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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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BECAUSE THOU ART

Because Thou art All-beauty and All-bliss,
My soul blind and enamoured yearns for Thee;
It bears Thy mystic touch in all that is
And thrills with the burden of that ecstasy.

Behind all eyes I meet Thy secret gaze
And in each voice I hear Thy magic tune:
Thy sweetness haunts my heart through Nature's ways;
Nowhere it beats now from Thy snare immune.

It loves Thy body in all living things;
Thy joy is there in every leaf and stone:
The moments bring Thee on their fiery wings;
Sight's endless artistry is Thou alone.

Time voyages with Thee upon its prow—
And all the future's passionate hope is Thou.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 154)

THE SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Towards a True Scientific Psychology

1

WHEN the ancient thinkers of India set themselves to study the soul of man in themselves and others, they, unlike any other nation or school of early thought, proceeded at once to a process which resembles exactly enough the process adopted by modern science in its study of physical phenomena. For their object was to study, arrange and utilise the forms, forces and working movements of consciousness, just as the modern physical Sciences study, arrange and utilise the forms, forces and working movements of objective Matter. The material with which they had to deal was more subtle, flexible and versatile than the most impalpable forces of which the physical Sciences have become aware; its motions were more elusive, its processes harder to fix; but once grasped and ascertained, the movements of consciousness were found by Vedic psychologists to be in their process and activity as regular, manageable and utilisable as the movements of physical forces. The powers of the soul can be as perfectly handled and as safely, methodically and puissantly directed to practical life-purposes of joy, power and light as the modern power of electricity can be used for human comfort, industrial and locomotive power and physical illumination; but the results to which they give room and effect are more wonderful and momentous than the results of motorpower and electric luminosity. For there is no difference of essential law in the physical and the psychical, but only a difference and undoubtedly a great difference of energy, instrumentation and exact process. The Supreme Existence which expresses itself equally in soul and matter, moves upon one fundamental principle on all its sevenfold levels, and even by one set of medial processes, but It varies their minute arrangement and organic functioning to suit the material which it is using and the objective which it has set before Itself in Its divine movement.

Exact observation and untrammelled, yet scrupulous experiment are the method of every true Science. Not mere observation by itself—for without experiment, without analysis and new-combination observation leads to a limited and erroneous knowledge; often it generates an empirical classification which does not in the least deserve the name of science. The old European system of psychology was just such a pseudo-scientific system. Its observations were superficial, its terms and classification arbitrary, its aim and spirit abstract, empty and scholastic. In modern times a different system and method are being founded; but the vices of the old system persist. The observations made have been incoherent, partial or morbid and abnormal; the generalisations are far too wide for their meagre substratum of observed data; the abstract & scholastic use of psychological terms and the old metaphysical ideas of psychological processes still bandage the eyes of the infant knowledge, mar its truth

and hamper its progress. These old errors are strangely entwined with a new fallacy which threatens to vitiate the whole enquiry,—the fallacy of the materialistic prepossession.

2

Psychology ought to be rather than is the science of consciousness and of the motions of consciousness as distinguished from the science of form and of the motions of form. We are dealing, therefore, in psychology with a more subtle, flexible and versatile material than in the physical sciences; its motions are more elusive, its processes harder to fix; but when once grasped and ascertained, its laws and activities are found to be quite as regular, manageable and utilisable as the processes of physical Nature. They give room to even more wonderful and momentous results. There is no difference of essential law in the physical & psychical, but a great difference of instrumentation and exact process. For the Supreme Existence moves on one fundamental principle or one set of principles in all its manifestations, but varies its organic arrangement and functioning of the principles to suit the material which It is using & the objective which It intends to reach. In both fields observation & experiment are the only sound foundation of knowledge. But observation without experiment leads only to a limited and erroneous science, often to an empirical system of surface rules which do not deserve the name of science at all. It is this defect which has so long kept European psychology in the status of a pseudo-science; and, even now when real observation has begun & experimentation of an elementary kind is being attempted, the vices of the perishing sciolism mar and hamper this infant knowledge. It has not rid itself of all its old scholastic swaddling clothes; therefore it still walks on all fours and cannot yet learn to stand up erect and walk.

3

Psychology is the science of consciousness and its status and operations in Nature and, if that can be glimpsed or experienced, its status and operations beyond what we know as Nature.

It is not enough to observe and know the movements of our surface nature and the superficial nature of other living creatures just as it [is] not enough for Science to observe and know as electricity only the movements of lightning in the clouds or for the astronomer to observe and know only those movements and properties of the stars that are visible to the unaided eye. Here as there a whole world of occult phenomena have to be laid bare and brought under control before the psychologist can hope to be master of his province.

Our observable consciousness, that which we call ourselves, is only the little visible part of our being. It is a small field below which are depths and farther depths

and widths and ever wider widths which support and supply it but to which it has no visible access. All that is our self, our being,—what we see at the top is only our ego and its visible nature.

Even the movements of this little surface nature cannot be understood nor its true law discovered until we know all that is below or behind and supplies it—and know too all that is around it and above.

For below this conscient nature is the vast Inconscient out of which we come. The Inconscient is greater, deeper, more original, more potent to shape and govern what we are and do than our little derivative conscient nature. Inconscient to us, to our surface view, but not inconscient in itself or to itself it is a sovereign guide, worker, determinant, creator. Not to know it is not to know our nether origins and the origin of the most part of what we are and do.

And the Inconscient is not all. For behind our little frontal ego and nature is a whole subliminal kingdom of inner consciousness with many planes and provinces. There are in that kingdom many powers, movements, personalities which are part of ourselves and help to form our little surface personality and its powers and movements. This inner self, these inner persons we do not know, but they know us and observe and dictate our speech, our thoughts, feelings, doings even more directly than the Inconscient below us.

Around us too is a circumconscient Universal of which we are a portion. This Circumconscience is pouring its forces, suggestions, stimulus, compulsions into us at every moment of our existence.

Around us is a universal Mind of which our mind is a formation and our thoughts, feelings, will, impulses are continually little more than a personally modified reception and transcription of its thought-waves, its force-currents, its foam of emotion and sensation, its billows of impulse.

Around us is a permanent universal life of which our petty flow of life-formation that begins and ceases is only a small dynamic wave.

4

Psychology is the science of Consciousness; it is the knowledge of its nature, its processes and the aim or results of its processes, its law or laws of being, its habitat and instruments, its what, why, where, whence and whither.

But what is consciousness and can there be a science of consciousness? We are not in presence of a body of concrete, visible or sensible facts, verifiable by all, which form an indisputable starting-point, are subject to experiment and proof, where theories can be tested at every point and discarded if they do not accord with the facts, with all the facts. The data here are subjective, fluid, elusive. They do not subject themselves to exact instruments, can lend themselves to varying theories, do not afford proofs easily verifiable by all. Their presentation is difficult and can hardly be more than

scanty and often infantile in their insufficiency. Theories are numerous, but few or none have any solidity or permanence.

To understand the psychology of others we depend upon our observation of them and our own interpretation of the movements we observe and our comparison with our own psychological actions and reactions. But our observation is limited by the fact that what we observe is not the psychological events we wish to study but signs of speech, action, facial or bodily expression which seem to us to indicate them; but it is still more limited by the possibility of error in our observation and still more in our interpretation. Errors of wrong attribution, exaggeration, diminution, false [?evidence], false valuation, crop up at every turn; indeed, the whole observation may be nothing but error, the interpretation purely personal and mistaken. Comparison with ourselves may be a fruitful fountain of mistakes; there is no doubt a general similarity in the mass of human reactions, but the differences and variations are also marked and striking; there is here no source of certitude.

A direct experiential and experimental psychology seems to be demanded if psychology is to be a science and not merely a mass of elementary and superficial generalisations with all the rest guesswork or uncertain conclusion or inference. We must see, feel, know directly what we observe; our interpretations must be capable of being sure and indubitable; we must be able to work surely on a ground of sure knowledge.

*

Modern psychologists have aimed at certitude in their knowledge, have found it or thought they found it by mixing up psychology and physiology; our physiological processes are supposed to be not only the instrumentation or an instrumentation of our consciousness, but the base or constituents of our psychological processes. But by this method we can only arrive at an extended physiological, not at a true psychological knowledge. We learn that there is a physical instrumentation by which physical things and their contacts work upon our consciousness, reach it through the nerves and the brain and awake certain reactions in it which may however vary with the brain and the consciousness contacted; we learn that the consciousness uses certain physiological processes as well as physical means to act upon outward things and conditions; we learn too that physical conditions have an action upon our state of consciousness and its functionings. But all this was to be expected, since we are a consciousness embodied and not disincarnate, acting through a body and with a body as a habitation and instrument and not a pure consciousness acting in its own right[.]

Yogic Psychology

1

The problem of consciousness can only be solved if we go back to a radical state of our existence in which things get back to their reality. For there they are no longer a mass of phenomena which have to be cleared up, classified, organised by the perceptions, conceptions and relative logic of the human intellect. These perceptions, these concepts, this logic belong to an imperfect instrument and the arrangements they make can only be provisional and, at that, onesided and only half-true or a good deal less than half-true—and even that truth is of an inferior kind, a constructed representation and not truth itself in its own nature. In fact the intellect sees only the phenomenon, it cannot go back behind it; when it tries, it only arrives at other and more occult phenomena. The truth of things can only be perceived when one gets to what may be called summarily the spiritual vision of things and even there completely only when there is not only vision but direct experience in the very substance of one's own being and all being.

2

Consciousness is not an unaccountable freak or a chance growth or a temporary accident in a material and inconscient universe.

It may so appear on the surface and physical science, since by its very terms it is limited to the examination of appearances and must start from the surface phenomenon, may choose or may have no alternative but to treat it on that basis. But surface appearances are not the reality of things, they may be a part of the truth but they are not the whole reality. One must look beyond the external appearances of things before one can know things in themselves: especially first appearances are apt to be deceptive. It is not by regarding a flash of lightning as a chance ebullition of fiery temper in a cloud that one can know the truth of electricity. We must go far and dig deep before we can get at the truth about the Force that manifested the lightning. Consciousness may similarly appear as a phenomenon, an outbreak of sentience in the obscurity of an originally nescient being; but we must go far beyond that specious appearance if we would know the true nature and origin and discover the entire possibilities of this apparently strange and anomalous force. For anomalous it is, since it occurs in a fundamentally inconscient universe of Matter and strange and curious it is in its reactions, aberrations, workings, destiny.

Physical science—and psychology in its present methods is only an extension of physical science—conducts its search into things from down upwards; it regards Matter as the foundation and the bottom of things and having searched into that foundation, got as it thinks to the very bottom, it believes, or once believed, it has by

that very fact understood their depths, their centre, their height and top. But this is a naive error. The truth of things is in their depths or at their centre and even at their top. The truth of consciousness also is to be found at its top and in its depths or at its centre; but when we enter into the depths of consciousness or when we try to reach its centre, we go off into trance and likewise before we get to its top, we go off into trance.

Our searches into Matter also are vitiated by the fact that in Matter consciousness is in a trance and gives no apparent response to our probings. In living Matter, not yet mental, still subconscious, it does give sometimes a reply, but not one that we can understand, and, as for mind in the animal, it is only consciousness half awakened out of the original trance of inconscient Matter: even in the human being it starts from an original nescience, its expressions, its data, all that we can ordinarily observe of it, are the movements of Ignorance fumbling for knowledge. We cannot understand from these alone what consciousness really is nor discover its source or its supreme possibilities or its limits, if indeed it has any limits and is not like being itself infinite and illimitable. Only if we can get away from this imperfection and ignorance to some top of its possibilities or to its latent depths or some hidden centre, can we discover its true nature and through it the very self and reality of our being.

How do we know that there is a top to consciousness or an inner centre, since these are not apparent on the face of things? By its supernormal, not its normal manifestations and phenomena, for the top of things is always supernormal, it is only the bottom and what is near to the bottom that are normal, at any rate to our ordinary consciousness in the material universe. Especially we can know by the supernormal becoming normal to us—by Yoga.

3

I mean by Yogic psychology an examination of the nature and movements of consciousness as they are revealed to us by the processes and results of Yoga.

This definition at once takes us out of the field of ordinary psychology and extends the range of our observation to an immense mass of facts and experiments which exceed the common surface and limited range very much as the vastly extended range of observation of Science exceeds that of the common man looking at natural external phenomena only with the help [of] his unaided mind and senses. The field of Yoga is practically unlimited and its processes and instrumentation have a plasticity and adaptability and power of expansion to which it is difficult to see or set any limit.

It is true that modern psychology has probed the internal law of living matter and consciousness and arrived at results which are remarkable but limited and fundamentally inconclusive. We know from it that the movements of consciousness are affected and on a certain side determined by the functioning of the physical organs. But still the nature, origin and laws of consciousness remain unknown; all that has

been proved is that the body provides for it an engine or instrumentation for its manifestation in living physical bodies and that certain lesions, alterations or deteriorations of the engine may lead to considerable or serious results in the functioning of the embodied consciousness. This was to be expected and can at once be conceded; but there is no proof that consciousness is a function of matter or that it was originated by the chemical or biological processes of the body or that it perishes with the dissolution of life in the body. The cessation of its functioning in the body at death proves nothing, for that was to be expected whatever the origin of consciousness or its fundamental nature. Its disappearance may be a departure, a disappearance from the body, but not a disappearance from existence.

It is true also that modern inquiry probing into psychological (as opposed to physiological) phenomena has discovered certain truths that are equally discovered by Yogic process, the role of the subconscious, the subliminal, double or multiple personality; but its observations in these fields are of an extremely groping and initial character and one does not see easily how it can arrive at the same largeness of results here as in physiology, physics, chemistry or other departments of physical Science.

It is only by Yoga process that one can arrive at an instrumentation which will drive large wide roads into the psychological Unknown and not only obscure and narrow tunnels. The field of psychology needs a direct inner psychological instrumentation by which we can arrive at sure data and sure results in ourselves verified [by] equally sure data [and] results in our observation of others and of the hidden psychological world and its play of unseen forces. The physical is the outwardly seen and sensed and needs physical instruments for its exploration; the psychological is the physically unseen and unsensed, to be discovered only by an organisation of the inward senses and other now undeveloped and occult means. It is through consciousness, by an instrumentation of consciousness only that the nature and laws and movements of consciousness can be discovered—and this is the method of Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 314-23)

ON ANATOLE FRANCE

Great Prose Writers

THE prose field is a field, it is not a mountain. It has eminences, but its high tops are not so high, the drops not so low as in poetical literature.

Then again there are great writers in prose and great prose writers and the two are by no means the same thing. Dickens and Balzac are great novelists, but their style or their frequent absence of style had better not be described; Scott attempts a style, but it is neither blameless nor has distinguishing merit. Other novelists have an adequate style and a good one but their prose is not quoted as a model and they are remembered not for that but as creators. You speak of Meredith, and if Meredith had always written with as pure a mastery as he did in *Richard Feverel* he might have figured as a pre-eminent master of language, but the creator and the thinker played many tricks on the stylist in the bulk of his work. I was writing of prose styles and what was in my mind was those achievements in which language reached its acme of perfection in one manner or other so that whatever the writer touched became a thing of beauty—no matter what its substance—or a perfect form and memorable. Bankim seemed to me to have achieved that in his own way as Plato in his or Cicero or Tacitus in theirs or in French literature, Voltaire, Flaubert or Anatole France. I could name others, especially in French which is the greatest store-house of fine prose among the world's languages—there is no other to match it. Matthew Arnold once wrote a line something like this:

France great in all great arts, in none supreme,

to which someone very aptly replied, “And what then of the art of prose-writing? Is it not a great art and who can approach France there? All prose of other languages seems beside its perfection, lucidity, measure almost clumsy.”

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 548)

* * *

Anatole France's Irony

I so much enjoyed Anatole France's joke about God in the mouth of the arch-scoffer Brotteaux in his book *Les dieux ont soif* that I must ask you to read it.

Ou Dieu veut empêcher le mal et ne le peut, ou il le peut et ne le veut, ou il ne le peut ni ne le veut, ou il le veut et le peut. S'il le veut et ne le peut,

il est impuissant; s'il le peut et ne le veut, il est pervers; s'il ne le peut ni ne le veut, il est impuissant et pervers; s'il le peut et le veut, que ne le fait-il, mon Père?

I wonder what God might answer to it, supposing he should ever feel inclined to?

[Either God would prevent evil, but could not, or he could but would not, or he neither could nor would, or he both could and would. If he would but could not, he is impotent; if he could but would not, he is perverse; if he neither could nor would, he is impotent and perverse; if he both could and would, why on earth doesn't he do it Father?

(This translation was made by Sri Aurobindo a few days later at Dilip Kumar Roy's request. It was Dilip who had sent the quote to Sri Aurobindo and to whom Sri Aurobindo replied. —Ed. Note based on Sri Aurobindo to Dilip, Volume 1, published by Hari Krishna Mandir Trust, Pune, 2003.)]

Anatole France is always amusing whether he is ironising about God and Christianity or about that rational animal, man or Humanity (with a big H), and the follies of his reason and his conduct. But I presume you never heard of God's explanation of his non-interference to Anatole France when they met in some Heaven of Irony, I suppose—it can't have been in the heaven of Karl Marx, in spite of France's conversion before his death. God is reported to have strolled up to him and said, "I say, Anatole, you know that was a good joke of yours; but there was a good cause too for my non-interference... Reason came along and told me, 'Look here, why do you pretend to exist? you know you don't exist and never existed or, if you do, you have made such a mess of your creation that we can't tolerate you any longer. Once we have got you out of the way, all will be right upon earth, tip-top, A-1: my daughter Science and I have arranged that between us. Man will raise his noble brow, the head of creation, dignified, free, equal, fraternal, democratic, depending upon nothing but himself, with nothing greater than himself anywhere in existence. There will be no God, no gods, no churches, no priestcraft, no religion, no kings, no oppression, no poverty, no war or discord anywhere. Industry will fill the earth with abundance, Commerce will spread her golden reconciling wings everywhere. Universal education will stamp out ignorance and leave no room for folly or unreason in any human brain; man will become cultured, disciplined, rational, scientific, well-informed, arriving always at the right conclusion upon full and sufficient data. The voice of the scientist and the expert will be loud in the land and guide mankind to the earthly paradise. A perfected society; health universalised by a developed medical science and sound hygiene; everything rationalised; science evolved, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient; the riddle of existence solved; the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world; evolution, of

which man, magnificent man, is the last term, completed in the noble white race, a humanitarian kindness and uplifting for our backward brown, yellow and black brothers; peace, peace, peace, reason, order, unity everywhere.' There was a lot more like that, Anatole, and I was so much impressed by the beauty of the picture and its convenience, for I would have nothing to do or to supervise, that I at once retired from business,—for, you know that I was always of a retiring disposition and inclined to keep myself behind the veil or in the background at the best of times. But what is this I hear?—it does not seem to me from reports that Reason even with the help of Science has kept her promise. And if not, why not? Is it because she would not or because she could not? or is it because she both would not and could not, or because she would and could, but somehow did not? And I say, Anatole, these children of theirs, the State, Industrialism, Capitalism, Communism and the rest have a queer look—they seem very much like Titanic monsters. Armed too with all the power of Intellect and all the weapons and organisation of Science. And it does look as if mankind were no freer under them than under the Kings and the Churches. What has happened—or is it possible that Reason is *not* supreme and infallible, even that she has made a greater mess of it than I could have done myself?" Here the report of the conversation ends; I give it for what it is worth, for I am not acquainted with this God and have to take him on trust from Anatole France.

1 August 1932

(*Ibid.*, pp. 554-56)

* * *

One of the most fundamental requisites for the search of the Truth is a critical reason, almost a cynical mind which tears off the mask and refuses to accept current ideas, thoughts and opinions. It is a kind of solvent. Man must have the courage to see the Truth as it is without any deception about it. Shaw has got that critical mind to a great extent and we find the same in Anatole France.

The second thing that a man must have in order to reach the Truth is the aspiration for a Truth higher than what has been attained. He must watch all ideals, principles and truths and see which are possible and how far each ideal can be realised; and, most important of all, he must know the conditions required for the fulfilment of such an ideal.

(A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 424)

* * *

Bernard Shaw and Anatole France

To compare him [*Bernard Shaw*] with [*Anatole*] France is futile—they were minds too different and moving in too different domains for comparison to be possible.

3 February 1932

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 537)

SRI AUROBINDO

The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.

* * *

I always preferred the folly of passion to the wisdom of indifference.

* * *

To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream, not only plan but also believe.

* * *

The first virtue of all really great men is that they are sincere. They eradicate hypocrisy from their hearts.

* * *

Nine tenths of education is encouragement.

* * *

Irony is the gaiety of reflection and the joy of wisdom.

Anatole France

‘WORDS OFTEN REPEATED...’

January 12, 1914

A TEACHING can be profitable only if it is perfectly sincere, that is, if it is lived while it is being given, and words often repeated, thoughts expressed frequently can no longer be sincere....

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 56)

ON THOUGHT—III

It has always seemed to me that apart from a very few exceptions, the mental role of women is not to speculate on the metaphysical causes of the phenomena which are perceptible to us, but to draw practical conclusions from these phenomena.

Madame Martial was telling you very rightly last Friday that it would be wrong for women to want to think in the same way as men, that they would be in danger of losing their own qualities—profound intuition and practical deduction—without acquiring those of their masculine counterparts—logical reasoning and the capacity of analysis and synthesis.

That is why today I shall not attempt to demonstrate to you by logical reasoning and transcendental speculation that thoughts exist as true, autonomous, living and active entities.

Besides, if we do not want to indulge in idle talk, if, very sincerely, we want to explain the smallest phenomenon, we must always go back to the most universal general laws. The whole universe is necessary to explain a grain of sand. And this is not the programme we have chosen for the *Union de Pensée Féminine*. Those who, as a result of the teaching they have received and the cerebral gymnastics they have undertaken, are fond of taking up vast metaphysical problems, will find an excellent opportunity to do so at the *École de la Pensée* on the first Friday of each month.¹

At the *Union de Pensée Féminine*, we shall be more modest, if you agree.

Women, by their very nature, are more capable of taking the spiritual or, in the deepest sense of the word, moral standpoint.

We are essentially realistic and formative in this spiritual domain; we want to know how to live well, and for this we must learn how to think well.

To realise the primary importance of thought, we must know it as it is, that is, as a living being; and so that you may be convinced of the autonomous existence of thought, I shall ask you only to ascertain this for yourselves, which is an easy thing to do.

1. *Alternative version intended for another group:*

I do not know if you are familiar with the notion of thought as a living and autonomous entity. I shall not venture here to prove its exactitude to you, and this for two reasons.

The first is that in order to explain the smallest phenomenon (for such is our usual way of proving its reality to ourselves), it is necessary to bring in the most universal general laws. Many times we have been led to observe that the whole universe is necessary to explain a grain of sand. And this enquiry would lead us really too far tonight.

On the other hand, to do this, we would have to devote ourselves to lengthy metaphysical speculations, and there is nothing I dread more than this form of mental activity.

Faithful in this matter to the teaching of the Buddha, I am convinced that we can make a far better use of our time and minds than in hazardous excursions into the intellectual realm which, in the last analysis, always eludes our enquiry and inevitably brings us face to face with the unthinkable.

The Buddha always categorically refused to answer any metaphysical question on the origin or the end of the universe, saying that only one thing matters: to advance on the Way, that is, to purify oneself inwardly, to destroy in oneself all egoistic desire.

A little observation will enable us to realise that very often, for example, we receive thoughts which come to us from outside, although we have not been brought into contact with them either by speech or reading.

Who has not also observed this phenomenon: a thought which is “in the air”, as we say, and which several inventors, several scientists, several literary men receive simultaneously without having been in physical communication on this matter?

One could go on giving examples indefinitely. I leave each one to reflect and find the examples which seem most conclusive to her.

Before proceeding further with our subject I shall read you a page on thought which may help you to understand it.

It is a page from an as yet unpublished philosophical volume.

“Any phenomenon implies a corresponding substance; any vibration necessitates a medium of its own; and if vibrations of light require the medium which we know as ether, will not a medium be needed for the more subtle, more mysterious and also more rapid vibrations of thought?

“I am not speaking of a thought which has already assumed the form and substance provided by the materiality of the brain. Psychologists know very well that before it attains to its modes of conscious activity there, a thought must first of all have passed through remoter states, through the unknown regions of what we call the subconscious.

“It has come from the inner depths to our surface self like a meteor reaching us from inaccessible spaces.

“What was the origin of this meteor, the source of this thought? We do not know, but they exist, the one beyond our sun, the other probably beyond light.

“There is a relationship of ascendance between light and thought. To go from one to the other in the scale of imponderables, it is necessary to mount a step: conceiving (*concevoir*) is a higher way of seeing (*voir*).

“If we do not see thought, it is because its substance is more ethereal than that of light; just as, if we do not hear light, it is because its essence is more subtle than that of sound.

“Among the elements of its own order, thought moves just as our bodies do among physical objects. Just as our hands know how to shape these objects, in the same way thought also knows how to mould these elements and cast them into a myriad appropriate forms.

“Thus our intellectual gestures are no less fruitful than our physical gestures. And that is why wisdom has always taught that we must watch over our thoughts as we would over generating acts.”

So we see that thought, which is a dynamism in the highest sense of the word, acts in its own realm as a formative power in order to build a body for itself. It acts

like a magnet on iron filings. It attracts all the elements which are akin to its own character, aim and tendencies, and it vivifies these elements—which are the constituent cells of its own body, that I shall call fluidic to avoid going into too many explanations—it animates them, moulds them, gives them the form which is best suited to its own nature.

We shall find a striking analogy between the work of thought and the work of the inventor, the builder of any kind.

Let us take as an example a steam engine. The engineer draws up a plan in its smallest details, calculates and arranges everything, then he selects the appropriate materials for the materialisation of his conception, watches over the construction, etc.

And when the engine works, becoming by its movement a real living being, it will be the most complete possible manifestation of the thought which has built it, it will give the full measure of the power of this thought. (The awakened unconsciousness of locomotives, cars, ships.) The formative thought, a living entity, animates the body which has been built for it by the hands of men. In the mental domain also, there are conscious builders.

There are people who are specially gifted or who have developed certain inner senses in themselves, who can come into direct contact with this domain, mainly through vision and touch.

When they are thus able to watch over the working of the phenomenon, they can, like chemists in their laboratories, manipulate substances, select them, mould them by their will-power and clothe their thoughts in forms that can manifest them fully.

But this is the ultimate stage of one of the many paths of individual progress. Long before achieving this full consciousness, it is possible to make powerful formations. Any person whose thought has any strength and persistence is constantly making formations without being aware of it.

If you keep in mind that these formations are living entities always acting in the direction imparted to them by the thoughts which have given them birth, you will easily perceive the considerable consequences of these mental acts.

Just as a good, kind, just and lofty thought can be eminently beneficial, so also a malevolent, base, wicked and selfish thought can be baneful.

On this matter, I shall quote to you a passage from the Dhammapada which will give you an idea of the enormous importance attributed to thought by the wisdom of the past.

“Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, the harm caused by a misdirected thought is even greater still.

“Neither father nor mother nor any other kinsman can do so much good as a well-directed thought.”

If you reflect upon the incalculable number of thoughts which are emitted each

day, you will see rising before your imagination a complex, mobile, quivering and terrible scene in which all these formations intercross and collide, battle, succumb and triumph in a vibratory movement which is so rapid that we can hardly picture it to ourselves.

Now you realise what the mental atmosphere of a city like Paris can be, where millions of individuals are thinking—and what thoughts! You can picture this teeming, mobile mass, this inextricable tangle. Well, in spite of all the contradictory tendencies, wills and opinions, a kind of unification or identity gets established among all these vibrations, for all of them—with a few minor exceptions—all express craving, craving in all its forms, all its aspects, on all planes.

All the thoughts of worldly-minded people whose only aim is enjoyment and physical diversion, express craving.

All the thoughts of intellectual creators or artists thirsting for esteem, fame and honour, express craving.

All the thoughts of the ruling class and the officials hankering after more power and influence, express craving.

All the thoughts of the thousands of employees and workmen, of all the oppressed, the unfortunate, the downtrodden struggling for some improvement of their cheerless existence, express craving.

All, rich or poor, powerful or weak, privileged or deprived, intellectual or obtuse, learned or ignorant, all want gold, always more gold to satisfy all their cravings.

If from place to place there occasionally flashes out a spark of pure and disinterested thought, of will to do well, of sincere seeking for truth, it is very soon swallowed up by this material flood that rolls like a sea of slime....

And yet we must kindle the stars that one by one will come to illumine this night.

But for the moment we are living within it, soaking it up, for in the mental as in the physical domain we are in a state of perpetual interchange with the environment.

This is to point out to you how we are contaminated each day, at each minute.

Can any one of us say that she has never felt craving and that she will never feel it again? Besides, how could we not feel craving when the atmosphere we breathe is saturated with it? How could we not feel this host of desires rising in ourselves when all the vibrations we receive are made of desires?...

And yet if we want our thought to be beneficial and effective we must free ourselves of this bondage.

With this fact in mind, let us first of all draw a practical conclusion: let us be lenient towards all, for temptation is strong and human ignorance is great indeed.

But just as we must be compassionate and kind to others, we must be exacting and strict with ourselves, since we want to become lights in the darkness, torches in the night.

We must therefore learn to resist this daily pollution victoriously.

The very fact of knowing that there is a danger of contagion is already a great step towards liberation. But it is far from sufficient.

There are two possible victories to be won, one collective, the other individual. The first is, so to say, positive and active, the second negative and passive.

To win the positive victory it is necessary to declare an open war of idea against idea, for the thoughts that are disinterested, lofty and noble to give battle to those that are selfish, base and vulgar. This is a real hand-to-hand fight, a struggle of each minute which demands considerable mental power and clarity. For to fight against thoughts it is first of all necessary to receive them, to admit them into oneself, deliberately allow oneself to be contaminated, absorb the sickness into oneself the better to destroy the deadly germ by healing oneself. It is a real war in which one imperils one's mental balance at every minute—and a war demands warriors. I shall not recommend this practice to anyone. It belongs by right to the initiates who have prepared themselves for it by long and rigorous discipline, and we shall leave it to them.

For our part, we shall be content to asepticise ourselves so as to be safe from all infection. We shall aspire therefore for the individual victory, and if we win it we shall find out that we have done more for the collectivity in this way than we suspected at first.

To win this victory we must build up in ourselves a mentality whose quality is the opposite of that of the surrounding medium. We must, little by little, day by day, fill our minds with the loftiest, purest, most disinterested thoughts we can conceive of, and through our deliberate care they must become sufficiently living that they awaken in us each time a temptation to think wrongly comes to us from outside and rise in their dazzling splendour to face the shadow which constantly lurks in wait ready to assail us.

Let us light within ourselves the fire of the ancient vestals, the fire symbolising divine intelligence, which it is our duty to manifest.

This work cannot be achieved in a day or a month or even a year. We must will, and will with perseverance. But if you could know the benefits one reaps from this, if you could feel that peace, that perfect serenity which gradually replaces in us the agitation, the anxiety and fear which spring from desire, you would unhesitatingly set to work.

Moreover, the building up of a synthesis of pure and powerful thoughts does not lead solely to our own happiness. The clearer and higher the flame, the more light it sheds around it.

The star we allow to shine through us will foster the birth of similar stars by its example; fortunately, not only darkness and ignorance, but also knowledge and light can be contagious.

In addition, the care we take to remain conscious of our highest thoughts will compel us to control our thoughts constantly, and this control is gradually obtained by the methods I outlined to you last month—analysis, reflection, meditation, etc.

Those who have achieved the control of their mental being can emanate at will a certain portion of their intellectual power, send it wherever they think proper, while remaining perfectly conscious of it.

These emanations, which are true messengers, will take your place wherever, physically, it is for any reason impossible for you to go yourself.

The advantages of this power will be easily apparent to you.

A thought which is skilfully directed and sustained can, by affinity, awaken to consciousness a glimmer of wisdom in many minds as yet wrapt in darkness, and thus set them on their way towards progressive evolution; it can serve as an intermediary for one who is sick by drawing towards him the vital forces needed to cure him; it can watch over a dear friend and protect him from many dangers, either by warning him through mental communication and through his intuition or by acting directly on the cause of peril.

Unfortunately, the inverse is also true, and bad thoughts as well are not wanting in power of action.

We cannot imagine all the harm we do by receiving and emanating bad thoughts, thoughts of hate, vengeance, jealousy, envy, malevolent thoughts, harsh judgments, sectarian valuations....

We all know how injurious it is to listen to and repeat slanderous gossip, but it is not enough to abstain from the words, we must also abstain from the thoughts.²

Besides, a little reflection will suffice for this, for we shall very soon understand how rash our judgments and estimations always are.

With regard to acts, to actions committed, we shall be able to tell ourselves again and again that we do not know them exactly as they are, that in any case, the motives behind these acts, the many causes which have determined them, almost completely elude us.

With regard to defects, let us not forget that those which annoy us most in others are usually those which thrive most in ourselves and that, in any case, if we did not have any seeds of these defects within us, we would not be able to perceive them anywhere. Besides, what exactly is a defect? Most often it is the reverse side of a quality, an excess of virtue which has found no outlet, something which is not in its place.

2. Passage added when presented to another group:

For nothing is more pernicious to ourselves and to others than this uncharitable state of mind. How many times have we not felt a kind of insurmountable barrier rising up between ourselves and someone we know. And yet towards this person, our words and acts have always been perfectly courteous and occasionally even very friendly.

But where this person is concerned, within ourselves, we have given rein to this spirit of analysis and criticism which lightly dismisses good qualities and fastens only on shortcomings, no doubt without any spitefulness, but with a shade of irony or malice, a feeling of our own superiority—wretched as we are! And so, little by little, drop by drop, between this person and ourselves, a veritable river is formed which separates us more and more from each other, despite whatever physical efforts we may make to come closer together.

As for what concerns us personally, we must be more prudent still and follow one strict rule very scrupulously: never judge anything without first having put ourselves in the place of the other, whoever he may be, with the greatest possible impersonality; try to feel what he has felt, see what he has seen, and if we succeed in being perfectly sincere, very often we shall see our estimation becoming less strict and more just.

Besides, as a general rule, in what light shall we look at what we want to judge? What shall our criterion be? Indeed, do we fancy that we possess the supreme wisdom and the perfect justice that we are able to say with certainty, “This is good, this is bad”? Let us never forget that our notions of good and evil are wholly relative and so ignorant that, in what concerns others, we often find fault with an act which is the expression of a wisdom far greater than our own.

True science does not judge; it investigates phenomena as precisely as it can in their manifold causes and numerous effects. It says, “This will determine that”—see therefore whether *that* conforms to what you wish before doing *this*. At all events, even if in what personally concerns us we can take as a criterion our greater or lesser likeness to our highest ideal in all its intensity and progressive splendour, we have no right to demand from others that they should realise our own ideal, unless we know that our ideal is superior to theirs, in which case we would have to be quite certain that our ideal conforms in every respect to the supreme ideal, the absolute ideal, to the universal plan in its innermost essence....

But before attaining to such transcendent heights, we can always keep in mind that the malevolent or uncharitable thoughts emanating from men are the chief causes of division among them; they make their union almost impossible even when they wish to realise it.

What we constantly endeavour to achieve in our physical actions is at the same time constantly hampered or even destroyed by our mental actions.

So let us watch over our thoughts, let us strive to create for ourselves an atmosphere of beautiful and noble thoughts and we shall have done much to hasten the advent of terrestrial harmony.

19 February 1912

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 87-96)

ON ANATOLE FRANCE

An Impersonal God

What does “to seek after the Impersonal” mean?

Oh! It’s very much in fashion in the West, my child. All those who are tired or disgusted with the God taught by the Chaldean religions, and especially by the Christian religion—a single God, jealous, severe, despotic and so much in the image of man that one wonders if it is not a demiurge as Anatole France said—these people when they want to lead a spiritual life no longer want the personal God, because they are too frightened lest the personal God resemble the one they have been taught about; they want an impersonal Godhead, something that doesn’t *at all* resemble—or as little as possible—the human being; that’s what they want.

But Sri Aurobindo says—something he has always said—that there are the godheads of the Overmind who indeed are very similar—we have said this several times—very similar to human beings, infinitely greater and more powerful but with resemblances which are a little too striking. Beyond these there is the impersonal Godhead, the impersonal Divine; but beyond the impersonal Divine there is the Divine who is the Person himself; and we must go through the Impersonal to reach the Supreme Divine who is beyond.

Only it is good, as I said, for those who have been put by education into contact with too individual, too personal a God, to seek the impersonal Divine, because this liberates them from many superstitions. After that if they are capable they will go farther and have once again a personal contact with a Divine who indeed is beyond all these other godheads.

So that’s it.

(CWM, Vol. 7, p. 240)

* * *

The Most Frightful of All Beings

The maximum of goodwill is to give money for something which one understands well (which is also easy to understand), to build a hospital, for example, or to open a crèche for little children. These are all works of goodwill that men understand. But if they are told that we want to change the human consciousness, we want to create a new world, oh! the first thing they say is: “Pardon me! Do not speak of God, for if it is God who is doing the work, well, it is God who will give you the means for it and you have no need of our help.” I have heard people saying: “If you represent the Divine upon earth you can do whatever you like; there is no need for us to give you

anything.” And how many among you are free from that idea (an aftertaste of that idea): the Divine is all-powerful, therefore, the Divine can do whatever he likes?

That is the first argument, that is the theory. The Divine is all-powerful, he can do whatever he likes; therefore he does not need anybody’s help. And if you push your idea sufficiently far, you will see that if the Divine is truly all-powerful in this world and does always whatever he wants, well, I tell you, he is the greatest monster in the universe! Because One who is all-powerful and makes the world such as it is, looking with a smile at people suffering and miserable, and finding that all right, I would call a monster. It was the kind of thing I used to think about when I was five. I used to tell myself: “It is not possible, what is taught there is not true!” Now, as you have a little more philosophical mind, I shall teach you how to come out of the difficulty. But, first of all, you must understand that that idea is a childish idea. I simply call on your common sense. You make of your Divine a person, because that way you understand him better. You make of him a person. And then this person has organised something (the earth, it is too big, it is difficult to understand—take anything else) and then this thing the Divine has organised with the full power to do exactly as he likes. And in this thing—that he has made with the full power to do as he likes—there is ignorance, stupidity, bad will, fear, jealousy, pride, wickedness, and also suffering, illness, grief, all the pains; and a set of people who cannot say that they have perhaps more than a few minutes of happiness in the whole day and the rest of it is a neutral condition, passing by like a thing that’s dead—and you call that a creation!... I call it something like a hell! And one who would make that deliberately and not only make it but look at it and say: “Ah! it is very good”, as it is narrated in some religious books, that after having made the world such as it is, the seventh day he looked at it and was extremely satisfied with his work and he rested....Well, that never! I do not call that God. Or otherwise, follow Anatole France and say that God is a demiurge and the most frightful of all beings.

But there is a way out of the difficulty. (*To a child*) Do you know it, you? Yes, yes, you know it! You will see all these conceptions and this idea that you have are based upon one thing, an entity that you call God and a world that you call his creation, and you believe these are two different things, one having made the other and the other being under the first, being the expression of what the first has made. Well, that is the initial error. If you could feel deeply that there is no division between that something you call God and this something you call his creation, if you said: “It is exactly the same thing” and if you could feel that what you call God (perhaps it is only a word), what you call God suffers when you suffer, he does not know when you do not know; and that it is through this creation, little by little, step by step, that he finds himself again, unites with himself, is realising himself, expressing himself, and it is not at all something he wanted in an arbitrary way or made like an autocrat, but that it is the growing expression, developing more and more, of a consciousness that is objectifying itself to itself.... Then there is no other thing but the sense of a collective

advancing towards a more total realisation, a self-awareness of knowledge-consciousness—no other thing but that, a progressive self-awareness of knowledge-consciousness in a total unity which will reproduce integrally the Original Consciousness.

That changes the problem.

(CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 160-62)

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Wanting to Make Others Progress

There are a hundred ways of looking at a problem. If you want to find the solution, you must take up all the elements one after another, rise above them and see how they harmonise.

There is a state of consciousness which may be called “gnostic”, in which you are able to see *at the same time* all the theories, all the beliefs, all the ideas men have expressed in their highest consciousness—the most contradictory notions, like the Buddhistic, the Vedantic, the Christian theories, all the philosophical theories, all the expressions of the human mind when it has managed to catch a little corner of the Truth—and in that state, not only do you put each thing in its place, but everything appears to you marvellously true and quite indispensable in order to be able to understand anything at all about anything whatsoever. There is a state of consciousness... Oh, I was going to tell you things you cannot yet understand. I shall give you a simpler example. Anatole France said in one of his books: “So long as men did not try to make the world progress, all went well and everybody was satisfied—no worry about perfecting oneself or perfecting the world, consequently all went well. Therefore the worst thing is to want to make others progress; let them do what they like and don’t bother about anything, that will be much more wise.” On the contrary, others tell you: “There is a Truth to be attained; the world is in a state of ignorance and one must at all costs, in spite of the difficulty of the way, enlighten man’s consciousness and pull him out of his ignorance.” But I tell you that there is a state of consciousness in which both the ways of seeing are absolutely equally true. Naturally, if you take only two aspects, it is difficult to see clearly; one must be able to see all the aspects of the truth glimpsed by the human intelligence and... something more. And then, in that state, nothing is absolutely false, nothing is absolutely bad. In that state one is free from all problems, all difficulties, all battles and everything appears to you wonderfully harmonious.

But if you try to imitate this condition mentally—do you understand? To make a mental imitation of it—you may be sure of doing stupid things; you will be one of those who have a chaos in their head and can say the most contradictory things without even being aware of it.

In that condition there is no contradiction—it is a totality and a totality in which one has the full knowledge of all the truths expressed (which are not sufficient to express the total Truth), in which one knows the respective places of all things, why and of what the universe is formed. Only—I hasten to tell you this—it is not by a personal effort that one reaches this condition; it is not because one tries to obtain it that one obtains it. You *become* that, spontaneously. It is, if you like, the crowning of an absolute mental sincerity, when you no longer have any partiality, any preference, any attachment to an idea, when you do not even try any longer to know the truth.

You are simply open in the Light, that's all.

I am telling you this, this evening, because what is done, what has been realised by one can be realised by others. It is enough that one body has been able to realise that, one human body, to have the assurance that it *can* be done. You may consider it still very far off, but you can say, "Yes, the gnostic life is certain, because it has begun to be realised."

(CWM, Vol. 4, pp. 157-59)

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Things Are as They Should Be

Equality of soul is a way. It is a means, it is a way—it can be a goal also. But it is not the consummation.

For example, there are those who say, who profess that everything that happens is the expression of the divine Will (I spoke about this last time, I think), there is an entire way of looking at life, understanding life, which is like that, which says, "All that is, the world as it is, all that happens, is the expression of the divine Will; therefore wisdom wants us, if we want to be in relation with the Divine, to accept without flinching and without the slightest emotion or reaction all that happens, since it is the expression of the divine Will, and it is understood that we should bow down before it." This is a conception which tends precisely to help people to acquire this equality of soul. But if you adopt this idea without adopting its opposite and making a synthesis of the two, well, naturally, you have only to sit through life and do nothing—or, in any case, never try to make the world progress.

I remember having read in a class, before our present class started—a class which also used to be held on Wednesdays, perhaps, I don't quite know, in which I used to read books—I read a book by Anatole France, who had a very subtle wit—I think it was *Le Livre de Jérôme Coignard* but I am not absolutely sure—where he says that men would be perfectly happy if they were not so anxious to improve life. I am not quoting the exact words but the idea. Unhappiness begins with this will to make men and things better!... (*Mother laughs*) That is his way of saying exactly the same thing I was just telling you in another form. If you want to be peaceful, happy, always

satisfied, to have perfect equality of soul, you must tell yourself, “Things are as they should be,” and if you are religious you should tell yourself, “They are as they should be because they are the expression of the divine Will”, and we have only one thing to do, that is to accept them as they are and be very quiet, because it is better to be quiet than to be restless. He turns the thing round and puts it in another way; he says life is very comfortable and very tolerable and very acceptable, if men don’t begin to wish that it should be different. And the minute they are not happy, naturally nobody is happy! Since they find that it is not what it should be, well, they begin to be unhappy—and others too.

But if everyone had the good sense to say, “Things are as they should be; one dies because one has to die, and one is ill because one has to be ill, one is separated from those one loves because one has to be separated, and then, etc... and one is in poverty because one has to be poor, one...”, you know, there is no end to it. Well, if completely, totally, one says, “Things are as they should be”, it makes no sense to grieve or to revolt, it’s foolish!... Ah! one must be logical. So we say that misery begins with the will to make things better than they are. Why do you not want to be ill when you are ill? You are much more ill when, being ill, you don’t want to be ill, than if you tell yourself, “All right, it is God’s Will, I accept my illness!” At least you are quiet, that helps you to recover, perhaps.... And poor people—why do they want to be rich? And people who lose their children or their parents—why don’t they want it to be like that? If everybody wanted things to be as they are, everybody would be happy.

This is one point of view. Only it happens that perhaps—perhaps, the divine Will is not quite like that. And perhaps it is as in that story—you all know the story of the elephant and its mahout?—the elephant, its mahout and the Brahmin on the road who refused to get out of the way of the elephant and, when the mahout told him, “Go away”, he replied, “No, God in me wants me to stay here”, and the mahout answered, “Pardon me, but God in me tells you to go away!”

So the reply to Anatole France is perhaps just this that there is a will higher than that of man which wants things to change. And so there is nothing to do but obey and make them change.

There we are.

(CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 68-70)

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Irony in Antole France and Sri Aurobindo

(On Anatole France and *La Révolte des Anges*)

...These children don’t understand [Sri Aurobindo’s irony]. They read it prosaically

(*gesture indicating the surface*). Strangely enough, it's the same phenomenon when they read Anatole France. And Anatole France, read without understanding his irony, is abominably commonplace.

They don't grasp the irony.

Sri Aurobindo had it. He understood the irony of Anatole France so well, he had this same thing—so subtle, so refined...

"Very good," he would say while reading *La Révolte des Anges*. "Yes, it is true, which of the two should we believe?" (*Mother laughs*)

(*From an undated conversation, 1959*)

* * *

First Question to Anatole France

And to Théon, the God of the Jews and Christians was an Asura. This Asura wanted to be unique; and so he became the most terrible despot imaginable. Anatole France said the same thing (I now know that Anatole France had never read Théon's story, but I can't imagine where he picked this up). It's in *The Revolt of the Angels*. He says that Satan is the true God and that Jehovah, the "only God," is the monster. And when the angels wanted Satan to become the one and only God, Satan realised he was immediately taking on all Jehovah's failings! So he refused: "Oh, no—thank you very much!" It's a wonderful story, and in exactly the same spirit as what Théon used to say. The very first thing I asked Anatole France (I told you I met him once—mutual friends introduced us), the first thing I asked him was, "Have you ever read *The Tradition*?" He said no. I explained why I had asked, and he was interested. He said his source was his own imagination. He had caught that idea intuitively.

(*From a conversation of January 27, 1962*)

* * *

What is God?

It's about the last sentence; someone has asked me, "What is God?" So I've replied (taking the word "God"):

"It is the name man has given to all that exceeds and dominates him, all that he cannot know but is subject to."

Instead of saying "to all that exceeds him," we could say, "to THAT WHICH exceeds him," because from the intellectual standpoint, "all that" is debatable. I mean there is a "something"—an indefinable and inexplicable something—and man has

always felt dominated by that something. It is beyond all possible understanding and dominates him. And then, religions gave it a name; man has called it “God”; the French call it *Dieu*, the English, *God*, in another language it’s called differently, but anyway it’s the same.

I am intentionally not giving any definition. Because my lifelong feeling has been that it’s a mere word, and a word behind which people put a lot of very undesirable things.... It’s that idea of a god who claims to be “the one and only,” as they say: “God is the one and only.” But they feel it and say it in the way Anatole France put it (I think it was in *The Revolt of the Angels*): that God who wants to be the one and only and ALL ALONE. That was what had made me a complete atheist, if I may say so, when I was a child; I refused to accept a being, WHOEVER HE WAS, who proclaimed himself to be the one and only and almighty. Even if he were indeed the one and only and almighty (*laughing*), he should have no right to proclaim it! That’s how it was in my mind. I could make an hour-long speech on this, to show how in every religion they tackled the problem.

At any rate, I have given what I find is the most objective definition. And as in the other day’s “What is the Divine?”, I have tried to give a feeling of the Thing; here I wanted to fight against the use of the word which, to me, is hollow, but dangerously so.

(From a conversation of June 7, 1967)

* * *

A Marvellous Writer

There is a good writer in Gujarati—I could study his books. X told me that his style is like Anatole France’s.

Really! If he writes like Anatole France he must truly be a marvellous writer!

26 October 1934

(CWM, Vol. 17, p. 66)

THE MOTHER

THE INHUMANITY OF ANATOLE FRANCE

[*Essay published in St. Xavier's College Magazine, Bombay, February 1925.*]

PITY and Irony! They sum up the attitude of Anatole France towards the world. With the benign superiority of the intellectual happily obsessed with ostentatious egoism, he touches two chords only of his inward soul, and to their tune plays the libretto of his Art. But to the veriest tyro in psychology it must be evident that pity and irony are entirely negative qualities in a man. Pity at its best is the spark of native tenderness struck by the cruelty of fate; it is at its worst the patronising affability produced by the consciousness of worldly vanity. In either case the environment affects the spectator: he does nothing to actually arrange the environment, so that it may be an object not of compassion, but of admiration. Irony is the sly laughter called forth by topsyturvydom and general human folly. The worm lying on its back, helplessly supine or hopelessly struggling, gives the naturalist standing above it the feeling, which usually expresses itself in the exclamation: "What fools these creatures are!" But the sage who perceives the erratic behaviour of men lifts not a finger to show the delinquents the right way, nor does he strain one muscle to turn their faces from the errors of the past. In other words, both pity and irony do nothing: they just sit, look and pass comment: they offer no friendly advice: they are superbly passive. They do not tell us what to do: they are merely negative attitudes.

Now an artist who entertains the slightest ambition to be great cannot afford to be passive. He must have some positive ideal by which to judge the diverse activities going on through the centuries—the Spartans combing their long hair at Thermopylae, the Rome of Caesar changing into Rome of Peter, a thousand hoarse voices stirred with the Carmagnole,¹ the civilised barbarians of the day of science running amok in Nazi Germany. He must sift events, sort religions, pick and choose in the vast heap of history, accept and reject in the copious collection of philosophy. He must elucidate the complexes of civilisation with the light of his ideal, and cut the Gordian knots of pressing problems with the knife of his desire. To take things as they are is to him death as an artist. So here, no share in the moulding of minds amounts to the forfeiture of his privilege as an intellectual. Something definite and decisive, a plan to change the world for the better, is absolutely essential to real greatness. The various departments of life fall into their proper places, and bear their logical significance only when existence in its entirety is evaluated according to a fixed standard. The artist, in order to be a landmark, must say what is good and what is bad. He must draw a line between high and low, divide the world's bundle of thought into wise and foolish, on the basis of some unchanging ideal. Anatole France is curiously wanting in any such permanent substratum to his generalisations. He does not take sides: he prefers to be neutral. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he chooses, not to

1. Carmagnole: *Song and dance among French revolutionists of 1793.*

be out of the fray but to be in the thick of it, and attack in turn all the parties at strife. He is not impartially amicable but impartially hostile. He favours nobody because he scorns everybody. He takes no sides, not so much by refraining from struggle, as by indulging in universal warfare. His irony riddles with its shot and shrapnel all the institutions, aspirations and groping hopes around him; and then, over the debris of shattered idols, he sheds the lifeless light of his pity. This is what he calls being superior: this is what we call being inhuman.

He is a no mean hand at making targets. At one glance he marks out the vulnerable spot. But scarce does it profit a man if he kill the whole world without trying to convert a single soul. It is not enough to divide things into those meriting pity and those deserving irony, yet fail to enumerate all that is not to be pitied and all that is not to be ridiculed. Anatole France cannot take an Ideal and with it as the sword split cosmos into the desirable and the undesirable, saying: "These things I favour: these others I despise; and for the former I will battle against the latter till my sword cleaves to my hand, and blood runs through my fingers." He has, therefore, no message for anxious humanity; for he betrays no likes and dislikes, no vehement preferences, no irrepressible predilections. There is no love in his heart, there is no hate in it either. To him all matters are the same, for all matters are negligible. He slaughters without anger and pities without passion, that is why he is a figure unappealing save to a supercilious brute, who is sometimes moved to the cold compassion of contempt by the misery of his inferiors. He is too callous and careless to be appreciable. It is not only because Anatole France has no love in him that he is hateful; it is also because he has no hate in him that he is not lovable.

We have by this time grown accustomed to regarding him as a dilettante, sitting at an old carved table, with flowers in some antique vase, on all sides the precious dust of centuries in rare prints and first editions, the glitter of glassware of a forgotten age, statuettes bending gracefully over decorated shelves, Japanese crockery, bronzes, cameos, relics of all sorts and shades. Far away the din and noise of the world; no crack of discord breaks the holy calm in which the master lays "the mighty line". What has he to do with the mob of mankind, he who dwells among the past, he who inhabits the land of immortal by-gones? What is Paris to him whose country is Attica? What are the boulevards of the world to the lone wanderer on the slope of Tempe? What are the Bois de Boulogne and the Champs Elysées to the philosopher in the garden of Epicurus? He is detached, aloof, secluded, frigid as a star. He goes on doing his literary work while the great world rolls by. The feeling of detachment from matters mundane gives him a certain indifference towards issues for which others are living and dying, starving and gibbeting, killing ruthlessly and seeking martyrdom. To him liberty, equality, fraternity are mere intellectual concepts and the Republic less real than Utopia. Absorbed in the ancient poets and the early saints he comes to deem books his world and the world a pale phantom of the mind. He develops a gay nonchalance in important matters, a debonair air which looks upon the passing show

of life with eyes of pity and irony. He is the prince of sceptics, casting the shadow of doubt over everything. Nothing is real except thought, nothing is true except beauty. Existence is a bag of trifles, cosmos a little joke, and God he considers the pastime of priests. All your mighty metaphysics, your heavy sociologies, your whirring industries, and your heart-breaking tragedies are as feathers in the literary scales Monsieur Anatole France holds in that richly adorned room of the Villa Saïd. With a gesture of frivolity he dismisses world-problems. Radiantly sceptical, he states every possible point of view, tries to reduce to absurdity eternal verities, confesses smilingly his own inability to fill the vacuum created by his destructiveness, toys with dogmas on which the Rock of Ages is built, offers a silk handkerchief to the wet cheek of sorrow, then distils the tear and the tragedy in the essence of neat phrase, and while making light of all things grave and gay, great and small, he plies his patient pen, filling out manuscript after manuscript of crystalline prose. Naturally such a supreme dilettante has no definite philosophy, no rule of conduct, no theory of the universe. He does not care to have them. He can only laugh and pity: he can neither approve nor respect. He can either destroy or ignore: he cannot create or do battle for a cause. But even his destructiveness is desultory, even his soldiership is aimless, for he is the soldier who has no banner to stand by, no country to fight for. In the most drastic meaning of that terrible term, he is a nihilist. But he is a nihilist who does not believe even in nihilism.

Anatole France, by his very nature, cannot be a contributor to the page of world-thought. Not a single idea, hiding itself in a remote corner of the Volume of Wisdom, can claim as its father this Frenchman who is diffident about all ideas. When we recount the names of the undying dead who have made our modern mind what it is, who have left us tower on tower of vision to climb for searching life's secret, we shall seek in vain for Anatole France. There will be Plato; there will be Aristotle; there will be Spinoza; there will be Kant; there will be Hegel. Ibsen will find a place among them, and Nietzsche and Spencer and Bergson and Tolstoy and Bernard Shaw. But the greatest man of letters of the twentieth century will be missing. He shall go unremembered among the makers of man. For he is essentially an unmaker, a destroyer, a refined Vandal, a Gaul who is also a Goth. His universally sceptical temperament is responsible for that lack of passion in his books, passion without which the inner eye can never be lit open. They are clever books, comely books, but they are not passionate books. This is only inevitable, since the man who pledges himself to no ideal has got no zeal for fervour. He does not want to convert anybody or demonstrate anything; and it is only the proselytiser who is enthusiastic. We can never envisage Anatole France, dancing in sheer joy at proving a point to an obstinate opponent, or springing at the throat of another man who tried to prove his own point. And the writer who has not these passions in him is a poor, miserable abstraction. He may be a superman who sees the uselessness of party and struggle, who is in the know of the secret of the world, who pretends to have discovered that the world is a Sphinx without a secret. But, by a dark paradox, it is greater to be a man who takes the universe seriously than

a superman who takes it to be an empty joke. It is greater to believe that something is everything than that everything is nothing. In short, it is greater to believe than to disbelieve. For belief is positive, doubt is negative. Anybody can doubt, because many things can never be satisfactorily proved on earth; but if belief be acquiescence in perfectly ascertained knowledge, few can dare to believe, since it requires a titanic intellect to attempt the assiduous task of proving all that is provable. It is only the adventure of catching truth that lends life a purpose. It provides us with an ideal to follow: it renders our numberless actions component parts of a harmonious whole. It serves as the motive force to our wishes, and makes us keep steady and active on the path, which seems to run into mists, but which we know leads to a goal. The sea we sail may have no shore, but we must steer and not drift; and in order to steer like voyagers instead of drifting like ship-wrecked flotsam, it is necessary to be persuaded that every sea is an Atlantic leading to an America. If life appears meaningless we must give it a meaning by endeavouring to find one; for life is desirable only so long as it desires!

Perhaps the most heinous crime of Anatole France is his scepticism. It has rendered him indifferent to progress. He does not believe that humanity can improve itself. He doubts it profoundly. A wrinkle of concern crosses his brow in some hallowed moment, but it vanishes like a summer cloud; for he is glad to announce to himself that mankind will not and cannot advance. If it did, it must advance towards a goal; that is the sole way of measuring its progress. Unless we fix what it is we are striving to attain, how can we draw nearer and nearer to it? That is to say, progress implies the existence of ideals; but Anatole France distrusts all ideals. He has no philosophy by which to weigh the respective merits of the past, the present, and the future; so he prays—to whom one wonders—that the world remain as it is, a world of mistakes and delusions, thwarted hopes and useless suffering, vile trickery and painted sin—the perpetual object of pity and irony. To him the aim of Art is to observe with poetic grace and lambent humour Life's stumbling in the dark; and the aim of Life is to continue stumbling in the dark in order to provide Art material for poetic description and humorous reflection. There is a note of unthinkable callousness in this conception. The pity of Anatole France seems to come from a heart which is only a yawning cavern. He commiserates unhappy mortals, but he wishes them to be always unfortunate enough for commiseration. He is kind only to be cruel. One feels chilled as one stands before this Frenchman whose very pity is deadlier than winter's snow. One feels the presence of a wicked spirit, when one considers a thinker who desires that the world should never reform and never be happier lest he should be robbed of the privilege and pleasure of pitying it and mocking it. Anatole France may be a luminous angel, but he is a Lucifer. Anatole France may be a gifted artist, but he is an artist gone mad. As such one does not know what he deserves more: Pity or Irony.

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of November 2007)

Ah, if only I could recreate those moments!

AFTER the Mother's physical passing, evening meditations were started in the Ashram main building. So I started going to the Ashram in the evenings. The lights would be turned off and everybody became absorbed in meditation. I would sit at the entrance of the Meditation Hall. The moonlight suffused the air all around and everything looked simply entrancing. The soft gentle breeze stilled our minds and then proceeded to offer its obeisance at the Feet of the Mother, like a friend.

After the meditation, one evening, as I was returning home with Jyoti, I remembered a childhood prank of mine. In fact I cannot help thinking about this whenever it is the fortnight of the waxing moon. And as we walked on that deserted moonlit street, I recounted that incident to Jyoti.

I had just settled here permanently. The year was 1944. I used to go in the evenings for a walk along the seafront all alone and I enjoyed this immensely. The walk naturally would become even lovelier during the fortnight when the moon was in its waxing phase. I used to enjoy sitting and watching the sea for a long time as I was greatly attracted by the sea.

It was a full moon night. The sea looked so enchanting that I could not bring myself away. So I just kept sitting there. When I finally got back home I realised that it was half-past nine.

I noticed that the Mother gave me flowers in a somewhat serious mood. I just could not figure out what the matter was. Neither did I have the courage to ask Her. I could not sleep at night and kept sitting in front of the sea longer and longer overcome with sadness, almost depressed. Only when I felt a little lighter would I return home. One day when I went to the Mother I found Her very serious indeed and I just blurted out:

“But what have I done, Mother? Why do You give me flowers with that stern expression? You know I have come here only for You.”

And as I said this my throat choked with grief.

The Mother answered:

“You spend a long time on the seafront. You wander about all alone till very late at night.”

I was quite surprised and I told the Mother with great earnestness:

“Yes, Mother, I sit by the sea for a long time. I really enjoy it. Especially now when the moon is waxing. The sea looks so enchanting. I'll take you tomorrow for a walk on the seafront. You'll see how much You really love it! Will You come?”

The Mother held me by the shoulders and looked into my eyes. Her eyes were

smiling. I was slightly taken aback.

“Listen,” the Mother said, “the war is on at this moment. There is a blackout in the town. It is not right for you to go at such a time to the sea all alone. Moreover, you know how rickshaw pullers get drunk in the evenings and move around. Make sure that you are home by nine.”

I fell from the sky. Why hadn’t She told me this much earlier? All these days I had spent feeling downcast!

When the Japanese were bombing Cox-Bazaar we were in Feni. On Sri Aurobindo’s directions our family was the only one that had stayed on in that deserted town for quite some time. And we never felt the slightest fear at any time. Then when we went to Calcutta, the curfew was on there too. The Japanese went on bombing but I did not feel frightened at all. Tapati and I continued to study in the room on the terrace and as soon as the siren was sounded we would go under the staircase and quietly stand behind the sandbags like everyone else. And when the all-clear signal was given, we would return to the terrace to study. At that time the young did not pay much attention to the war and the soldiers. At Feni our school, college and the three or four hostels for boys were situated just beyond the open field in front of our house. During the war the soldiers had occupied all these places. We did not know anything called fear. As soon as the Mother mentioned the war, all those memories of our life overtook me. A girl who had lived her childhood through wars and blackouts—how could such a girl be scared of the blackouts in Pondicherry?

I gratefully bowed before the Mother, extremely surprised to see Her concern for a girl who had newly come to the Ashram. How She thought about each and every child of Hers. And that day’s incident was quite inconceivable for a young girl who had just arrived in the Ashram. After a long time, I slept peacefully once again.

*

That day the Mother was not to meet anyone after the balcony darshan. I was leaning against the gate of the ‘Mother’s kitchen’ opposite the balcony and thinking that I would not be able to meet the Mother. In the meantime, the Mother appeared at the balcony. I stood there, my eyes fixed on Her as I filled myself with Her presence knowing that She would not meet anyone later that day. As the Mother was re-entering Her room She stopped on the threshold, turned and signalled to me to come up. Everybody left and the balcony street was empty then. I stood a while leaning against the gate of the ‘Mother’s kitchen’ on the same spot where I would always stand and wait for the Mother for the balcony darshan. And even today whenever I take that street my eyes automatically look up at the balcony. Who knows when She might suddenly appear and bless me with Her darshan! Anyway, after a lot of hesitation I finally entered the Ashram and nervously went up the stairs to go to the Mother’s room. As I entered I saw Her arranging flowers. On seeing me She at once remarked:

“Ah! So you understood that I was calling you?”

I stood there, a little shy. The Mother gave me a handful of flowers and blessed me. I swam in a sea of bliss all through the day. Isn't it puzzling how the slightest prayer somehow reaches the Mother?

*

Tapati and I went to work in the morning. I noticed that everyone, *Baudi* (Rajsena Nahar), Sujata, Sumitra, Suprabha, Shivani-di and a host of others were busy tidying up things at the Press. Such enthusiasm filled everyone! The Mother had told Chitra that She would come to visit the Press in the afternoon. Chitra was running about everywhere doing a lot of work. Come afternoon and we all stood up and waited for the Mother. The Mother entered but did not look at anyone. She went into every room, stood near the machines and asked a number of questions. We followed Her everywhere close behind.

In one of the rooms a chair was arranged for the Mother to sit. She came into this room, inspected everything and sat down in this chair. A bag of toffees was kept near Her chair. We all stood in a line and received a toffee from Her one after another. Then we went back to our spots and continued looking at Her. Now it was Chitra's turn. She looked rather glum and I wondered what was wrong with her. Then the Mother returned to the Ashram.

When I went to the Mother in the evening, the Mother asked me with some concern:

“Do you know what was wrong with Chitra? I found her very glum while I was distributing toffees at the Press.”

“Mother, it was Chitra whom You informed about going to the Press. She did everything with a lot of eagerness, tidying and arranging everything. She really put in a lot of hard work. We all worked very hard, Mother. But You came to the Press and did not look at us even once. Poor Chitra is the youngest amongst us and so she must have felt a little hurt.”

The Mother heard me and went into a trance. After a while She gave me a flower-blessing and I went down. A little girl had come to Her looking slightly sad and even that received the Mother's attention. Nothing escaped Her eye, however small!

In this way how many such little frailties and shortcomings in us were picked up by the Mother! And She always tried to help us get over these human weaknesses. Truly we learnt so much from Her.

*To wipe out sorrow in this life, we cannot hope.
But strength to bear that sorrow, O grant us in our heart.*

*

The Mother came down to distribute flower-blessings to everyone after ten. We watched Her sitting in the hall and giving to each one a flower according to his or her need. And each person bowed gratefully before Her before leaving. After awhile I noticed that She was looking towards Bula-da's room. In fact that is where people were lining up to come to the Mother in the Meditation Hall. Malavika-di was also standing there in the line and I realised that the Mother was actually looking in Her direction. Malavika-di used to suffer terribly from sciatica. I noticed that she was dragging herself with great pain towards the Meditation Hall in order to get the flower-blessing from the Mother's hand. Malavika-di's pain did not escape the Mother's eye as She kept focussing on her painful leg. Even after she had taken the flower from Her hand, the Mother continued watching her leg as she limped away. One day, I told Malavika-di about this incident and she was deeply moved and her eyes welled up with tears of joyous gratitude. Thus she got from the Mother's infinite Grace, the strength to battle against pain and disease.

*

I went to see the Mother in the morning. Everyone was standing in line on the staircase. In front of me stood little Lucy, *Baudi's* daughter, who was also waiting to go to the Mother. She had in her right hand a beautiful, small bottle of perfume. It must have been French. Lucy was very fond of this perfume. And she had brought her favourite thing to offer to the Mother.

“Bonjour, Lucy,” the Mother greeted her as soon as she entered Her room.

“Bonjour, Douce Mère,” Lucy replied and handed Her the perfume-bottle.

The Mother looked delighted as She inspected the bottle from different angles. Then She showered Lucy with all Her caresses and gave her many different flowers. A little girl had given away her most-loved thing: that is the real value of ‘offering’.

*

An incident comes to my mind. Father had planted a pumpkin plant at home. The plant began yielding huge pumpkins. Father kept the biggest of the lot aside. One day he announced:

“I will give this pumpkin to the Mother. I'll take it to the Playground and offer it to Her.”

I was taken aback and said:

“You're certainly not going to the Playground with that pumpkin!”

Father did not say anything.

I went happily to the Playground that evening as usual. The Mother was distributing toffees to the group after the Gymnastic Marching. What did I see at the end of the line? Father! Advancing towards the Mother with that pumpkin in his

arms! The Mother inspected the pumpkin for quite a while. I was dying of shame in the meantime and furious with father as everybody was giggling away in the Playground.

We ran and waited near the Garage in the Ashram for the Mother's car to arrive, for one more darshan. The car came and stopped but the Mother did not come out. She called for Dyuman-da who came running. The Mother showed him the pumpkin and asked him to take it to Her room on the first-floor. Only after Dyuman-da had taken the pumpkin away, did the Mother come out of the car. I cannot tell you how very embarrassed I felt. The Mother went directly upstairs. She had brought back with Her a commonplace pumpkin in the car! Father's dream of offering the pumpkin to the Mother was fulfilled.

It was only later that I understood that more than the thing being offered, however ordinary that might be, it was the earnestness that was more precious in the Mother's eyes. What was important to the Mother was not what was given but how it was given.

The story of Bhakta Sudama naturally comes to mind. He went to Sri Krishna's royal court carefully carrying in his *chaddar* a fistful of humble *nadus* (a rural sweet of Bengal) for his childhood friend. But then on seeing Sri Krishna in his royal robes he felt a little embarrassed and hesitant about giving his simple offering to his friend. So Sri Krishna himself asked for the *nadus*. He sat on his royal seat and joyfully began relishing those rice *nadus*.

*

One day the Mother said:

You know I have prepared a straight path, a path by which the soul can go directly to the psychic world. It does not have to go through, after death, the suffering of the vital world. If someone leaves even with a little bit of desire then the vital beings will follow. And they cause a lot of suffering. Just imagine the state of the soul then. It is in that terrible state that one can understand how much the body protects the soul. Haven't you ever had a nightmare? As if someone is pursuing you. You want to be safe from them and you cannot stop running...and then you wake up with a start. You were convinced that you were fine in your bed but in reality you had gone out of your body. Some vital being was pursuing you. As soon as you re-entered your body and the soul found its shelter you were safe from this vital being. You woke up. So you understand how man has to suffer after death. The soul then has left the body. It is in a terrible state then.

This path that I have created, it is just a quick passage after death directly into the psychic world. You must remember me just at the time of death. From wherever the call comes, in whatever condition, I will be present there. I will take the soul safely straight to the psychic world. You have to call me.

So I asked Her:

“But does everyone know You? Then? Very few people know that You are here.”

The Mother listened to me, then laughed.

“Am I present only in this particular body? Whenever anyone calls the Divine in any form from anywhere, I am present. I am after all the Mother.”

Here I remember those famous lines from Nishikanto.

*Here in human forms you tread
On golden path by silence led.
How many are they who know you are
On this earth immense in wordless tread?*

*

31st December 1954

New Year's Eve. It was a Wednesday. The Mother distributed the New Year's message in the class and everybody waited eagerly to hear what the Mother would say. The class started with the Mother's announcement:

This message was written because it is foreseen that next year will be a difficult year and there will be many inner struggles and even outer ones perhaps. So I tell all of you what attitude you should take in these circumstances. These difficulties may perhaps last not only twelve months, that is, one full year, but perhaps fourteen months; and during these fourteen months you must make an effort never to lose the attitude about which I am going to speak to you just now.

In fact, I insist that the more difficult things are, the more you must remain quiet, and the more should you have an unshakable faith. Of all things this is the most important.

Usually, as soon as things become difficult, human beings get agitated, become irritated, get terribly excited and they make the difficulties ten times more difficult. So I am warning you right away that this is not to be done, that you must do the opposite; and what I am going to read to you is precisely what you must repeat to yourself as soon as you feel some anxiety or worry within you; you must remember what I am telling you today and remember it throughout the year. You can repeat it morning and evening profitably.

First She read the message in French and then in English:

No human will can finally prevail against the Divine's Will. Let us put ourselves deliberately and exclusively on the side of the Divine, and the Victory is ultimately certain.

But She did not give us any further hint. She just kept repeating that tremendous obstacles and difficulties lay ahead. We would need to battle for fourteen months.

The path of sadhana, especially Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's chosen path is full of hardship, a path where one needs to wage huge battles at every step. And now the whole of 1955 lay ahead.

Man's life moves forward only through suffering and hardship. He learns to progressively recognise himself only through painful blows.

I recognised myself in blow after blow, in pain after pain.

And so when the Mother kept repeating that the coming fourteen months were going to be testing times, we were all naturally a little crestfallen.

But the Mother also uttered a few words of hope. After telling us at length about the tremendous hardships and obstacles that lay in store in 1955, the Mother read out the following poem by Sri Aurobindo:

One Day
The Little More

One day, and all the half-dead is done,
One day, and all the unborn begun;
A little path and the great goal,
A touch that brings the divine whole.

Hill after hill was climbed and now,
Behold, the last tremendous brow
And the great rock that none has trod:
A step, and all is sky and God.

Then She read four lines of another poem by Sri Aurobindo:

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

I understood that tough times were ahead. We had to get ready for fourteen months of great disturbance and difficulty.

*Not the awful echo of rustling forest is this,
But the ocean swelling with python's hiss.*

The class ended with a lot of questions and answers.

We began resolutely preparing ourselves for the hardships and difficulties of the new year. In just a few hours the new year—1955—would be upon us. Carrying high hopes and enthusiasm we vowed to overcome all obstacles.

*O Bird of my Heart, O dear Bird mine,
Flutter not in darkness, cease not from forward flight!*

The Mother had packed into Her message all the power and energy needed to battle against the tremendous obstacles in the coming year. We had understood from the Mother's words that in fourteen months some new, extraordinary event was to take place. Everyone eagerly waited as the seconds ticked away. Days and months rolled by.

With bated breath the universe waits,
Still, solitary, mute witness of Time.

Fourteen months were now almost over. The final moment was near. What was going to happen? On 1st January 1956 we received from the Mother Her New Year Message:

The greatest victories are the least noisy.

The manifestation of a new world is not proclaimed by beat of drum.

And so we all waited with bated breath. And finally breaking through all the obstacles and resistances, the victorious, irresistible Supramental Light came down onto the earth. Our waiting had come to an end, although we could not actually see the event.

On one Wednesday evening, in the Playground, during the meditation after the class, the Supramental Light came down with full force in the most unimaginable way. There was an uncontrollable, irresistible power in the descent. It was the 29th of February 1956. Just as the Mother had announced, the descent of this new Light took place exactly fourteen months later.

The grown-ups had been talking about the manifestation of the Supramental Light for quite a few years. "You will see that the Supramental Light will descend in our Playground itself." The astonishing thing is that it did happen there. How a thought enters the human consciousness is truly amazing! It might be more apt to call it an intuition rather than a thought.

It was later that we came to know from the Mother something about the Supramental Light. On 29th February 1960 during the special blessing, the Mother revealed what had happened in 1956:

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that “*the time has come*,” and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.

She explained later:

What happened on February 29, 1956, is not so much a vision or an experience as something done. During the Evening Meditation in the Playground, I went up into the Supermind, and saw that something needed to be done, and I did it.

It is interesting to note that the words “The time has come” which express what I simultaneously knew and willed when I found myself in front of the massive door on whose other side was the world, were heard by me in English and not in French. It was as if Sri Aurobindo had spoken them.

When I came down from the Supermind after that flood of light had swept all over the universe, I thought that since the outpour was so stupendous everybody who had been sitting before me in the Playground would be lying flat! But on opening my eyes I saw everyone still sitting up quietly: they seemed perfectly unconscious of what had happened!

After the descent of the Supramental Light, the Mother modified the last four lines of Her prayer of 25th September 1914 in *Prayers and Meditations* from:

The Lord hast willed and thou dost execute;
A new Light shall break upon the earth.
A new world shall be born,
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

to:

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

We used to recite this prayer of the Mother every morning and we still do. At the very

beginning of the prayer She addresses the Divine Mother:

O Divine and adorable Mother, with thy help what is there that is impossible?

After the manifestation of the Supramental Light, the Mother finally revealed Herself to the earth. *Thou dost execute* was changed to *I execute* as the universe heard in hushed wonder the Mother's proclamation.

In 1956 on 24th April, the Mother said:

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.

On 10 July 1957, during the class in the Playground, the Mother emphasised that

a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*.

And this was the message She distributed on the first 'anniversary':

29.2.60

The Golden Day

Henceforth the 29th February will be the day of the Lord.

The Mother

(*To be continued*)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

(Translated by Maurice Shukla from the original Bengali *Abismaraniya Muhurta*)

MAN STOOD ERECT

It was a full moon night, but for the bowed ape, walking heavily head down, it had no meaning. He woke up shivering in the fresh spring wind—the heat of the whole day, the perspiration, now the shiver and thirst—woke him up. Bent, his hands hanging low, he walked stealthily towards the river bed—eyes half open—sleepy. The moonlight slept on the riverbed, tranquil, ethereal. The beauty and the serenity of the scene was unfelt by the ape-like man. He did not know what light was or beauty or serenity. He splashed some water on his face, eyes wide open he looked down at the rippling water and something strange caught his eyes. Something was shining in the water, round like a ball. He stretched his paw-like hand to catch it but it broke still shining. He tried to catch it again, he shook the water but the ball broke into more pieces—came together and broke again. He looked aghast—had never seen such a sight before. The water had stopped moving—the ball was back shining as if beckoning. A swan swooped down to catch a fish, it flew up—he instinctively looked up towards its flight and a breathtaking sight caught him motionless. The flight of swans against the moon and a starry cloudless sky. The beauty penetrated his earthborn eyes and stirred his hidden chords. His neck ached and he looked down at the earth. An urge to look up over and over again to behold the ethereal beauty made him stand erect with head held high. The heartstring stirred, a song of mirth arose, his lips parted with an inner bliss.

In the prone obscure beginnings of the race
The human grew in the bowed apeline man.
He stood erect, a godlike form and force,
And a soul's thoughts looked out from earth-born eyes;
Man stood erect, he wore the thinker's brow:
He looked at heaven and saw his comrade stars;
A vision came of beauty and greater birth
Slowly emerging from the heart's chapel of light
And moved in a white lucent air of dreams.
He saw his being's unrealised vastnesses,
He aspired and housed the nascent demigod.

(*Savitri*, p. 485)

AND MAN WAS BORN.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

['Udar' was the name given by Sri Aurobindo to Lawrence Pinto.

An exhibition was organised on the occasion of his centenary, 26 April, 2007, using a large number of photographs and a selection of short texts.

As Udar was very much part of the Ashram's growth, a visit to the exhibition was an invitation to feel something of the atmosphere of the years when the Mother was physically present in our midst, and see Her take part in so many activities.

A book is under preparation.

We present here, in small instalments, the 'text' part of the exhibition.]

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They were moved by her towards great unknown things,
Faith drew them and the joy to feel themselves hers...

Savitri

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Introduction

The August Darshan of 1937

From 1934 to 1937, though I had been in Pondicherry most of the time and had many friends in the Ashram, I had never entered the Ashram main building or felt like going for a Darshan or anything like that. I was just busy making money and having a good time. My friends in the Ashram were first Amal (K. D. Sethna), Purani, Ambu, Dr. Ramchandra and some others.

I finally got married to Mona in February 1937 and then we had several more friends in the Ashram. They suggested that we should go for a Darshan and it was arranged for us to go on August 15, 1937. In those days those who went for Darshan had their names listed and the time for each person to be present was indicated. Our time was just before noon.

Udar

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We dressed up in our best clothes and went upstairs and were led into the Darshan room and then I received a shock, which I had not at all expected.

It was my first sight of Sri Aurobindo and the words that came into my head

were, “I have seen majesty at last!”—This word, ‘majesty’, had attracted me, both for its sound and meaning and I had often regretted not ever having seen it. I had seen majestic robes and crowns and all that, but no majestic person. Here I saw—no wonderful robes or any crown—just a simple dhoti and chaddar, but such a wonderful figure of Majesty. I was also a bit awed by it. Then I looked at the Mother and saw there so much sweetness and love that I just went up to Her and put my head into Her lap. Mona did the same.

Udar

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This was the turning point in his life. Slowly he came closer to the Ashram and more particularly to the Mother.

The Golden Chain

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Udar’s Name

Then I come to my name. My name was formerly Lawrence Marshall Pinto. I asked the Mother for a new name and I received the name of ‘Udar’ from Sri Aurobindo Himself, in His own handwriting, which was given to me by the Mother. There He wrote the name as follows:

Udar—Sanskrit Udara—
Noble, generous, upright and sincere—
Sri Aurobindo

26th April 1938
To Udar with blessings—
Sri Aurobindo

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“*Udara*”—the Sanskrit name for a divine quality—Generosity. (Giving and Self-Giving without bargain.) The Mother gave this name to the flowers of the *Impatiens Balsamina* and Sri Aurobindo had given this name to one of his early disciples, Mr. Pinto, who recently passed away. Now, since a few years, we have been sending flowers from Promesse for the Ashram Samadhi and the Master’s room, by the power of Her Grace.

From 5th December till the 9th of December 2001, we programmed a regular flower offering for all the days except the 7th. But, on the 7th of December, my amma

brought me a lot of the generosity flowers. I was a bit upset, as I had not thought of giving flowers to Her that day. But then, Varadhrajan volunteered to take me to the Samadhi and offer the flowers himself. We started for Pondy by 3:00 p.m. Varadhrajan went and offered these with a prayer: "Lord give Udar to all."

As he came out, a well-wisher met us and conveyed to us the news of Udar's passing.

We humbly remembered Sri Aurobindo giving him the name; his consecration to the Lord and the Mother's work; his relation to the Samadhi and his early morning readings of *Savitri* which many Aurovilians would remember.

Syamala and Varadhrajan

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The story of his life after he came to the Ashram runs parallel to the story of the Ashram's growth. He was involved in practically every new project. When we started putting his story together we soon realised how difficult it was going to be because he was a man of so many facets that no one knew all of them, not even his family.

The Golden Chain

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Mother could not have built this world-within-a-world with only poets and artists. She needed people with sound technical knowledge and a head for organisation. The whole edifice stood on columns like Pavitra, Dyuman, Purani, Udar and others, all men of action. They came to Her, through strange twists of Fate, pulled towards Her by an invisible force. Udar and the others had all the skills needed for Her work but above all they had an unshakable devotion to Her.

The Golden Chain

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Some Letters

Udar

22.9.38

If there is an order of the kind to give, Mother will be glad to do it through you. She sends you her blessings for your work which you are starting tomorrow.

Sri Aurobindo

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1st January 1946

Prostrate at your feet I beseech you, my beloved Mother to grant me this my most earnest prayer. Be with me and of me always and in all things. In work and in play, asleep or awake, be always the sole object of my delight, of my very existence. When I am sad, console me with Thy Divine Presence. Answer my every doubt with Thy Beautiful Smile. Have compassion in my weakness and pardon my numerous mistakes. Take me, Mother, and make of me what you will, a thing of Thine own.

That is my aspiration. Grant me Thy Divine Grace that it may remain before me throughout this year and for all the years to come.

Udar

The Mother's reply

Yes, my dear child, I shall always be with you, in success and in failure, in joy and in sorrow as an eternal and unfailing presence—with my love and blessings,

The Mother

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31st December 1946

1st January 1947

My beloved Mother,

This last year has been for me, indeed, a year of Grace in which the Promise of Thy “Eternal and unfailing presence” has been amply fulfilled.

For the year that is coming, I beseech Thee, my sweet Mother, to still keep open to me the fountain of Thy Grace that I might continue to find solace and strength in the stream of Thy Love and Compassion.

Please give me your blessings for the year 1947 and obtain for me also, I pray Thee, the benediction of Our Lord

Udar

The Mother's reply

Indeed last year has given you the opportunity to being drawn much closer to us, and thus on many occasions we could appreciate fully your faithfulness and ability. In this regard we enter with full confidence the New Year which begins to-night.

With our love and blessings

The Mother

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Harpagon

The origin of the name is in itself interesting. This property, so near to the Ashram, had very little building on it and what was there was old and dilapidated, but Mother wanted it because of its position. The owner of the property, a very rich person, knew our need and so demanded a very high price and wouldn't budge from his demand. Finally Mother said to pay him his price but that She would name the property after the owner's nature and so She called it Harpagon. In French literature Harpagon is the name of the chief character in Molière's play *L'Avare* (The Miser).

The question of fitting up the asbestos cement louvres for Golconde came and for that a large number of brass fittings had to be made and thousands of brass bolts, nuts, etc. We needed a foundry, as the blade handles had to be cast to the special shape designed by the architects. It was for this that Mother gave to me for use the building known as Harpagon

Udar

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I had to make the bolts and nuts. Mother had given me a strict order that I should not alter a single line or specification fixed by the architects. Now in drawing the bolts I do not think they were conscious of being very accurate in showing the threads and just made a nice drawing. When I counted these threads I found that there were 5½ to the centimetre which is not standard at all. One can have 5 or 6 but 5½ is out. So what to do? Where could I get the taps and dies for this odd thread? And yet I was not to alter the architects' specification. So I finally decided to make our own taps and dies and this I did—very largely by hand and helped a great deal by Pavitra who had a lathe in his Atelier. I worked around 18 hours a day and did so much work with small files (without handles) that there grew a small hole in the palm of my right hand which is still there. It is my “glorious scar” of the Divine's work.

Udar

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I had been given some workmen, very good ones indeed, with a traditional competence, who turned their hands well to modern machine parts. The Mother gave me a large heap of old brass vessels which had to be broken down and melted and cast in the foundry and machined. I asked Her for some machines and She turned to Pavitra who was present and he said he could spare a hand drill. That is all the machine I started with. But Pavitra was indeed most helpful as he did all the machining work very, very well indeed in his Atelier in the Ashram main building.

Udar

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So that is how I came to be set up at Harpagon and put up a foundry there. This foundry has now been shifted to the Coco Garden. We made all the Golconde fittings at Harpagon, cast them in the foundry and hand-finished them in the adjacent shed.

Udar

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Mona and I joined the Ashram in 1937. The Golconde building was in process of being built at the time. So, even before it was finished, Mona and I have been associated with it. Mother gave charge of Golconde to Mona even then and she, with several ladies to help her, began to prepare the linen for the rooms and other things necessary. I was given the fine work of preparing the furniture.

Udar

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Then I told the Mother that I would need some money to buy certain tools etc. because when I joined the Ashram I had given all my money to the Mother as most sadhaks had done. She went into Her room and brought out one rupee which She gave to me, saying with a smile: "Here is the money." Though I was fairly new at the Ashram, I did not protest and understood at once what a great gift She was giving me and such a wonderful compliment.

It was a challenge and given by the Divine Mother to me who, She felt, could rise to it. Most foreign-trained engineers are desk workers and give orders. I had no desk and no one to give orders to and so had to do most of the work with my own hands—and with one glorious rupee from the Mother as a channel of Her Force into me.

Udar

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Later when the work for Golconde increased I felt that I needed some machines. Mother agreed but said She could not spare any money for this. All She could give was an allowance of Rs. 200/- per month. How to start a workshop on this small allowance? Nevertheless I did not press for more but accepted what She gave with joyful gratitude. Pavitra kindly gave me one small hand drill on a stand. All the others that were needed I made myself. Later I understood the wonderful gift Mother had given me—the challenge! It is not difficult to set up a nice workshop when one has enough money for it but Rs. 200/- a month is really a glorious challenge and I am so happy now that I took it up, even not understanding it at the moment, and succeeded. Having fulfilled the task She had set me is now a source of perpetual joy.

Udar

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All sorts of work were done at Harpagon and as the Ashram developed so its needs too increased and with that the activities at Harpagon. Panou-da was a big asset to Udar. Udar himself had trained him. He too loved challenges. He could work day and night if required and most of the time that was the case. Later on Sati-di also joined Harpagon.

Udar had already established the smithy, foundry, carpentry, fitter shop, machine shop, stone polishing section—all that was required for Golconde work and also stone repair work that was done before at Pavitra-da's Atelier (now Chum's office) was shifted there. As the residents increased so did the cycles and hence cycle repair was added at Harpagon.

With the starting of the Playground and Tennis Ground, the shoe-making and racket stringing also were taken up. Later, gymnastic equipment like parallel bars, uneven bars, horizontal bars, springboards, etc. as well as athletic equipment were made here. So with the starting of the Sports Ground—javelin, discus, hammer, shot put etc. were manufactured in Harpagon.

As Harpagon grew and they started taking orders from the public for business purposes, a Trust was formed 'Harpagon Workshop Trust' with Udar as sole Trustee, with all the profits going to the Ashram

Lilou

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Purchasing Department

As Udar had lived in the outside world and knew how to deal with the world of commerce, he became in-charge of the Purchase Department. Anything that needed to be bought in the Ashram was done through this department so that everything was centralised. Even things that needed to be repaired were brought to him. He was given the work of constructions too. Whenever there was anything Mother wanted to get done which was a bit complicated or new She often called Udar.

The Golden Chain

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In the mid-fifties in the Ashram, we had a centralised Purchasing Department. All the departments of the Ashram including Dispensary, Building Service, Electric Service, Furniture Department etc. had to route their purchases through Udar who was in charge of the Purchasing Department. The person in charge of his department would get Mother's sanction for his requirement and would pass it on to Udar who would order the material and after receiving it pass it on to the person concerned. This included also the imported material and equipment. Udar would get the licenses, open a Letter of Credit after receiving the Proforma invoices from the firms abroad and when the material arrived in India, arrange for the clearing of Customs, etc. All this and many

other things were done from his office with Wilfy and Lilou working with him.

Lilou

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Udar was the strong, solid backbone of various services he provided to the Mother and the sadhaks.

Ramraj

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Once a notice was put up in the Ashram that those interested to do extra work between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. could give their names either to Udar or Ravindra-ji. That was normally the resting time, but quite a few names came. I started working in Harpagon. This was then a new work. Sheets of plastic or rolls of sheets were bought and I used to make plastic covers for books or for anything whatsoever. This too I did for a pretty long time, quite a few years.

Lata

*

Plastic work started with making the book covers for the Deluxe edition of “The Mother”. This work, like some of the other, was done at night in the office. It was mainly the same batch that came for athletic groupings. Afterwards it became a regular work in our department.

Lilou

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(To be continued)

P. and G.

The ordinary life consists in work for personal aim and satisfaction of desire under some mental or moral control, touched sometimes by a mental ideal. The Gita's yoga consists in the offering of one's work as a sacrifice to the Divine, the conquest of desire, egoless and desireless action, bhakti for the Divine, an entering into the cosmic consciousness, the sense of unity with all creatures, oneness with the Divine. This yoga adds the bringing down of the supramental Light and Force (its ultimate aim) and the transformation of the nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 669)

STEPS TOWARDS FORMING A CONFEDERATION OF SOUTH ASIA

As stated in an earlier article, it is our firm conviction and belief that the partition of India will be undone by the sheer law of political forces. As a natural consequence many of the problems of the subcontinent will be resolved and this will ultimately lead towards the formation of a confederation of South Asia. This confederation will comprise all the SAARC countries, including Afghanistan and Myanmar.

We believe that this step will not only bring peace, harmony and economic growth to the region, but also be a major step in ushering in world unity based on a durable peace, justice and equality in the world. India can play her true and destined role only after this event takes place and this can happen only when the first step is taken, that is to say the partition of the two nations, India and Pakistan, is undone. This can be done by stages and in a gradual way.

The question that arises is whether this denouement will take place by the cooperation of the human agencies, that is to say the peoples and Governments of India and Pakistan and all the other nations of the subcontinent or, alternatively, will it need painful and crushing circumstances to bring this about?

We shall try to see in this article the steps and the process that could be taken by the different Governments in the region, and more particularly by the Government and the people of India that will lead to a peaceful and harmonious way of bringing about this reconciliation and fulfil the Divine plan.

Steps to be taken

The first step in this process is to establish friendly relations with Pakistan, then to move towards union and finally to move towards a confederation of South Asia.

What will be the methods of moving towards this goal? In the words of Sri Aurobindo, it has to be done

...by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 476)

The questions that naturally arise are, what are the conditions that we need to create both on the psychological and practical levels to bring about this fulfilment.

The steps mentioned by Sri Aurobindo are clear: the slackening of tension, a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, the constant necessity of common and concerted action and finally an instrument of union for that purpose.

The Hindu-Muslim problem

But as should be evident, the first problem that needs to be resolved is the Hindu-Muslim problem and that needs to be taken up urgently. For this to happen, it must be made absolutely clear that Hindu-Muslim unity is not possible unless India-Pakistan relations improve radically; the two are intimately interlinked. It is hoped that the present attempt to bring about a thaw in Indo-Pak relations will be carried forward to its logical conclusion. That conclusion will be that the State of Pakistan merges with India and once more becomes an indivisible part of India. For the very existence and foundation of Pakistan is that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together. It was on that basis that Pakistan was created. However, the history of the last 60 years has shown how unstable Pakistan is and the simple reason for this is the falsehood of the basic premise on which Pakistan is built. As a matter of fact, there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan and they are living a life of dignity and harmony with the rest of the country. It follows that steps have to be taken to establish a working and harmonious relation with Pakistan. This will lead automatically to discovering the means of a greater harmony between the two religions of Hinduism and Islam and finally between all religions. But it is evident and must always be kept in mind that all this cannot happen overnight; it needs a long psychological preparation and some practical steps on the external plane. We will have to start by becoming good neighbours and live peacefully. This will ultimately and inevitably lead to the creation of a united nation. What then are the steps to be taken towards Pakistan and what should the policy be?

Steps to be taken towards Pakistan

Our policy should base itself on the following planks:

It seems that one of the chief obstacles to unity in the subcontinent is the Pakistan Army and its sister establishment, the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). The first step would be, therefore, to reduce the influence of the military in Pakistan. This can be done by strongly supporting the return of genuine democracy in Pakistan. It must be remembered that a genuine and true democracy means the respect of constitutionalism, rule of law, popular sovereignty and representative Government.

Pakistan needs an 'all-encompassing formula' for stability. Every important political force should be on board for a fair and free election in Pakistan.

For in a democracy, the Governments are obliged to respond to the basic needs of the people, and that will inevitably put pressure on large military budgets. And this

is what the Government of India must encourage by supporting the political forces that want democracy to be established in Pakistan.

Second, constituencies in Pakistan whose livelihood and prosperity depend upon good relations with India should be nurtured. That will mean that we have to develop the growing trade relations between India and Pakistan. In this, India should take the initiative. The example of West Germany is a living testimony to this approach. We should not allow the initiative to rest with Pakistan. A probable step in this direction could be to declare a unilateral freeing of trade.

Third, we should help the secular-minded people in Pakistan to come closer to us—through people-to-people and professional contacts, by throwing open opportunities for education and training, and cultural activities. The disillusionment of the middle class with the failure of Pakistan can play an important role in turning the tide in favour of India.

This is evidently already happening in Pakistan as can be seen from this extract in an article written by Kuldip Nayar in *The Deccan Chronicle* dated 10 September 2007.

The message of universal peace attracted 65 of us, including eight MPs, from India to Bullshah's mazaar (grave). Although eventually buried at a place some eight kilometres from Kasur, the mazaar is now in the heart of the city. This was the people's catharsis for their prejudice and bigotry. They themselves moved their homes and shops to the mazaar. It was partly his message and partly the desire to have friendly relations with India that made nearly the entire population of Kasur come out on the streets to welcome us. It was a tumultuous reception. Rose petals were showered on us all the way to the mazaar. We were loaded with garlands. "India-Pakistan dosti zindabad," was the slogan that went up. Subsequently, at a large meeting the entire gathering raised hands in response to a question posed by Manzur Ali, a local MP: How many would like to visit India?

Fourth, on the political plane we must deepen our relations and understanding with the United States, Russia, China, as well as the neighbouring countries that see Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to the stability of their societies. Obviously, this is a large agenda and it requires a steady purpose and time to fructify. But above all, it needs a national consensus covering all parties, with secularism, economic success, and a strong national defence as the underpinnings of our future. We must set out therefore in building this consensus among all political parties and religious groups.

Finally, and most important, we must reinterpret all the religions practised in India—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and all the others—at a deeper level. The time has come when we have to begin to consider seriously what they all really mean and are in their soul, that is to say, in their very reality and essence. Once that is done, we

shall realise that in their spiritual core there are no real irreconcilable differences. This will be the first step towards going beyond religion and making spirituality the driving force of all life.

We shall take up each of these separately and try to see the conditions that need to be created for their fulfilment.

Slackening of tension

The slackening of tension is possible only after we address the root causes of the tension. What then are the causes of tension? The root cause of the tension is the premise that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together. With Partition, the two communities—Muslims and Hindus—that had lived together for hundreds of years were divided. As a result, a foundation of hatred was laid in the region, a foundation that has consequences even today. The history of the last 60 years in India has proved that Hindus and Muslims can and are indeed living together more or less harmoniously. It is true that there are tensions among the two communities but in most cases they have their root outside India, emanating mainly from the neighbouring countries.

However, the problem remains and we shall now try to find out the steps to resolve this problem. The true and final solution lies in going beyond religion into spirituality. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer, Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult egoism stand in the way.

All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind. For that there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all-comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution.

(CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 211)

The question is whether we can put forward this solution to the nation and more particularly to the political parties and the masses, or is it premature? For politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to move from religion to spirituality at this stage might seem premature. For while the highest spirituality moves in a free and wide air far above that stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma, man does not arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation and, if it were demanded of him at once, he would never

arrive there. At first he needs lower supports and stages of ascent; he asks for some scaffolding of dogma, worship, image, sign, form, symbol, some indulgence and permission of mixed half-natural motives on which he can stand while he builds up in himself the temple of the spirit. Only when the temple is completed, can the supports be removed, the scaffolding disappear.

On the other hand, there are suggestions in some quarters that we should abandon religion and give it up completely. But in the subcontinent and especially in a country like India, it is not possible to eliminate religion. It is too deep-rooted in the psyche of the people and is a powerful motivating force. Therefore one has to find other means to solve the problem. That solution is to graduate from religion to spirituality, to bring an awareness in the nation that religion is only the first step and that we must move towards spirituality.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when he was active in politics, Sri Aurobindo had written:

Of one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Mahomedan unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down, in the heart and in the mind, for where the causes of disunion are, there the remedies must be sought. We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Musulman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. We believe this to be the only practical way of dealing with the difficulty. As a political question the Hindu-Mahomedan problem does not interest us at all, as a national problem it is of supreme importance. We shall make it a main part of our work to place Mahomed and Islam in a new light before our readers, to spread juster views of Mahomedan history and civilisation, to appreciate the Musulman's place in our national development and the means of harmonising his communal life with our own, not ignoring the difficulties that stand in our way but making the most of the possibilities of brotherhood and mutual understanding. Intellectual sympathy can only draw together, the sympathy of the heart can alone unite. But the one is a good preparation for the other.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 31)

Let us see what can be done in the light of this statement.

The first thing to be clearly understood is that it is not by political means that any understanding or harmony can be brought about. It is not by reservations or vote-

bank politics that any true understanding will take place. For this is not a political issue and these steps only divide the communities further. It must be emphasised that this is not a political problem; rather it is a national problem and has to be treated as such with as little interference as possible from the political class.

All misunderstandings between the religious communities should be removed and the one way to do this is by a continued discussion and dialogue among the leaders of the different communities. Regular meetings should be held among the religious leaders of different communities to find out the common points in the religions and stress on them; as for the differences, they can be sorted out by dialogue. For it is in the interest of all the religious communities to create an atmosphere of harmony and goodwill in the nation.

In this context, it is being suggested that a Central University be created to study all the religions in the subcontinent and the world; this can be a forum for a deep study of the essence of all the religions and leading to their final integration. Scholars from all over the world may be invited to teach in the University thus creating the platform for a new age which goes beyond religion to culminate into an integral spirituality. It is to be noted that the age of religions is coming to an end and we are at the beginning of an age where spirituality will prevail; and this spirituality will be all-embracing and will include all life in its fold. Let us prepare and work for the advent of the new Age.

In this context, a good example is India's own history of the Sufi movement. One might say that it was India's first strong experiment in recent times to see how far the spiritual force can unite even extremely diverse groups such as the Hindu and Musulman, diverse not only in language, customs, traditions and beliefs, but also in temperamental cast of the inner being. One comes from a large spiritual calm, and richly complex refreshingly rejuvenating spiritual striving of the Hindu, the other is born of a fiery and passionate spirit of an exclusive religious outlook, full of zeal and aggressive energy. Yet, the Sufi mystics found no contradictions in this and easily reconciled the two. The Kashmir problem could be solved by encouraging the Sufi tradition to grow there. It will inevitably bring about a reconciliation of the Hindus and Muslims; the temptation to strive for a political solution has to be forgone once and for all. Handing over a part or the whole Kashmir to Pakistan will only encourage the perverse two-nation theory and that will not be good for either of the two nations.

Another point to note is that one of the characteristics of Indian culture down the ages is its power of assimilation. When one studies Indian history it will be noted that India has assimilated elements from all those who invaded the country, be it the Greeks, the Persians or others. But she assimilates when her Central Truth is recognised by the other party, and even while assimilating, she does it in such a way that the elements absorbed are no longer recognisable as foreign but become part of herself. Instances of this are what we took from the Greek architecture, from the Persian painting.

However, after the advent of the Muslim civilisation into India, a new problem was created which came in the way of a complete assimilation and a politically united India. This was the clash of two civilisations and religions. The real problem introduced by the Muslim conquest was not that of subjection to a foreign rule and the ability to recover freedom, but the struggle between two civilisations, one ancient and indigenous, the other mediaeval and brought in from outside. That which apparently rendered the problem insoluble was the attachment of each to a powerful religion, the one militant and aggressive, the other spiritually tolerant indeed and flexible, but obstinately faithful in its discipline to its own principle and confined behind a barrier of social forms. There are two conceivable solutions,—one is the rise of a greater spiritual principle and formation which could reconcile the two religions and the second is a political patriotism surmounting the religious struggle and uniting the two communities.

During the freedom struggle an attempt was made to create this political patriotism and feeling of nationalism; it was partially successful but in the end religious intolerance and mistrust took over and the result was the partition of the country.

Regarding the process of assimilation, Sri Aurobindo says:

The assimilation of the Mahomedan culture also was done in the mind to a great extent and it would have perhaps gone further. But in order that the process may be complete it is necessary that a change in the Mahomedan mentality should come. The conflict is in the outer life and unless the Mahomedans learn tolerance I do not think the assimilation is possible.

The Hindu is ready to tolerate. He is open to new ideas and his culture has got a wonderful capacity for assimilation, but always provided that her Central Truth is recognised.

(A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, p. 282)

We present here a passage from a well-known writer, Nolini Kanta Gupta on what makes a nation:

Common love, common labour and above all, as the great French thinker Ernest Renan, pointed out—common suffering, that is the cement which welds together the disparate elements of a nation—a nation is not formed otherwise. A nation means peoples differing in race and religion, caste and creed and even language, fused together into a composite but indivisible unit. Not pact or balancing of interests nor sharing of power can permanently combine and unify conflicting groups and collectivities. Hindus and Muslims, the two major sections that are at loggerheads today in India, must be given a field, indeed more than one field where they can work together; they must be made to come in contact with each other, to coalesce and dovetail into each other in as many ways and directions as

possible. Instead of keeping them separate in water-tight compartments, in barred cages, as it were, lest they pounce upon each other like wild beasts, it would be wiser to throw them together; let them breathe the same air, live the same life, share the same troubles, the same difficulties, solve the same problems. That is how they will best understand, appreciate, and even love each other, become comrades and companions, not rivals and opponents.

To have union, one must unite—division can never lead to unity. Also this unity is established automatically and irrevocably, not by any abstract sense of justice and equality, nor by any romantic or imaginative feeling of fraternity, but by a dynamic *living together*. A common political and civic and economic life creates a field of force that can draw together into a harmonious working the most contrary and refractory elements.

(Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 94-5)

Let us find out more and more areas where we can all work together, irrespective of religion, caste or creed and share our lives as Indians, first and always. It is not by reservations but working together that understanding and trust can be built. A wonderful example of this is the Armed Forces in India, for they are a living example of this unity and national integration in the nation. It will not be out of place to take into account some remarks made by the Mother regarding the Indian Army. In a certain situation that arose in 1967, She felt it necessary to send a message to the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. After a Central Minister who had come to see the Mother had left for Delhi, the Mother sent someone with an urgent message:

So I had to send someone immediately to tell her, “For heaven’s sake, support the army.” It’s India’s only hope.

(*From a conversation of 19 April 1969*)

It will therefore be worthwhile to make a detailed study of the working and training in the Armed Forces and incorporate whatever is possible into the mainstream of the national life. Some of the qualities which are strongly present there can be usefully incorporated into the national life. These are discipline, courage, team spirit, professionalism, secularism and patriotism.

It is now high time to attempt the solution of the problem on both these lines, that is to say, firstly, to create a nationalism that unites the whole nation going beyond religion, caste and creed and secondly, to take steps to move and graduate from religion to spirituality.

The institution of SAARC is itself a first step and opportunity in this direction and this forum can be used to create patriotism on both political and economic lines. It must be also emphasised strongly that there is already an underlying unity between the nations of SAARC. This unity is geographical, economic, cultural and spiritual.

We must stress on these aspects and take advantage and work on them in building a confederation of South Asia.

As for religion, we shall quote this passage from the Mother to illustrate the solution:

Instead of taking these religions in their outward forms which are precisely dogmas and intellectual conceptions, if we take them in their spirit, in the principle they represent, there is no difficulty in unifying them. They are simply different aspects of human progress which complete each other perfectly well and should be united with many others yet to form a more total and more complete progress, ...a more integral approach to the Divine.

(CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 77-78)

However, all this needs a preparation and these ideas and concepts must be introduced in the education system, in the schools and colleges. Some time in the 1960s the Mother gave the following messages to the Government of India:

I would like them (the Government) to recognise Yoga as education,... [because] it will be good for the country.

Matter will be transformed, that will be a solid base. Life will be divinised. Let India take the lead.

(CWM, Vol. 12, p. 252)

And again:

India has or rather *had* the knowledge of the Spirit, but she neglected matter and suffered for it.

The West has the knowledge of matter but rejected the Spirit and suffers badly for it.

An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised.

(*Ibid.*, p. 249)

As stated earlier, to pursue this to its logical conclusion, we have to set up institutions which will make a detailed study of all religions in their deeper meaning and bring about a reconciliation of all religions. More, it has to lead to the generalisation of Yoga, which is a practical way of attaining to the spiritual consciousness. **Yoga has to be generalised.**

This is the line of thought and action that the political leaders and more particularly the religious heads of the two communities should stress. If this is done with sincerity

and persistence, it should be possible to create the conditions for the emergence of a great synthesis of all the religions and thus open the way for a true spiritual flowering of India and eventually of the world.

Finally, as a first practical step some suggestions are being made which could be implemented immediately.

- Ensure that a uniform civil law is put in place. This has to be done by a detailed discussion with all the communities.
- Eliminate the policy of reservations by gradual steps. There should be no reservations based on caste or religion. The only reservations made should be for the economically handicapped and the physically handicapped.
- Stop all religious conversions. Let each citizen of India follow his own religion without hindrance. Why should there be conversions at all? What is the motivation behind most conversions? It is the belief that my religion is the only true religion and my God is the only saviour of humanity. This is not a policy of harmony and tolerance but a blueprint for disharmony and conflict. What ultimately happens when someone who has that attitude comes into a community and converts people? People are taught to reject their ancestors and their traditions. Families are broken up. Division and conflict almost inevitably occur wherever this missionary business goes on. Therefore stop all conversion.
- Create a Central University and institutions with the purpose of studying, integrating, harmonising and synthesising all religions.

If these steps are pursued sincerely and steadfastly, there will inevitably come about a deep psychological unity leading to a confederation of India, which will include all the countries of the subcontinent. This will be the natural and final outcome and culminate in a lasting and durable political unification.

The need to move towards a confederation of India

The Mother had remarked:

[Certain events were] set in motion by and under the impulsion of the forces of Truth that wanted to create a great “Asian Federation”.... It was a federation that, as a matter of fact, needed the return of Pakistan and all those regions, and which includes Nepal, Tibet, also Burma, and in the south, Ceylon. A great federation with each country having its autonomous development, perfectly free, but which would be united in a common single aspiration for peace and fight against the invasion of the forces of dissolution. That was very clear, it was willed...

(From a conversation of September 21, 1966)

As these steps are taken and a sense of unity begins to prevail in the subcontinent, there will result a movement towards creating a confederation. This confederation will include all the States within SAARC and at a later stage could even include Afghanistan and Myanmar. However, certain conditions have to be kept in mind and scrupulously fulfilled. The first condition is that the Indian Government must scrupulously respect the free internal life and will, the social, cultural, economic tendencies of the sub-nations while giving them an equal part with herself in the management of the great common questions of the confederation. India herself can be nothing more than a clamp and nodus of this new type of aggregate. Given this orientation nothing short of some unforeseen cataclysm can prevent the formation of a true and living confederation of South Asia.

This is at least the hope and dream that we cherish. Time alone will show how and when this will become a reality.

KITTU REDDY

India Renascent

The patriot who passes judgment on a great movement in an era of change and turmoil, should be very confident that he has something worth saying before he ventures to speak; but if he can really put some new aspect on a momentous question or emphasize any side of it that has not been clearly understood, it [is] his bounden duty however obscure he may be to ventilate [it.]

The commonplace that India is in transition has of late been strongly impressed on us by certain English empiricists; they have devoted whole articles and pamphlets to marshal proofs and enumerate instances in support of this proposition

It is time that an Indian who has devoted his best thoughts and aspirations to the service of his country, should have in his turn a patient hearing

India is indeed a snake who has rejected her outworn winter weeds

Sri Aurobindo

(Jottings from a notebook used by Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge in 1891 and 1892.)

(Bande Mataram, CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 3)

THE STORY OF GOLCONDE

(Continued from the issue of November 2007)

5

Golconde, the building

THE building is reported to have started on October 10, 1937 and it was almost finished in 1948.

Regarding “the genesis of the name Golconde,” Udar said:

To set up such a large building required quite a lot of money and, in those days, much money was not available. So the Mother spoke to Sir Akbar Hydari about it, and as he was the Dewan to the Nizam of Hyderabad he was able to get from the Nizam a donation of one lakh of rupees for this building... Now because the first money came from Hyderabad, the Mother wanted to give a name to the building which had some connection with Hyderabad and so she chose the name Golconde, the French rendering of Golconda, the famous [diamond] mine in [erstwhile] Hyderabad [State]. (*Mother India*, January, 1990, p. 13)

In March 1935, a plot situated at the corner of the present Manakkula Vinayakar Street and Dupuy Street was purchased by the Ashram. The total area measured about 2524 sq. meters. There was a house in brick, whose door opened to the then Orleans Street—at present Manakkula Vinayakar Street. Apart from the building there were other outlying small structures and sheds, all in a ruined state. Again in March 1938, some brick sheds on the western side of the plot and a vacant place, bordering the Gingee Salai, were also purchased. The door of this area opened onto Dupuy Street.

In the first building a few artists of the Ashram had put up an exhibition of their paintings. The Mother had come to see it. This building was demolished for the construction of Golconde. Before the construction of Golconde started, the open area was used by some younger Ashramites for their exercises, running and competitions.

The area available was quite small for the construction of a building of any large size. Nevertheless, Raymond took up the challenge. The length of the land lay from east to west which suited him very well, and he designed the building oriented very strictly east to west, with all the openings only on the north and south, and he designed it in such a manner that both faces should be openable fully, so that it could get the fullest possible current of air which is south to north in summer and north to south in winter. He also arranged that the sunlight should not enter any room directly and

bring its heat directly with it. So the rooms are always cool and do not need any fans.

Golconde is built in three parts: East, West and the middle portion. Little gaps are left in between these parts which are covered with copper plates. This is to avoid cracks due to heat. Golconde is also earthquake proof and is provided with lightning conductors.

The plan of the building was strikingly simple. Its two long staggered wings are set at an angle on the narrow plot, thereby making the most of rather limited space. Each wing consists of a series of single rooms that are strung out along a north-facing gallery, which runs the length of the building. On both the north and south sides, the entire building surface is equipped with operable louvres.

The body of the building is of reinforced concrete, left natural except for the white plaster on the end blank walls. The building achieves the architectural distinction by thorough integration of plan, structure, and final design. The fundamental principles of architecture—simplicity, economy, directness and closeness to nature—were consciously and consistently observed. ...

Apart from an architectural model, a full-scale prototype room was made before starting the actual construction. The execution of the building left nothing to chance. A laboratory was set up for testing cement, aggregates, sand grading and test blocks of concrete etc. (in pre-standardisation days). A workshop was set up to custom build all fittings required in copper, bronze and brass. A machine was designed to cut large size cuddapah stone tiles for the floor.

(*GOLCONDE*—monograph by SAARIC)

The Inspiration, Force and Guidance...

We get the following observation from Mrityunjay's reminiscences:

During the approximately eight years (1937-1945) of the construction work many building-specialists, engineers, contractors, architects, from India and abroad came to visit the site. Always they were struck by the sincerity and one-pointedness of the work, and the singular harmony and cheerfulness of the workers. They could not but be convinced that '**something else**' was behind that performance...

We have collected here a few incidents which, according to us, highlight that '*something else*' behind the performance.

First of all, this venture was conceived by the Mother. As Sri Aurobindo said:

In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others.

Mrityunjoy writes:

It required a supreme boldness on the part of the Mother to push through her idea, knowing very well the limited and obscure conditions in which it had to be worked out—through an inexperienced engineer (Chandulal), a handful of assistants with little or no technical training, and a few unskilled labourers who had never even seen a reinforced concrete building, let alone worked on constructing one.

Antonin Raymond perceived this unusual presence and help behind this work. He remarked:

...Under the invisible guidance of the leaders of the Ashram, whose presence was always felt, to whom all was reported, whose concern was the spiritual growth of each member of the community, I achieved the best architecture of my career. Golconde, the dormitory was called....

Mother was interested in every detail of the work. Even in the outward aspect of the work Her light was guiding in all matters of administration as well as construction.

Agnes Sammer remembers her husband François telling her of the Mother's advice:

Don't consider the amount of money or the length of time: I want a good building. It was the first time in his life he had heard this from a client.

Time and again one realised that this '*something else*' was not only an invisible guidance.

George Nakashima, while preparing the one room model with Chandulal had this to say:

We talked everything over with Mother. She was interested in all the details. She had an amazing knowledge of what we were doing and what was going on with the construction principles. She took my design and recommendations and gave her opinion. But, as far as the construction and final design was concerned she left it pretty much to me.

Mrityunjoy noted:

Once there was a technical problem which could not be solved by the group of engineers present: Pavitra, Chandulal and the architects Sammer and Nakashima. After long fruitless arguments, Pavitra suggested that they should present the

problem to the Mother and see what suggestion she could offer. Sammer said, "But we can't disturb her with a matter of this kind. It is for us to solve it. She has no training in engineering." Pavitra replied, "You'll see. Come, let's go." The Mother received them at once and listened attentively to their explanations of the difficulty. After a few moments of silence she said, "Can it be done this way.....?" and described a solution which they all agreed was the only reasonable and usable one. Sammer, an atheist and materialist, deeply moved, reported to his wife "I have just witnessed a miracle."

Often various difficulties, technical, financial or human, cropped up. Mrityunjy remarks:

...In these circumstances the Mother showed the Light: not to calculate in human terms but to leave it to the Divine and work for Him only, without considering anything else. The wonder is that these materialistic architects understood it. The Mother was preparing them by giving regular interviews but the fact that they accepted those uncertain financial conditions justifies Mr. Raymond's words: "Not only was the life in this Indian monastery the revelation of another way of life, but the conditions under which the work of the building was done were so remarkable when compared to those we had known in the materially bewildered world, that we lived as in a dream."

Khirod-da used to work in the Ashram Building Service. When Golconde was being constructed, the Second World War broke out, making it difficult for any major project to continue smoothly because all material was being diverted to War efforts all over the British Empire. At such a critical juncture the building team of Golconde faced an acute shortage of cement. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were appraised of the situation. Khirod-da went to the Mother a few times to repeatedly tell Her about the shortage of cement. Soon he became impatient and once again impressed upon the Mother that there was 'no cement'. The Mother sensed his impatience and gravely looked at him and simply said, "**You men of little faith.**" Hearing this Khirod-da quietly came downstairs full of remorse! Soon after that, as he turned the corner of the 'Balcony Road' near the dispensary, he was surprised to see a lorry going towards the front of the Ashram Gate. Then another lorry, and another one and many more lorries followed the first one! They were all carrying cement bags to the cement storage area.

When Golconde was built it was felt that apart from the town supply of water, more water could be needed. As per the Mother's instruction a well was dug on the spot indicated by Her. This is an artesian well from which crystal clear water flows continually.

Here is another example of the Mother's action: Sadhaks who worked in

Golconde at that time have recounted how during their work if there was the probability of rain which could have spoilt their concreting work, they would rush to the Mother and tell Her about it. She would reassure them and ask them to continue their work.

Nirodbaran writes in *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*:

...the construction of Golconde. I am not going to enter into an elaborate description of its development. Considering that our resources in men and money were then limited, how such a magnificent building was erected is a wonder. An American architect with his Japanese and Czechoslovakian assistants foregathered. Old buildings were demolished, our sadhaks along with the paid workers laboured night and day and as if from a void, the spectacular mansion rose silently and slowly like a giant in the air. It is a story hardly believable for Pondicherry of those days. But my wonder was the part the Mother played in it, not inwardly which is beyond my depth but in the daylight itself. She was in constant touch with the work through her chosen instruments. As many sadhaks as possible were pressed into service there; to anyone young or old asking for work, part time, whole time, her one cry: "Go to Golconde, go to Golconde." It was one of her daily topics with Sri Aurobindo who was kept informed of the difficulties, troubles innumerable, and at the same time, of the need of his force to surmount them. Particularly when rain threatened to impede or spoil some important part of the work, she would invoke his special help; when for instance, the roof was to be built. How often we heard her praying to Sri Aurobindo, "Lord, there should be no rain now." Menacing clouds had mustered strong; stormy west winds blowing ominously; rain imminent; and torrential Pondicherry rain! We would look at the sky and speculate on the result of the fight between the Divine Force and the natural force. The Divine Force would of course win: slowly the Fury would leash her forces and withdraw into the cave. But as soon as the intended object was achieved, a deluge swept down as if in revenge... During the roof-construction, work had to go on all night long and the Mother would mobilise and marshal all the available Ashram hands and put them there. With what cheer and ardour our youth jumped into the fray at the call of the Mother, using often Sri Aurobindo's name to put more love and zeal into the strenuous enterprise....

And that is how this beautiful structure came into being on the physical plane.

(Concluded)

CHITRA SEN

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of November 2007)

19. Embroidering Bhakti in Verse

THE gusts of devotion that overwhelm the mystic cannot be sustained for long and so it is difficult to come across sublime epics in this genre. Intense devotees could take up writing long poems as part of their personal sadhana, adoring the Supreme, but rarely are they masters of Tamil poesy. After Kamban Tamil poesy reverted to its style of presenting brief pellets of mystic at-one-ment, or garlands of verses in different metres. But three epics of later centuries which have retained their hold on popular enthusiasm till today are Kachiappa Sivachariar's *Kanda Puranam*, Sevvai Chooduvar's *Bhagavatham* and Villiputturar's *Bharatham*.

Kachiappar's time is not known and he has been placed anywhere between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The epic is based on the relevant portions in the Sanskrit work, *Skandham*, which deal with the legends concerning Subrahmanya. The *Kanda Puranam* presents the Vedic pantheon in detail. The canto on 'Kumara Sambhavam' in Valmiki's *Ramayana* had inspired numerous epics and epyllions beginning with Kalidasa's classic, *Kumara Sambhavam*. The marriage of Shiva and Parvati gave an opportunity to spread Shaivism in a big way through an exhaustive recordation and it is so with Kachiappar's epic too:

The sun and the moon held umbrellas;
Vayu moved the whisk; Varuna
Held up the smaller circular-insignia;
Indra raised the larger one.
Standing beside Shiva they served
The immense love.
The demon-heroes sounded
Various drums: bheri, kokkara,
Sallari, Karatika, peeli,
Udukka circular on the sides,
Maddala, kutamula, thatari,
Kahala which is battle-famous,
Giant flutes, all of them
Noble instruments of music.¹

This juxtaposition of Vedic deities and contemporary instruments of culture went

1. *Kanda Puranam*, verses 759-760. All translations from Tamil are by Prema Nandakumar.

well with the audience which came in large numbers to listen to the exposition of *Kanda Puranam*. The epic is also the first of the Puranas to highlight the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta. It is generally held that Kamban's *Ramayana* was Kachiappan's inspiration. It may be mentioned here that *Kanda Puranam* itself became the inspiration for Koteeswara Iyer to write the *Kanda Purana Keerthanaikal* in the last century which has continued to hold a high place in Tamil devotional poetry.

Sevvai Chooduvar's *Bhagavatam* is a transcreation of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata*. Sevvai Chooduvar's work also has twelve Books which contain 4973 verses. The familiar legends are all there: Dhruva, King Prithu, Prachina Barhi and the Narasimha incarnation. The Krishna incarnation comes to an end at the close of the eleventh Skandha. In the final Skandha we have the Uddhava Gita. The description of the Kali Age does sound contemporaneous, not unlike the canto, 'The Descent into Night' in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. This is *Sevvai Chooduvar*:

The rulers of the Kali Age
Will not be ashamed of acting
In immoral ways. People will suffer
From sicknesses, thieves and poverty.
Giving precedence to negligible jobs
They will gain only disquiet of the mind.

Nor will people in this Age
Have self-control over their desires.
There will be a gradual weakening
Of noble qualities like grace,
Patience, holiness, life span, physical strength,
Good intelligence and dharma.²

Sevvai Chooduvar lavishes his best on the Krishna incarnation. His Tamil becomes musical and moving when he begins to write about the flute-playing in Brindavan, and familiar scenes are once again touched by the poet in ecstatic self-abandonment:

Elephants that drip rut like rain
The lions, tigers and droves of deer
Forgot their mutual enmity
Once they heard the flute's call.
Lost in the folds of music,
They stood like painted pictures
Gazing at the noble figure of Krishna.

2. Book XII, verses 4725, 4726.

The rivers that heard the flute play
 By the Prime Significance of the Vedas
 Became pure like Ganges, saluted his feet
 And streamed forth. Their waves that touched
 Krishna's lotus-feet grew wholesome....

Saraswati, consort of lotus-born Brahma
 Left him to come down and dance
 To Krishna's music. Listening to the sounds
 Of the flute, Indra who was in Karpaka garden
 Shed tears from his thousand eyes.³

Sevvai Chooduvar reminds one of Perialwar when he describes the cow and the calf that have forgotten to eat the grass in their mouths while listening to the sounds of Krishna's flute. Another version of the *Bhagavata* in Tamil was by Varadaraja Iyengar, known familiarly as Arulaladasar. What is unique about this *Bhagavata* version is the detailed exposition of Nappinnai's history. Just as Radha is associated with Krishna in North India, in the South, it is Nappinnai who rises before us when we think of the consorts of Krishna. The Purana is a retelling of Krishna subduing the seven wild bulls of Yashodha's brother Kumbhaka and marrying his daughter Nappinnai, a legend which has been in the fond memories of Tamil devotees from immemorial times. Whatever the Purana, these works were helpful to the common man to remember the Divine all the time and offer his services to Krishna, thus keeping the Bhakti Movement strong. These versions of the *Bhagavata* and Kamban's *Ramayana* were to inspire dramatic songs like *Bhagavata Dasamaskandha Keerthanaikal* by Anantha Bharati and *Rama Nataka Keerthanaikal* by Arunachala Kavirayar. The songs became staple food for Kathakalakshepams that spread bhakti into the remotest corners of Tamil land.

Villiputturar's *Bharatham*, again, was a retelling of Vyasa's epic, and has remained a subject for popular discourses on the need for devotion in one's life. Villiputturar has confessed that he wrote the work as it afforded him a chance to speak of Krishna's greatness repeatedly. For instance, when Duryodhana pleads with Kāla Māmuni to perform an *abhichara homa* to destroy the Pandavas, Karna adds: "If the Five continue to live, they will ask for the earth again as it has been released from the effects of the dice game. If you can perform a *homa* to kill them in ways the enemies do not know of, you would have gifted this seven-islanded earth to the snake-bannered Kuru." But the sage shudders at their contemplation of such a terrible act and replies:

3. Book X, canto 8, verses 2904, 2905, 2908.

One who wears anklets! Even if I perform this homa
 To send the Pandavas to Death's regions above,
 Will the imperishable Pandavas die?
 The evil work if I begin listening to your command,
 Will only destroy me and will not affect the Pandavas
 Who are victorious lions. They have Mayavan⁴ with them.
 To assent to your request who wants to own the earth
 So vast, I will have to die as those who commit suicide
 By consuming poison. This alone will be the result.⁵

In the post-Kamban period, the poets began to look at prosodic novelties increasingly. Where the original inspiration was very intense, the devotional element was well sustained in the poetry that was written. But where it was not, novelty alone ruled. There is a huge mass of devotional poetry written between the 14th and 18th centuries which are cited by the devout but have not illumined the public imagination in a big way. Here too there are exceptions like the poet Pillai Perumal Iyengar who had an intense devotion for the Lord while remaining a master of Tamil prosody and poetics.

Pillai Perumal Iyengar's *Ashta Prabandham* (Eight Books) is held in high reverence by Vaishnavites in particular. These eight works are constantly related to the *pasurams* of the Alvars and the Manipravala commentaries on the hymns of the Alvars. Referred to as the Divyakavi (the Holy Poet), Iyengar was born as Alakiya Manavaladasa in the village of Tirumangai in a Srivaishnavite family. He mastered early the Sanskrit and Tamil works considered vital for an understanding of Vaishnavism. As a young man he was in the service of the local chieftain. One day when he was at work, he suddenly began to crush his upper garment saying, "Krishna, Krishna." On being questioned by his colleagues, he replied that he had realised that the chariot of Ranganatha in distant Srirangam had caught fire, and he was trying to put it out. Later on, this was found to be true and people of Srirangam had actually seen someone not belonging to their place putting out the fire with his upper garment. The chieftain was overawed by Iyengar's bhakti and settled him in Srirangam itself.

Owing to his intense devotion for Lord Ranganatha, Iyengar never seems to have sung in praise of the presiding deities of other Vaishnava temples. Hagiology tells us that Pillai Perumal Iyengar was so devoted to Ranganatha that he would not sing of any other god, even if it be but another form of the same Paramapurusha. Even when the Lord appeared in his dream and asked him to sing of Venkateswara, Iyengar is said to have replied that having decided to sing of Arangan (Ranganatha) he would not care to praise another Kurangan (One who lives with monkeys). This

4. Krishna

5. *Aranya Parvam*, canto 8, verses 9 & 10.

was an obvious reference to the Tirumala Hill which has a rich population of monkeys. We are told that this *apachāra* led to a severe colic and only when Iyengar realised his folly, he sang *Tiruvengadathu Antadi* and *Tiruvengada Malai* and was cured of the malady.

When he was attacked by colic, he understood that no narrow walls separated the world of devotion. Henceforth he sang about Venkateswara of Tirupati and Sundararaja Perumal of Tirumaliruncholai. There is even a garland of verses by him on the 108 Divya Desas (holy spots) of pilgrimage hailed by Vaishnavas. An effortless composer of lyrics, Iyengar has also written a disputational work called *Parabrahma Vivekam*.

Each of Iyengar's verses invariably streams forth four major rasas and hence they are the connoisseur's delight:

1. The mythological background of Indian culture
2. The literary antecedents (Sangam poetry, Alvars, Kamban)
3. Tamil diction
4. Prosodic variety

For instance, the commentators have pointed out that though composed of independent verses, there is a steady progression in the argument of *Tiruvengadathu Antadi*. The first eight verses praise Venkateswara as the Uttama Purusha. The Lord gives darshan in a vision but withdraws immediately. Finding no response to his cries, Iyengar (like Nammalwar, Tirumangai Alwar and Kulasekhara) puts on the feminine garb in spirit while composing the ninth verse:

Lord Venkateswara who rests
In the wavy ocean, the banyan leaf,
In the holy Ananthapuram
And Srirangam beloved of devotees!
In this evening that rivals the complexion
Of the rakshasas, my daughter
Who is like a lonely creeper will not
Bear it, if the anril bird tweets but once.
Have a look and grant her grace.

Now follows a meandering structure of *nayaka-nayaki* moods full of aspiration, anxiety, brief spells of joy and renewed darkness of the soul. When the Lord does appear, her impatience and anger drive him away! Like leaves in a storm, we are shunted from one mood to another in this flood of Iyengar's devotion till we come to rest in the heroine's recognition of a rare joy that has invaded her soul in the guise of the Lord's feet:

My Lord has the Kadalmallai,
 The Milky Ocean, the heaven beyond,
 And Tirumala as his residing places.
 He has given his Feet to me
 Which are medicine to chase away
 The sickness of samsara; they are my eyes,
 My life, my guardian fortress. The sheer joy
 Rising in waves he has given me here
 As also the supreme Ananda in the beyond.
 These two are my mother and father.

The *Tiruvengadathu Antadi* which is a sustained drama of the love divine is in quiet contrast to Iyengar's *Tiruvengada Malai*. The latter is made up of one hundred verses. Each of the four-lined verses speaks of the greatness of Tirumala Hill in its first two lines and the glory of Lord Venkateswara's presence in the last two lines. There are charming vignettes. We watch the female monkey asking its companion to dig some roots for its meal; lovely girls fly high on golden swings; snakes rush back to their holes frightened by nightingales that imitate the cry of the garuda eagles; and the sun remains forever cool, drenched by the droplets from mountain streams rushing down.

In effect, this could also mean that Iyengar chose the two poems on Venkateswara to represent the two strains of ancient Tamil poetics; Puram and Aham. The Puram poems deal with the external life of man, of wars, heroism, day-to-day living. The Aham poems observe the interior spaces of the mind in terms of love. Naturally, the Antadi which deals with divine love becomes vital to our sadhana to attain the Lord. A careful study of the poem would then prove that it can be an excellent sadhana sastra.

Apart from the Antadi and Malai dedicated to Venkateswara, Iyengar also composed a hymn on the 108 *divya desas* hailed by the Alvars. The verse on the Venkata Hill assures us that worshipping Venkateswara releases us from sorrow-laden earthly life and gets us a place in Paramapada:

He is the goal; he is the way;
 He removes the sorrows of devotees;
 We have saluted the honey-streaming
 Venkata Hill; no more need we return
 To this evil earth; we have gone past it.⁶

In this brief verse, Iyengar reveals the multi-faceted Refuge that Venkateswara

6. Nootriyettu Tiruppathi Antadi, verse 96.

is for us. He is the Way, He is the Goal, He is the destroyer of the impediments on our Way. It may be noted that Iyengar does not include Srirangam in this “evil earth” (*leela vibhuti*). Srirangam is his favourite and as assured by the Lord, it is the *triteeya vibhuti*, a third creation, literally a Vaikuntha on earth which cannot be touched by evil. Here is a verse on Sundararaja, the presiding deity of Tirumaliruncholai Hill near Madurai, a paradise for lovers of nature even today:

He has come, the One who devoured
The whole world; he rests on the snake
That has a thousand mouths to eat the wind,
The Lord who came to Vidura’s new house
As a guest for eating food; he loves to reside
In Tirumaliruncholai beloved of gods
Who partook nectar; for the devotees of Azhakar
There is neither poverty nor sickness.⁷

Another remarkable hymnologist of the seventeenth century was Kumaraguruparar. Typical of bhakti mythology are the miracles attributed to him though he is so near to our own times. He was born to Shanmukha Kavirayar of Srivaikuntam, a holy centre of pilgrimage on the banks of Tambraparni. Even after reaching five years, the boy remained dumb. The parents took him to Tiruchendur and performed a vow for forty days. Lord Subrahmanya, the presiding deity of the temple, came in the guise of a temple priest, woke up the sleeping boy and wrote the Six-lettered Mantra (Sa-ra-va-na-bha-va) on his tongue and vanished. The boy went with his parents to have the early morning darshan of Subrahmanya, and began singing in soulful accents. The first of his hymns is the famous *Kandar Kali Venpa*. Revered and used for daily recitation by the followers of Subrahmanya, the poem describes how the Lord came to have six faces and became Shiva’s teacher, initiating his own father in the Pranava.

In the course of his pilgrimage, Kumaraguruparar came to Madurai and recited his poem on Goddess Meenakshi. The opening recitation was performed in the palace of Tirumalai Naik who was the chief of Madurai at that time. It went on for several days as Kumaraguruparar was explaining each of the verses of this *Meenakshi Ammai Pillai-t-Tamizh*.⁸ One day, a little girl whom everybody took for the priest’s daughter came near the king and he placed her on his lap, while listening to the recitation. The description for the day was calling out to the baby goddess to come and play with the devotee:

7. *Azhakar Antadi*, verse 18. The snake is supposed to have only air as its food. Azhakar means the Beautiful One in Tamil.

8. *Pillai-t-tamizh* is a unique poetic genre in Tamil literature. In this work the growth of a god or a goddess or a king is described, step by step. As, for instance, in the childhood of Goddess Meenakshi, the poet begins with a charming description of the way the baby claps her hands and then a lullaby for the goddess.

You who are the significance of divine hymns
 Sung by the ancients! You are like the rasa
 Of Tamil poesy which drips with honeyed sweetness!
 You are the lamp illumined in the temple
 Of the devotee's heart devoid of all egoism!
 Verily the gentle baby elephant
 That plays on the crests of the Himalayas!
 A painting that lives in the heart
 Of unequalled Shiva who is beyond this world
 That is garmented by the wavy ocean!
 One whose thick tresses are covered
 By honey-sipping bees! Come!
 Come, darling daughter of Malayadhwaja!⁹

It is said that the moment Kumaraguruparar recited this verse, the little girl on the lap of King Tirumalai Naik ran to him and garlanded him with a pearl necklace and vanished. Only then did the king and others realise that it was Goddess Meenakshi who had been with them in the guise of a little girl. Kumaraguruparar's *Muthukumaraswami Pillai-t-Tamizh* on Subrahmanya, the presiding deity of Vaitheeswaran Kovil is equally well-known. His long poems like *Kasi Kalampakam* and *Madurai Kalampakam* show how these latter-day poets were able to project the legends in *Tiruvilaiyadar Puranam* to popularise Shaivism. Earlier, the Nayanmars did not have many of these legends on hand and were sustained mainly by their own winging to the heights of mystic consciousness and by their very musical Tamil. If such superb "living in the Divine" was not possible for the latter-day poets, they yet sustained the Bhakti Movement by "living with the Divine", retelling the latter-day legends in more and more colourful embroidery of imagination and word-combinations. One such was a Veerashaiva saint, Turaimangalam Sivapirakasa Swamikal. His *Sonasaila Malai* (Garland of Sonasaila) shows an astonishing mastery of the Tamil language and *Tiruvengai Kovai* is a fine flight of bridal mysticism. His zeal as a Veerashaiva is seen in several compositions:

Equal to Benares in the north,
 Kailas of South, Kedar and Chidambaram
 Encircled by rich rice fields, Shiva
 Who has destroyed Manmatha
 Is seated on my palm, chasing away Yama.
 What tapasya did my palm do for this grace?¹⁰

9. Verse 62.

10. *Ishtalinga Kaithalamalai*, verse 4.

One of his stray verses gives the familiar contest between Subrahmanya and Ganapati in a charming style:

Ganesa came to Shiva and complained
That Kartikeya had pinched his ears;
The father immediately questioned Muruga;
“But my elder brother was counting
The eyes on my faces!” cried the boy.
“Why did you tease him so?” Shiva asked
Ganesa. “Ah, he was measuring
The length of my nose!” The peacock-rider
Grinned. The father looked at
Himavant’s daughter Uma. “Watch
Your sons!” The Maid whose womb
Holds all the cosmos garmented in oceans
Called Ganesa to her side with delight.
May the joyous Uma guard you!

During all these centuries there was no let up in the writing of Sthala Puranas to celebrate individual temples. Shaivism scored in a big way in this activity. Encouragement came from local chieftains and zamindars for writing them. Perhaps this was also an attempt to sustain the Vedic religion in South India which was being threatened by Islamic invasions and forcible conversions. Though a good deal of these lengthy narratives deals with prosaic details worked out in an equally prosaic manner, there are not wanting passages of deep devotion as the writers were devout poets.

One of the earliest among such Sthala Puranas is Maraijnana Sambandhar’s *Tiruvavarur Puranam* (16th century) on the Tiruvarur temple. The Purana is familiarly known as *Kamalalaya Chirappu*. It is typical of its genre which speaks of the unique importance of *murti* (presiding deity), *sthala* (the place) and *teertha* (water source). Verses like the following reveal how the Bhakti Movement initiated by the Alvars and Nayanmars was well sustained with the help of temple culture.

Those who offer wealth for renovation
Of shrines, for performing special worship,
Will gain a place in Shivapuram,
And draw close to the feet of Shiva.
Also those who speak of the renovation
In such a way as it is understood correctly,
Will also gain the Lord’s grace.¹¹

11. Sarga Nine, verse 386.

There is the *sarga* on Gokanna (Gokarna) in the Puranam which shows how the Shaiva poets made up quickly for the lack of the colourful Avatar-cycles in Shaivism. When the minion of Yama brings to the spirit world the Brahmin Gokanna of Madurai by mistake, Yama commands Gokanna to be taken back to Madurai. The Brahmin protests as his life on earth is no bed of roses. Yama offers him a boon instead and Gokanna wants to see hell. This gives a chance for the Pauranika to describe the hell-experience in detail. There are Raurava, Pramukha, Suprasiddha, Kilakalam and other malbowges, and each hell-hole is specifically linked to a particular type of sin. After going through the inferno, Gokanna is given a lecture on good works by Yama and sent back. Once again the same mistaken identity happens and this too is a Gokanna. In the end, both the Gokannas worship Tyagaraja and gain realisation. Like this Purana of Tiruvarur, all the Puranas dealing with particular pilgrim centres deal with moral evil and moral good in a fine manner. This is how the Bhakti Movement proved to be also a priceless educational agency of the times.

Though a good deal of Purana literature tends to be dull in the presentation of facts, there are welcome exceptions like the *Tiruchendur Sthala Puranam*. It is also interesting to note that these poets tried to cement the bondage between the followers of Shiva and Vishnu. The Purana, a gem of its kind, juxtaposes Vishnu and Shiva in a positive manner so that there need be no exclusiveness or mutual distrust among the devotees. Speaking of the personality of Subrahmanya, Vishnu tells Narada that Subrahmanya is actually a Divine Being who unifies the concepts of Shiva and Vishnu.

Shiva's eight shoulders strong
And my honey-dripping shoulders four
Became the twelve of Subrahmanya;
The fierce trident in Shiva's hands
And my glorious discus
Have become Subrahmanya's armaments.¹²

Like the Alvars and Nayanmars, these Pauranikas linked bhakti with nature in a very big way. A work that stands out in this field is Trikuta Rajappa Kavirayar's *Tirukuttrala Sthala Puranam*. While Tamil Sthala Puranas in general have plentiful inputs regarding the natural surroundings of the temples, *Tirukuttrala Sthala Puranam* integrates literary grace with descriptions of nature with a divine felicity. Kuttralam is a hill-shaded place with enchanting waterfalls and has been long associated with Siddhas who resided in the woods engaged in yoga and had cultivated expertise in herbal medicines. Around three hundred years ago, Trikuta Rajappa Kavirayar who resided in this pilgrim centre wrote the Puranam for the temple and even inserted a full-fledged canto on the southern breeze!

12. Canto XIV, verse 17.

The baby breeze takes birth
 In the Champak wood with honey-dripping blossoms,
 Is cradled by the thick branches of the trees,
 Bathes in the Honey-falls,
 And crawls on the front spaces
 Of the conch-shaped Shiva temple.¹³

It must be remembered that bhakti is not stagnation. It is a constant movement of the jivatman towards the Paramatman, and the bhakti poets in Tamil have sought to record this movement in various ways. Even the heavy embroidery of language and conceits cannot quite curb the movement. The Divine uses that very play of the intellect by the aspirant poet to transform his work into a flowing stream, be it a simple decad of verses or a full-fledged Purana. To conclude in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

And since God meets us in many ways of his being and in all tempts us to him even while he seems to elude us,—and to see divine possibility and overcome its play of obstacles constitutes the whole mystery and greatness of human existence,—therefore in each of these ways at its highest or in the union of all, if we can find the key of their oneness, we shall aspire to track out and find and possess him.¹⁴

That is indeed a beautiful summation of the entire Bhakti Movement in Tamil Nadu.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

13. 'Mandamaruda Sarukkam', verse 3.

14. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part III, chapter vi.

*Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness.
 Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your
 progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.*

The Mother

(On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 33)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Work: An Offering (A Compilation). Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 2007. Pp. 100. Price: Rs. 45.

WORK, action gives a sublime meaning and purposefulness, not only to human existence but also to the existence of God and the Gods, because, but for work there would not have been this universe nor would we have existed, since this creation, this cosmos itself, is a vast and grand divine work of God and His Powers.

Sri Aurobindo says:

Man embodied in the natural world cannot cease from action, not for a moment, not for a second; his very existence here is an action; the whole universe is an act of God, mere living even is His movement.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 13, p. 100)

We find an echo of the same voice in the great scripture, the Gita:

For none stands even for a moment not doing work; everyone is made to do action helplessly by the modes born of Prakriti.

(*Ibid.*)

Work indeed seems the very root of life, because not only its source but all its growth depends on work. Calvin Coolidge rightly points out:

All growth depends on activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort and effort means work. It is the prerogative of intelligence, the only means to mankind, and the measure of civilisation.

Nature too is constantly at work, constantly creating infinite things, constantly trying out new ones and exceeding her past creations. Work, or the inexhaustible instinct to work is Nature's great gift to man, without which our life would have become worse than death. Work, according to François Marie Voltaire, keeps at bay three great evils—boredom, vice and need.

Work and our life are, as it were, the warp and woof of the fabric of existence, which together present a progressive and dynamic panorama of Nature moving towards perfection and an ever-increasing perfection. But we have noticed that work, in general, is a natural manifestation of an innate *élan vital* or an instinctive impulse of the Id or the self-asserting ego which is a lesser power, neither independent nor self-sufficient and not the true self of man. Work under its stewardship does not take us very far, although in the beginning it helps to gather the straying energies around one central

spirit. Therefore there is a need to offer our work at the altar of our greater self, the true person in us, the soul, the inner godhead, who lives in the sanctorum of our heart, if we want to liberate ourselves from the outer nature and realise the true goal of our life. And if we can really do that and make our work an offering to the Divine,—ah!—it can make us reach in due course the highest reaches of the spirit, where all existence becomes light and delight, a divine felicity and force, a state of supreme consummation, which is the sole purpose and aim of our life on earth.

Work, then, is not merely an act, it becomes a pathway to union with the Supreme Being, work becomes Karmayoga. There are, of course, other paths of yoga leading to the same supreme goal—the Path of Love and the Path of Knowledge—but the path of Works has the privilege and prerogative of having an edge over the others. “Yoga through work,” says Sri Aurobindo, “is the easiest and most effective way to enter into the stream of this Sadhana.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, p. 207) Especially in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, which is being practised in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, at Pondicherry, work is indispensable, because, explains Sri Aurobindo, “Yes, obviously, that is one great utility of work that it tests the nature and puts the sadhak in front of the defects of his outer being which might otherwise escape him.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 706)

This is the core of the message proclaimed by the book under review—*Work: An Offering* which is a compilation from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the nature and spirit of work and the attitude towards it from the point of view of Integral Yoga, the yoga of self-perfection and transformation. We shall make a critical survey of the book to see how it fares in its total presentation.

Its exterior has a very cute, aesthetic and graceful look; the volume contains one hundred pages in one sixteenth of crown size, thus making it a very slim and light book.

The book is compiled from the writings of the two greatest masters and seers and spiritual authorities of modern times, touching upon work and its nature and its scope, its place and utility in human life and its potential as the most effective path of yoga. The enlightening words act and pierce like sunrays into the gloomy recesses of the mind and the heart and open up a sunlit path of Karmayoga for the seeking soul. Covering many dimensions of work, this tiny book takes in its sweep almost everything in minute detail about the path of works. The Gita also has dwelt on the Karmayoga quite at length. But there the doctrine of Karmayoga has been developed and insisted upon in a particular backdrop of a terrific battle in order to maintain the yugadharma of Time, where, albeit action is demanded as a sacred duty, it seems to be nothing short of a monstrous massacre. But the present book looks at the yoga of Divine Works and insists on it from a different perspective, that of the integral transformation of the world and of human nature from its present state into a divine substance as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

Here the significance of Yoga of Works is seen in the light of a new ideal, and a new goal which was never thought of before, that is for “realising Sri Aurobindo’s

supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth,...” (*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 117) This highest ideal or goal is much higher than the Mukti or moksha which is the goal of the Gita.

Right at the beginning of the book, in the introduction, there is a quotation from Sri Aurobindo which makes it very clear what should be the aim of Karmayoga practised in his Ashram:

The work in the Ashram was not meant as a service to humanity... The work was meant as a service to the Divine and as a field for the inner opening to the Divine, surrender to the Divine alone, rejection of ego and all the ordinary vital movements and the training in a psychic elevation, selflessness, obedience, renunciation of all mental, vital or other self-assertion of the limited personality.... The merging of the little ego in union with the Divine, purification, surrender, the substitution of the Divine guidance for one’s own ignorant self-guidance based on one’s personal ideas and personal feelings is the aim of Karmayoga,... (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 850)

To take up work as a discipline of yoga is no cakewalk. It is the most difficult task, like taming a tiger or like walking on a razor’s edge—*kshurasyadhāra*, as the scripture says. One must conquer one’s lower nature, the empire of the ego, in order to qualify as a candidate of the Karmayoga. Hence a great deal of preparation is indispensable. This book has rightly suggested in the section ‘The Preparation’ a few psychological drills to be practised in order to discipline the lower nature of our mind, life and body, such as a constant aspiration, stepping back, organising and planning one’s work, regularity, doing things carefully and doing them well, speaking less and speaking only what is necessary, knowing before doing, persevering, developing good taste and aesthetics, concentrating only on the work in hand, inner quietude, psychic control of the impulse of speech and action and the last but not the least, a prayer in the heart to guard against obstacles in the work.

The book points out a few ‘difficulties’ in the way of the Yoga of Works such as wrong actions, insincerity, resistance, unwillingness to make an effort to correct oneself etc. which have to be conquered by the sadhak of the Integral Yoga. “The difficulties are for the strong, and help to make them stronger.” “Persevere and you will conquer.” (*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 248) The Mother provides encouragement and presents the solution. She says, “With method, order, and care there is no difficulty that cannot be solved.” (*CWM*, Vol. 17, p. 278)

A sadhak of Karmayoga, a divine worker, when he is free from all preference and all attachment and breaks down the limits of his ego, becomes a divine instrument. “There is no greater pride and glory than to be a perfect instrument of the Master,” says Sri Aurobindo. (*SABCL*, Vol. 16, p. 287)

The most important point the book has raised is the attitude towards work. For the sadhak or the seeker of the Divine life on earth, no work should be regarded as big or small. All work is an offering to the Divine, hence a part of sadhana. “You take up

some work which is quite material, like cleaning the floor or dusting a room...this work can lead to a very deep consciousness if it is done with a certain feeling for perfection and progress;..." says the Mother. (*CWM*, Vol. 8, p. 161)

In the beginning, the Mother has given some guidelines to deal with the problems arising from mixing—several categories of workers in the Ashram like sadhaks, workers, co-workers and paid workers working together.

The book concludes on a grand note with 'The Sublime Work' which is the great and unique work of earth-transformation; it has already begun with the manifestation of the Supramental Light and Force on 29 February 1956. The Mother with the assurance of the successful future, asks us to keep hope and faith in Sri Aurobindo:

Live rather in the constant hope and conviction that what we are doing will prove a success.... let your imagination be moulded by your faith in Sri Aurobindo; for is not such a faith the very hope and conviction that the will of Sri Aurobindo is bound to be done, that his work of transformation cannot but end in a supreme victory and that what he calls the supramental world will be brought down on earth and realised by us here and now?

(*CWM*, Vol. 3, p. 157)

Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is quietly working out the most sublime and at once the most unique and unusual dream of the two great Divine dreamers and lovers of humanity.

To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine.

(*Savitri*, p. 692)

Since the book is a compilation of powerful mantric words of two great Divine authorities, it has automatically acquired the status of a book of knowledge and a handy torchlight to guide us on the uncharted terrains of Supramental Yoga and guard us at every step against the pitfalls on the wayside.

The book probes the deeper aspects of the nature of work and goes into minute details. This necessarily compels the many dark elements of human nature which remain hidden in the subconscious corners of our being and create difficulties in the Sadhana, to emerge into the light. In this sense we can say that Sri Aurobindo has gone beyond the Gita to explain the significance of the Yoga of Works.

According to my analysis, the chapters on 'Money' and 'Illusion' do not fall within the scope of this book. An editorial note about the organisation of the chapters would have been a great help to readers. The 'Introduction' has been very well compiled. A few quotations here and there do not have the right reference.

On the whole it is a commendable work and the editors and compilers rightfully deserve our felicitation.

D. P. GUPTA

NAVANIT STORIES

“PUDDYO CHHOON!”¹

“A WEALTHY man; hence a great man. How can we have him sit in Third Class as you and I do? Besides, he is a social reformer and so venerable, and, on top of that, our guest of honour! For him therefore, it will have to be Second Class. Of course, his respectable heart would love it even more if we provided the First Class fare, but that is beyond our means. So buy a Second Class ticket and he would graciously manage with that.” Thus we concluded our consultation.

Soon, with due ceremony, we escorted Pitambar-bhai to the Second Class compartment and then pushed ourselves like cattle into Third Class. There was no place to sit, so we stuck to each other—as do our celestial sovereigns in that skilfully conceived legend of the ‘Black Hole of Calcutta’.

Everything on that railway line was done at the respectable pace set by the *Bapus* of Kathiawad.² At long last, half-heartedly, the train crept out of the station. As it coughed, jolted, and clattered along, from the camaraderie that Nature creates among creatures thrown and rammed into each other, we began to loosen up. After all, only our bodies were no longer under our control, but our hearts and minds were ours. Gaiety and joyous chaos swelled up and filled our carriage—like the uninhibited chirping and trilling of flocks of birds settling on a tree for the night.

Some stations passed by in these joyous exchanges. As the train crawled into the next station, Shivji-bhai proposed, “We must go and check on our Pitambar-bhai!” and started to move towards the exit.

“What is the need, Shivji-bhai? He must be lording it in the Second Class. What difficulty can he possibly have? And how will you get out from this carriage and, worse still, how will you ever manage to return here to us?”

“*Arre bhai!* How can that be? Pitambar-bhai is a V.I.P.! He will feel insulted if we don’t keep him in good humour!” Unwillingly, they allowed this bother to spoil their joyful mood.

“I say, Shivji-bhai, just in case he is suffering in the crush of a crowd in his compartment, do invite him into our spacious one!” a young man trilled his farewell to Shivji-bhai, sending him laughing all the way to the Second Class carriage.

Second Class compartment: where even with their vault-sized bodies, six *kuberas*³ can stretch themselves out like those decadent Roman aristocrats on their couches, there were just three occupants. One of whom was Pitambar-bhai.

“Hello, Pitambar-bhai, sir? How are you making out? Any difficulties?”

1. “Am fallen into”: “am stuck here”: “am putting up with it.”

2. Bapu: literally ‘Father’; as a rule lord and master of a handful of villages, a lethargic, opium-addicted swaggerer with little or no brains, always surrounded by wily flatterers and pranksters.

3. Zillionaires.

“Don’t mention the word, Shivji-bhai! *Aa puddyo chhoon, to gem-tem chalaavi levouj pudshe*;⁴ what else to do?”

Puddyo chhoon? Where twelve of us could lounge like kings, he is only putting up with it? Completing somehow the mandatory norms of etiquette, a shocked Shivji-bhai returned to his colleagues who boisterously welcomed him back into their jolly company.

“Has Pitambar-bhai enough space to sit?”

“He could even elongate and inflate himself two feet more....”

“In that case, he must be enjoying himself!” another said.

“Enjoying himself? Fate does not grant such things to people in his circumstances.

“Wealth does not bring happiness, nor do luxury goods. Happiness is in the mind, my friends. Just look at your condition here, stuffed like sardines and yet not a worry on your faces, whereas lolling in Second Class he still says *Puddyo chhoon*! And by God, he is perfectly right! He is indeed fallen. Fallen into sorrow amidst happiness, in suffering amidst luxury.

“While any one of us can declare, ‘I am standing!’ For in truth we are standing; standing on our own legs, on our own happiness! Fie on those who indulge in such laments as ‘*aa puddyo chhoon*’. To sing *khado chhoon*⁵ always is to relish Life in all its colours. Those who, though living in palaces, travelling in private coaches, and, being surrounded by thousands bowing and scraping before them, are yet merely “putting up” are truly fallen because they are never satisfied. And is happiness possible without satisfaction? Happy are those who, barefooted and feasting on a handful of peanuts, sing away with gusto to their heart’s content, whatever their circumstances; they can cheerfully assert ‘Am standing up’. For they are indeed ‘standing up’; they are not fallen.

PUJALAL

(Translated from *Navanit*, published by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada, Gujarat, 1945)

4. As I have fallen into this circumstance, I shall somehow have to put up with it.

5. I am standing; I can face things; I am happy to be alive.

“Happy is he who possesses nothing”: he is someone who has no sense of possession, who can make use of things when they come to him, knowing that they are not his, that they belong to the Supreme, and who, for the same reason, does not regret it when things leave him.... Such a man finds equal joy in the use of things as in the absence of things. When you have them at your disposal, you receive them as a gift of Grace and when they leave you... you live in the joy of destitution. For it is the sense of ownership that makes you cling to things, makes you their slave, otherwise one could live in constant joy and in the ceaseless movement of things that come and go and pass, that bring with them both the sense of fullness when they are there and, when they go, the delight of detachment.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 253-54)

What do outer circumstances matter?... To seek Thee constantly in all things, to want to manifest Thee ever better in all circumstance, in this attitude lies supreme Peace, perfect serenity, true contentment. In it life blossoms, widens, expands so magnificently in such majestic waves that no storm can any longer disturb it.

The Mother

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 96)

*With a quiet mind
and a peaceful heart,
let us do the work
happily.*

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, Part 2, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 326)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

*All work must be play,
but a divine play,
played for the Divine,
with the Divine.*

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, Part 2, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 348)

With Compliments from B.