purpose? Only Rishis can wander in the regions above the mind and draw closer to the mystery, as Sri Aurobindo has done in the course of his yoga and recorded some of his revelations in his works. His *Essays on the Gita* gives a wider interpretation to the “cosmic purpose” than a mere destruction of evil. It also saves us from the fallacy that we are caught in an eternal series of circles with no possible growth upward:

“For there are two aspects of the divine birth; one is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the Godhead manifesting itself in the human form and nature, the eternal Avatar; the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness, *madbhāvam āgataḥ*; it is the being born anew in a second birth of the soul. It is that new birth which Avatarhood and the upholding of the Dharma are intended to serve.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus the incarnation is as much Krishna as Krishna-Arjuna. Krishna’s presence is needed to transform the potential beings ready for the next step in the ascent to life divine. The incarnation comes to signify “the manifestation of the divine nature in the human nature”, to show the path to mankind by setting up an example to follow. The Avatar does this knowing well that the human beings do not know it is the Supreme that

has put on the body of man, *avajaananti maam mudah manusim tanumasritam*. But fortunately it is not so always. Some forerunners of the multitude do gain knowledge of the Divine and manage to come to the sunlit path and gain the divine state of being.

Is this wishful thinking? Should we take all our yesterdays as a big Lie? Sri Aurobindo rightly says that the theory of incarnation is one of the most difficult concepts for the modern mind to subsume. As far as the Purana is concerned, it has no time to tarry for any duels on the plains of Ignorance regarding the ways of the Supreme. The Avatar is a never-failing guardian in distress, as in the case of Varaha, Narasimha. The Avatar is also a patient role-model for mankind as in the incarnations of Rama, Krishna:

“The Avatar does not come as a thaumaturgic magician, but as the divine leader of humanity and the exemplar of a divine humanity. Even human sorrow and physical suffering he must assume and use so as to show, first, how that suffering may be a means of redemption,—as did Christ,—secondly, to show how, having been assumed by the divine soul in the human nature, it can also be overcome in the same nature,—as did Buddha.”<sup>9</sup>

So we get back to the *Bhagavata* statement that the mystery of the avatars still remains. All that we know or need to know is that the Lord dons these incarnations in the wide, wide stage of his playful act (*visvam amogha-leelaa*). These avatars will not lend themselves to any rationalistic interpretations for they work at a para-human level and Suta says it is vain to hope for an understanding of “the mystery of the creator’s manifestations into countless names and forms”, just as a spectator cannot recognise the actor behind his make-up. But Suta hastens to add that the loving devotee recognises the Great Actor, as by performing service to the Lord, he inhales the scent of the Lord’s lotus-feet (*bhajeta tatpaadasarojagandham*). He then addresses the sages who have assembled for the yaga as blessed ones (*dhanyaah*) because all of them show unswerving devotion to the Lord and they are sure to see the Lord behind the incarnations, and receive illimitable joy when listening to the Lord’s story.

He then relates the origin of the narrative. Veda Vyasa, the Compiler, must have had several tellings and versions on hand which he codified into the Purana. In his hands the work attained the position of a scripture (*Brahma-sammitam*). Veda Vyasa was surely lucky for he had a very capable vessel to receive his work with care and use it for the good of the world (*nisreyasaaya lokasya*). This was Sage Suka who was “the supreme among the illumined ones” (*aatmavataam varam*).

It is the charm of the *Bhagavata* that often it tests our patience by repetition of events, ensures abrupt jumps across themes and calls for a total suspension of disbelief. Speaking of how he had come to hear the work, Suta informs the sages that Sage Suka taught the Purana to King Parikshit. The King had time to listen patiently to a work which was “the essence of all the Vedas and the sacred traditions” (*sarvavedetihaasaanaam saaram*) because he was on a fast unto death on the banks of the Ganga. He was surrounded by holy persons at that time. This was sat-sanga. To hear a great work recited in such an assembly was to imbibe it truly well. Suta was in the assembly and heard the entire work quietly. The scene as Parikshit lay dying on the banks of the Ganges has been etched in the racial memory of Indians down millennia:



“O holy men! Sitting by that sage of great prowess as he narrated the glorious accounts of the Lord, I too happened to hear it, by the grace of that great one. What I learnt from him, I shall now narrate to you, so far as my understanding would permit.”

Such is Suta Pauranika’s humility who is actually going to recite a massive epic poem from memory. Even as he speaks out, memories of that great king full of devotional attention to what is being said by sage Suka, swirl around him. Probably this poignant scene of King Parikshit accepting his fate with gracious resignation has touched the entire *Bhagavata* also and hence we have the added note of yearning in the several prayers for guardianship imbedded in the narrative. The unalloyed devotion that must have been generated in that week on the banks of streaming holiness, untouched by the anxieties of day-to-day living also has made the long narrative unparalleled as an ocean of bhakti.

This is the reason the Purana has survived through the innumerable vicissitudes that India has passed through during the last one thousand years and more. One has only to turn back in time to find hordes of foreigners descending on swift-moving horses from time to time with swords in hand cutting down people mercilessly, drawing them forcibly out of the ancestral faith which had sustained their souls so far, and destroying their temples and other holy places. But while her body was vandalised and repeatedly slain, the soul of India was kept alive in obscure villages where in a thatched cottage the local Pundit read out the *Bhagavata* in the fading light of a flickering lamp. Once again the people saw King Parikshit, the righteous king lying down on the bank of a stream while learned and holy people surrounded him when Sage Suka recited the Purana. The several incarnations brought these poor villagers a hope that sometime in the future we shall overcome these enemies of civilised living, religion and spirituality. Thanks to the Purana, the common man retained the faith that the Lord never abandons his devotees. It was no use getting worried over what was happening in these times of the Sword. The Purana was there and the Purana was the Lord Himself and he would come again as promised.

At the same time the Purana would cleanse the minds of Indians of deceit and evil that they harbour towards their own brethren since the Lord will not tolerate Jarasandhas, Shishupalas and Hiranyakshas to reside in our hearts. He would cut down our ten senses (the jnanedriyas and the karmendriyas) as the heads of Ravana, if we do not keep them under control. How can we plead ignorance of what constitutes moral evil and of moral good when we have this work in hand? Suta assures his listeners of this:

“For the guidance of man, rendered spiritually blind by the evil age of Kali, which set in with Krishna’s attainment of His abode and the subsequent disappearance of virtue and enlightenment from the world—this spiritual sun of a Purana has now arisen in the firmament of thought.”

The greatness of the *Bhagavata* lies in its ability to insinuate moral purity and probity in private and public lives even when apparently engaged in retelling tales of far away and long ago. Ancient but contemporaneous, the Purana needs to be read carefully to master the Art of Good Living.

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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6. Amar Nath Chatterjee, *Sri Chaitanya and the Chaitanya Movement* (2001), p. 107.
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## IN THE DEPTHS OF THE HEART

In the depths of the heart  
 Someone dwells  
 Who answers your every need  
 Each moment.  
 Open yourself to him,  
 The One,  
 Awaken your spirit,  
 Rise above;  
 Think not of petty happenings,  
 Silence the mind;  
 Follow the path alone,  
 With the One.  
 The physical weakens the mind,  
 The psychic lifts the heart;  
 Many are the stumbling stones,  
 And rugged the paths—  
 But the One real road leads  
 To those sublimer realms.

SUNITI

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

(Continued from the issue of March 2004)

THERE is a false subjectivism as well as a true subjectivism. The distinction between the two must be clearly grasped. The subjective stage is that turning point in man's growth when he turns his gaze from the outside and looks deep into himself to discover his truth and the right law for action. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the self. Everything depends on how that step is taken.

That the step has been taken by the modern world is undoubted. In all matters we are beginning to make a subjective approach. The new aim in educating the child has already been referred to. In the treatment of criminals, too, the latest idea is not to look upon an offender as a law-breaker to be imprisoned or tortured or hanged, but as an unfortunate person, a diseased human being whose infirmity is to be studied, whose case is to be diagnosed and treated from within. Society likewise is beginning to be looked upon as a living organism with a soul of its own. "So far," says Sri Aurobindo, "[it is] good; the greater knowledge, the truer depth, the wiser humanity of this new view of things are obvious. But so also are the limitations of our knowledge and experience..." As long as a boat is lying anchored in the haven, she runs but little risk; her dangers commence when the anchor is raised and she sails out in the open. Man released from the secure haven of conventions must hand over the management of his boat to a safe helmsman. At the present stage, he must first realise that his true personality is not his ego, but the divine Person ever present in him. The second truth that he must grasp is that he is not only himself but is one with all of his kind. The Divine expresses himself through the individual (*Vyasti*) as well as through the group (*Samasti*). The individual is not an isolated being, he cannot flourish by himself. Nor can the group crush the individual without maiming itself.

When a subjectively awakened group gets an egoistic self-vision, it commits a number of serious subjective errors. The most serious is to reduce the individual to a nullity, to a mere cell of the collective body. In every department of life the initiative passes into the hands of the collectivity and that collectivity is given a big name—the state. The result may be a gain in efficiency—but at the cost of the freedom of the individual. This is how the totalitarian state developed—principally in Germany, Italy and Russia. It may be that there is all over the world a tendency to increase the efficiency of the State and by way of payment for it give up a part of the freedom of the individual—Sri Aurobindo has discussed this development of the State at a great length in some of the later chapters of *The Human Cycle*.

A corollary of this view of the State is that it "has a divine right to the obedience, the unquestioning service and the whole activity of the individual, the service of State and community is the only absolute rule of morality." With regard to other States, its effective law is that of war and strife.

This leads to a ludicrous extreme. Since the survival of the best is the highest good of man, the interests of Germany, the Nordic race, were necessarily looked upon as the most important objective. We have called this view ludicrous, because it is totally inconsistent with the spirit of progress such as we believe to be characteristic of this age. If the Greeks looked down upon all non-Greeks as barbarians, if the Jews believed all gentiles to be inferior beings, if Moslems hated all non-Moslems as Kafirs (unbelievers), if the Hindus characterised all non-Hindus as Mlechchhas (unclean), we can find some excuse for them as it all happened so long ago. But there is no more excuse for the Britisher's erstwhile slogan of "White man's burden" than there is for the preposterous claim to superiority of the Nordic race. With regard to the German standpoint, Sri Aurobindo says, "It is a new and a modern gospel born of the application of a metaphysical logic to the conclusions of materialistic Science, of a philosophic subjectivism to the objective pragmatic positivism of recent thought."

Individualism aims at securing to the individual being the liberty to develop himself and fulfil his life in every way. There is only one thing that limits this freedom, and that is the obligation to allow other individuals the same freedom. In the case of nations, too, the individualistic age came to the same conclusion—each nation is to enjoy full freedom as long as that freedom does not affect the freedom of others. Just as the law of a state enforces the above principle of freedom with obligation, of liberty with law, as between man and man, so international law, it was hoped, would effectively restrain the egoism of nations. But so far this fond hope has not been realised. A League of Nations was founded after the first World War, but it could do very little to ensure fair play between one nation and another. Japan occupied Manchukuo, Italy gobbled up Abyssinia, Spain was the scene of a prolonged Civil War, fomented and fostered by powerful parties. These and other incidents made it clear to the world at large that another Great War was bound to come. And come it did. Now, after the second war a new international organization has come into being. This august body, the U.N.O., is functioning better than its predecessor. But how far it can go in enforcing a decree against a major power remains yet to be seen. A truly efficient international organization is likely to take a long time to develop. An international court administering international law is no doubt a fascinating ideal to the mental man, but "it is possible for subjectivism to go beyond and to discover the true Self as something greater even than mind."

The growth of science has brought in many new ideas in politics and sociology, often of a contradictory nature. But rampant individualism and extreme collectivism seek to justify themselves by the laws of physical science. The biological view that the root nature of all living is a struggle to take the best advantage of the environment not only for self-preservation but also for self-aggrandisement has given support to the political view that the individual must make every effort to prolong his life, to be strong and efficient and to dominate others. On the other hand, the dictum of science that the true law of life is that the component unit should live for the whole and subordinate and sacrifice itself to the growth of the whole has been taken to justify the collectivists' idea of a State or society. The very clever German thinkers combined the two ideas and justified

both the crushing down of the individual in the German State and its aggressive self-assertion against other States. But it is absurd to decide questions of the highest importance to our corporate life by scientific analogies. To quote Darwin's law of "Survival of the Fittest" in support of the political slogan "Might is Right" is absurd on the face of it. The subjective and the objective outlooks on life rise from the same source and are destined to meet each other on the spiritual plane. Our human aim is to transcend our ego-bound life and rise up to that higher level of consciousness. The Master says, "The ideal of human existence personal and social would be its progressive transformation into a conscious outflowing of the joy, power, love, light, beauty of the transcendent and universal Spirit."

In order to know the ideal law of Man's social development we have to take into consideration not only his evolutionary past but also his mental and spiritual destiny. We have to place him correctly in Nature's cycles. We know that he began as inconscient Matter and then proceeded to evolve, step by step, his vitality and his mentality.

In the Material stage there was very little variation; types varied, but the individuals of the type were uniform. Even when Life first appeared, the same law prevailed; but as Life grew, and Mind emerged and became self-conscious, the individual arrived at a greater power of variation. With the development of the intellect this power reached a very high level. Man is distinguished from the lesser animal by the liberation of his mental consciousness which enables him, more and more, to understand himself and the law of his being and, ultimately, to surpass his mentality and open his consciousness into higher and higher planes of existence, arriving, in time, at the Self, the Spirit which manifests itself in all Nature. It is the individual who has to make this ascent; it is for this end that man has become an individual soul. But he cannot do it by his unaided mentality. He needs the help of the secret Divine in him and he needs the help of the Divine immanent in Nature and in his fellow-men. This is where his corporate life comes in. The Master says, "All life around him is a help towards the divine purpose in him; every human being is his fellow-worker and assists him whether by association and union or by strife and opposition." Our aim is divine perfection; towards that end, individual man and, through his growth the race, has to travel. The object of society, therefore, should be to provide the suitable conditions of life and growth for this purpose. Man has to go ahead from stage to stage; there is nothing sacrosanct about any particular stage; "the cycles are many and each cycle has its own figure of the Divine in man..." All humanity is one in its nature, in spite of apparent differences in intellectual development; the whole race has one destiny towards which it is moving inevitably.

Within the general framework each individual has to follow the common aim according to his own *swabhava*, and to grow from within. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "Each individual man is that Self and sums up all human potentiality in his own being. That potentiality he has to find, develop, work out from within." He has to develop it himself from within, no State, no Church, no Order or Caste can dictate to him. The life and growth of the individual are for the sake of the world, but he can help the world only when he is really and truly his own self. When he asks for liberty it is not so much his

egoistic demand as the claim of his Self. Now, just as the individual Self can demand freedom of thought and action, so can the Self of his family or clan or community or nation. Only, as in the case of the individual, it must not be an egoistic demand. There is another thing, too. The individual cannot in any way be limited by the group he belongs to, for he is a manifestation of the universal Self and his goal in life is the realisation of that fact. What, then, is the position of the group or community? It is, says the Master, a mid-term between the individual and the universal, and helps them to fulfil each other. Mankind or humanity is too big an aggregate for the individual to grasp, so he tends to grasp it through the smaller intermediate groups. Neither the individual man nor the nation is intended by nature to stand by itself. No doubt, the individual perfects his individuality by free development from within, but he has to aid and be aided by a similar free development in others. The nation is an aggregate life that expresses the Self. It has the right to be itself, fulfil itself, but it can assert that right only in harmony with the same right of other nations. Nay, more, every nation has to respect and to aid and to be aided by the free development of all nations. The ideal law may be long in coming; but it is the business of the man of a subjective age to hold it before him and find out gradually how he can establish it in life.

C. C. DUTT

*(To be continued)*

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## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of March 2004)

WE may place our main emphasis on Sri Aurobindo, the yogic visionary, how the yogin was inspired to translate the vision into the structure of a great dramatic poem like *Ahana* and of a cosmic epic like *Savitri*. But it should not be forgotten that Sri Aurobindo was also a supreme technician in verse. When he took up a particular subject, he literally grew with it. What strikes us while reading *Ilion* is its Greek spirit. It is almost as though these nine books were based on the *Iliad*, and written by a Western author steeped in the classical Greek tradition. What strikes us especially is its metre—the classical quantitative hexa-meter with its oceanic swell of long lines that is the very surge of spirit that we encounter in Homer and in the great plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

K. D. Sethna in his book, *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, writes: “Aeschylus, one of the poets on whom ‘the Greek critic’ Aristotle’s mysterious term *katharsis* had a bearing, figures on several occasions in Sri Aurobindo’s writings. His *drasanti pathein* is not all that interests Sri Aurobindo. There are also comments on his style, temper and all-round rank in the poetic pantheon.”<sup>1</sup>

K. D. Sethna inquires: “Can *Ilion* be called Homeric in any valid connotation of the term?” meaning “the mind of Homer and the poetic art of Homer” and he explains: “What Sri Aurobindo, having picked out Homer’s theme for new treatment, must do is to preserve in the midst of his own individual psychology Homer’s fundamental bent of mind and Homer’s general world-view. One cannot, with a mental bent and a world-view poles apart from Homer’s, write naturally about the Heroic age of the *Iliad*.... Sri Aurobindo’s mind is complex and many-dimensional, at once more sensuous, more philosophical and more spiritual than Homer’s. But there is in it an insistent objectivity which... kins him to the ancient bard’s constant look outward on clear-cut shape and gesture, attitude and motion.... He takes care, nevertheless, not to exceed the Greek sense of the deific. Within that sense he gives rein to his profound Indian awareness and understanding of the Spiritual. The Greek *theos* is not merely a super-splendid form acting from without on human beings; he is also a super-conscious force acting from within—and he is more than a personal entity.”<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s hexameter in *Ilion* can be called Homeric, “...it is the majestic energy of the words and the speed and sinuousness and sonority of their rhythms that put them on a par with the spirit of the *Iliad*.... At last the power and beauty of the old quantitative hexameter has come into its own in the English language.”<sup>3</sup>

K. D. Sethna illustrates that by comparing Sri Aurobindo’s English rendering of the first line of a passage in Homer’s *Iliad* “about the descent of Apollo to avenge the Greeks’ insult to his high-priest Chryses

Bē de kat’ Oulumpoio karēnōn chōōmenos kēr

Down from the peaks of Olympus he came wrath vexing his heart-strings

with a less felicitous translation of that same line by Lattimore:

And strode down along the pinnacles of Olympos, angered in his heart..."<sup>4</sup>

"Sri Aurobindo has sacrificed strict literalness at the end but the fundamental Homeric spirit and sound are there—and perhaps all the more by that extra poetic touch to match the Greek splendour of word. In Lattimore we feel a smothering of the needed qualities...."<sup>5</sup>

An English reviewer, Banning Richardson, writing in the *Aryan Path* of March 1944, pp. 124-8 on Sri Aurobindo's *On Quantitative Metre*, included in *Collected Poems and Plays*, remarks about this "admirable essay", that it is "an essay which deserves wide currency and consideration by all those interested in the future of English poetry and of poetry in general." It is further remarked: "In it he seems to have struck at the root of the problem which modern poets have been attempting to solve by recourse to free verse forms. Both argument and example are convincing, and one wonders whether poets like Eliot, Auden and Spencer have reached similar conclusions. At least, they should be made aware of this considerable contribution to English prosody by an Indian poet."<sup>6</sup>

"*Ilion* is hardly as well known as it deserves to be," writes K. D. Sethna. "There has been little open appreciation in the West so far, in spite of enthusiastic pronouncements in private by men like Christopher Martin, once assistant editor of *Encounter*, and by the eminent art-critic and thinker, Sir Herbert Read. Martin wrote: 'I certainly am impressed by this masterly achievement in hexameters' (Letter, December 9, 1959). Sir Herbert stated: 'Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion* is a remarkable achievement by any standard and I am full of amazement that someone not of English origin should have such a wonderful command not only of our English language as such, but of its skilful elaboration into poetic diction of such high quality' (Letter, June 5, 1958)."<sup>7</sup>

The story of *Ilion* is about the fall of great heroes in a senseless slaughter, and more particularly about the destruction of the "topless towers of Ilium", a city of marble shining with the beauty of the Gods. Homer's *Iliad* breaks off with the funeral of Hector, slain in battle by Achilles. *Ilion* continues the story with a view to concluding it, but Sri Aurobindo has left it supposedly unfinished.

The outlines of the tale he was to tell are found in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*; the *Iliad*'s events are over after the deaths of Achilles, Paris, Penthesilea, as well as the destruction of the noble city of *Ilion*. It is a final vision of tragedy, the tragedy of Troy which is also symbolic of a recurrent phenomenon of human life. The *Iliad*'s tremendous concern with the tragic fatality that Troy has to face, is made evident by the scene in which Sri Aurobindo sets up the subject matter. The city, along with her inhabitants, gradually treads a path towards a total extinction of life and all that is human. The dawn with which the poem begins is the dawn of the last fatal day in the life of *Ilion*. Thus the poem begins:



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.<sup>8</sup>

The historical background of Ilion is narrated thus by V. Murugesu: “The Trojan war is the legendary conflict between the early Greeks and the people of Troy, an ancient city in the north-western Anatolia (today Turkey), north of the Scamander river on the plain of Troas (Troad). The stronghold of Troy stood at a strategic point commanding an intersection of routes that linked Europe and Asia. Its importance as a gateway city is brought out in some lines in the poem:

I shall go warring on till Asia enslaved to my footsteps  
 Feels the tread of the God in my sandal pressed on her bosom.  
 Rest shall I then when the borders of Greece are fringed with the Ganges.

(Book 1, p. 406)

“In Greek this city was referred to as Troe, or Troia, and later Ilios or Ilion which name Sri Aurobindo took for his epic. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millenia B.C., Troy was a prosperous cultural centre, the capital of the royal power that ruled the agricultural communities of the Troas.

“This war stirred the imagination of the ancient Greeks more than any other event in their history, and was the theme in the celebrated two epics of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.”<sup>9</sup>

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

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1. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece* by K. D. Sethna, p. 17.
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## NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

*(Continued from the issue of January 2004)*

### **Bondage and Expression**

O BONDAGE,  
O flower-tears,  
Did you garland with your dream-songs  
The full-moon's ray-basket of untrembling purity  
For the consecrated maiden?

That wreath of songs,  
Its perfume of adoration under canopy and canopy  
Sheds in secret.

Does the charmed aerial path  
Of service, worship-laden  
Lead into the unbearable  
Dark, the pain-shrouded solitary Night  
To hymn her?

Whom not finding,  
For her sake,  
Why these tears?

Why the procession of days with lowered head?  
Do you remember, dear,  
Memory's flute-bereft dry hours?

When close in evening's end one day,  
Moonless dense Night's sail-raised boat  
Would have floated past  
Into the celebrant-breeze of a friendless life—  
Who called out:  
O drop your burden of Bondage!

Whom you seek today  
Will she lay her seat  
In your lampless temple?

The nearer you come  
 The more your ancient  
 Desire's knots in petals  
 Of an incalculable moment's mantra-lotus  
 Will blossom, inflorescing.

Welcoming  
 The just-fledged flight of that radiant New  
 A memory will arise—

In Solitude's folds in a love-parted bud's  
 Sleepless deep recess  
 You were sunk:

Who, today, that wing,  
 Stirring with perfumed breeze,  
 Breaking the cruel shackles of Inertia,  
 Has freed with Her kiss of Light?

To that gathering of flowers  
 Now comes along a star-path through the white night  
 A moon-boat!

In each arrival's wave  
 Night's age-veils lift  
 In garden and garden.

A shiver passes through flowers, leaves, branches—  
 The flower unaware  
 Who ties it oh, who sings to it, calling.

*(To be continued)*

DEBASHISH BANERJI

## **GLIMPSES OF CHINA— CIVILISATION VS DEVELOPMENT**

*(Continued from the issue of March 2004)*

### **19 March—Kunming/Hong Kong**

YET another flight and yet again southwards to the island of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has the densest concentration and greatest variety of shops and shopping malls of any place on earth. Under British Colonial rule until 1997 the people did not have any say in their future so they concentrated their efforts mainly in making money. 97 per cent of the inhabitants are Chinese, of which a majority is Cantonese (as it is in Southern China). The main island has some small bits of tropical forest on the hills which I liked but everything else was so crowded. The old colonial Britishers stayed up on the green hills as it was a bit cooler there. The ferry crossing from the main island to Kowloon, a very crowded shopping area, is considered a highlight as one sees all the flashy soaring skyscrapers in the financial part of the main island.

### **20 March—Hong Kong/Huang Shan Mountains**

After blazing across the sky in Southern China we reached Tunxi where yet another cheerful guide received me to drive me to Huang Shan Mountains. As always, the roads were very good. China has over the years built an admirable infrastructure and even the domestic airports were busy with locals. En route we stopped at a 500-year-old traditional village called Honcun. It was lovely and gave me an insight into traditional Chinese life which is normally unknown to the tourist. The village was beautiful with moat, bridge, pond and lovely white-daubed traditional houses that were like pearls in the green hilly landscape. It was fun walking through the narrow alleyways waiting eagerly for what lies ahead at the turn. There were some houses that were selling antique wares.

The highlight was when my friendly guide, John, took me to a house. Lo presto! we found the owner sitting on a chair with his legs and feet in a half wooden casket (a bucket-shaped wooden piece). What on earth was this old man doing hiding his feet in the most unlikely of places? Then I discovered that there was a grill across this bucket, below which were fiery coals warming his feet placed on this grill. Remember, it is March and China is very cold then. But on seeing us he literally jumped out of his chair to invite us and regale us with his stories. There were a number of vertical wooden boards plonked all over the walls with calligraphic writings on them, all of which were about 300 years old. The proud owner explained how calligraphy was an art in China and how in one particular piece the artist, by twisting one letter, had been very bold, unconventional (pioneer like) and artistic. For good measure he assured us that he would never sell this unique piece irrespective of the gains. That was the calligraphic aspect but it soon transpired that this calligraphy was comprised of philosophical sayings. How interesting! My guide

came into his own by translating each of the calligraphic sayings. Here is a good sample with approximate translations:

Be obedient to your parents and grandparents.

Be humble, do not show off.

Be kind and compassionate to others.

Cherish food, clothing and do not pay much attention to money.

Study, it will bring prosperity.

Inspiration and passion make you look differently at the world.

You can profit or gain reputation but do not forsake being a good person.

What really impressed me was that these sayings were in the living room and that too for hundreds of years. Certainly a bit of this philosophy would be seeping into the veins of the inhabitants of the house. Coupled with the Tao and Confucian philosophy, the effect of the ancient Chinese civilisation on present day China still exists. Once Mother met a Protestant priest on the boat. He was going to China to convert or civilise the Chinese. He was so full of his religion. He asked Mother why she did not attend service on the ship and all kinds of other questions. As he was very insistent in his questioning, the Mother stated some facts, one of which was, “Listen, even before your religion was born—not even two thousand years ago—the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians.” Gasping for breath and with his confidence well and truly shaken, the missionary beat a hasty retreat and left Mother in peace.

### **21 March—Huang Shan/Tunxi**

Off we went to the Huang Shan mountains (Yellow mountains) first by cable car and then on foot. Regarded as sacred, it is the ambition of every Chinese to conquer them. Clouds swirled over them on that foggy day but it did not dim these mystic mountains. The region has a most unique topography so one can hop from one mountain to another; it is a conglomeration of mountains and peaks: peaks of different and unimaginable shapes with endemic conifer trees of various species perched on or around them, even clinging to the steep rock faces. Huang Shan is one of eastern China’s greatest sights and an old saying states that once you have climbed Huang Shan you will never want to climb another mountain. I am sure it is not because of the toil of the climb but because of its staggering and unique scenery. It is also a pilgrimage centre, trodden both by Emperors and Communist Leaders. My guide presented me with a lovely pictorial book on the Huang Shan mountains. I wonder in which other country guides present gifts to the travellers. Returned to Tunxi as it is well placed—next to the airport.

**22 March—Tunxi/Beijing**

Flew back to Beijing where Dan eagerly (and enthusiastically) was waiting for me.

During my 3-week stay I tried to understand and identify with the Chinese people, their art and even their history. I wanted to spread my wings and soar so as to get a panoramic view of China which would lead to a more wholesome and meaningful experience for me. I was in a very positive frame of mind throughout the trip, remembering that fate had given me a unique opportunity.

One of the critical stages of China's history was when Mao came to power. Though he is a revered figure, people do not respect him as much now because they are now realising that he did many wrong things. The premier Zhou Enlai is a greatly respected figure not only for his compassion but also for his calm courage, for his head could have easily been on Mao's chopping block as it was with many others. From 1958 to 1960 Mao initiated the *Great Leap Forward* where he collectivised the farmers into communes and sent many to the steel and other industries. This failed very badly and about 30 million people died in the subsequent famine. Industry also plummeted and Mao lost some of his control.

I think that 20th-century Chinese history is being rewritten and may not show Mao in very good light.

**23 March—Beijing/London**

Next day flew back to London.

(*Concluded*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual System and the Mother's Contribution to It**, by K. D. Sethna. The Integral Life Foundation. Pages 82. Price: Rs.120.00.

THE 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in the Ashram Library describes Sri Aurobindo's work thus: "Opinions vary on the merit of his voluminous, extremely complex and sometimes chaotic literary output of philosophical pondering, poetry, plays, and other works." For the numerous followers of Sri Aurobindo this description of their Master does not mean much for they are moved less by intellectual concerns than by a direct spiritual appeal which the great Yogi exercised and still continues to exercise over them. Yet before dismissing the criticism of being "chaotic", it is worthwhile to ponder over the possible reasons for the uncharitable description.

The concepts in any spiritual philosophy are bound to be experience-concepts, for it is upon his spiritual experience that the philosopher bases his notion of Reality. The aspects through which Sri Aurobindo's Reality expresses itself are not mutually exclusive but shade off into each other. To the analytic mind this may well create an impression of chaos. Moreover Sri Aurobindo's spiritual system evolved over many years and was modified and expanded by him more than once to take into account fresh experiences. Past viewpoints were sometimes abandoned outright in the light of a more comprehensive revelation. To an unsympathetic observer this may indicate chaos.

There is thus a need for chronological research into the development of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual system in the light of which his works can be better understood. K. D. Sethna's book under review is a beginning in this direction. Sethna brings to his inquiry the intellectual rectitude of an impeccable scholar as well as the plastic mind of a sadhak centred in his psychic. The concept of the Supramental gnosis, which forms the cornerstone of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual system, has been variously interpreted in other systems. Sri Aurobindo points out the following, "Two opposite errors have to be avoided, two misconceptions that disfigure opposite sides of the truth of gnosis. One error of intellect-bounded thinkers takes *vijñāna* as synonymous with the other Indian term *buddhi* and the *buddhi* as synonymous with the reason, the discerning intellect, the logical intelligence. The systems that accept this significance, pass at once from a plane of pure intellect to a plane of pure spirit. No intermediate power is recognised, no diviner action of knowledge than the pure reason, is admitted; the limited human means for facing truth is taken for the highest possible dynamics of consciousness, its topmost force and original movement. An opposite error, a misconception of the mystics identifies *vijñāna* with the consciousness of the Infinite free from all ideation or else ideation packed into one essence of thought, lost to other dynamic action in the single and invariable idea of the One. This is the *caitanya* of the Upanishad and is one movement or rather one thread of the many-aspected movement of the gnosis. The gnosis, the Vijnana, is not only this concentrated consciousness of the infinite Essence; it is also and at the same time an infinite knowledge of the myriad play of the Infinite. It contains all ideation (not mental

but supramental), but it is not limited by ideation, for it far exceeds all ideative movement. Nor is the gnostic ideation in its character an intellectual thinking; it is not what we call the reason, not a concentrated intelligence. For the reason is mental in its methods, mental in its acquisitions, mental in its basis, but the ideative method of the gnosis is self-luminous, supramental, its yield of thought-light spontaneous, not proceeding by acquisition, its thought-basis a rendering of conscious identities, not a translation of the impressions born of indirect contacts.”

But complete knowledge of this plane of consciousness did not come to Sri Aurobindo at once. In the first article, Sethna traces out the origins of the distinction between the Supermind and what came to be known as the Overmind. The Overmind was initially supposed to be an inferior sub-plane of the Gnosis itself. When Sri Aurobindo descended to the physical plane during the course of sadhana it was found that the Overmind-power was insufficient to transform the physical. Thus it was necessary to bring out in sharp focus the contrast between the Overmind and Supermind. With the aid of numerous quotations and excerpts from Sri Aurobindo, Sethna takes the reader on a journey wherein the reader sees for himself that it is upon lived spiritual experience that Sri Aurobindo’s system bases itself.

In an early letter Sri Aurobindo has written that his characteristic mode of action was through the Illumined Mind whereas the Mother acted through the Illumined Psychic. In the beginning of the collective yogic adventure the stress was laid on opening the yogic centre at the crown of the head. As the sadhana descended to the lower planes and many more were admitted to Ashram life, it was found that the head centre was too difficult an opening for most sadhaks. It was then that increasing stress was laid on the Psychic opening. As the Mother took the centre stage of the Ashram life and Sri Aurobindo retired to pursue his quest for the supramental descent, the sadhaks were encouraged to follow the Mother’s Sunlit Path of happy reliance and glad submission to the Divine within.

Sri Aurobindo passed away in December 1950 and on his passing, the Mind of Light was realised by the Mother. With the passage of time the Mother added new details to Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual system. She pointed out that one of the two ways towards the supermind would be a progressive diminishing of the animal in man through the creation of intermediate races between man and Superman. The other way would be the creation of a body through wholly supramental means. This is the theme of the second article.

The third article has to do with a subtle point connected with the nomenclature of planes of consciousness. The gradation of Consciousness is continuous yet each peculiar poise of relation between *purusha* and *prakriti* defines a new plane. The matter is complicated by the fact that each plane contains as it were, the shades of all the other planes but subordinated to its particular character. Sethna explores the distinction between the Physical-Mind and the Mental-Physical and its various ramifications. He quotes Sri Aurobindo: “The physical mind is technically placed below the vital and yet it is a prolongation of the mind proper and one that can act in its own sphere by direct touch with the higher mental intelligence.” Sri Aurobindo continues, “And there is too an obscure



mind of the body, of the very cells ...” Sethna rightly concludes that “the ‘body mind’ to which the Mother alludes [in some of her talks] is to be specially regarded as additional to and not overlapping with the physical mind.”

The book ends with Sethna’s answers to a series of questions posed by a well-meaning sadhak in the assumed role of *advocatus diaboli*. It is possible to differ with Sethna on minor points here and there, but by and large, throughout the book, Sethna’s persuasive logic succeeds in carrying the reader along with him. This slim volume will, it is hoped, set the trend for similar research by other scholars. It is a must for those Aurobindonians who wish to add mental clarity to their devotion for the Gurus.

HEMANT KAPOOR