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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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CONTRASTS

What opposites are here! A trivial life
Specks the huge dream of Death called Matter; intense
In its struggle of weakness towards omnipotence,
A thinking mind starts from the unthinking strife

In the order of the electric elements.
Immortal life breathed in that monstrous death,
A mystery of knowledge wore as sheath
Matter's mute nescience. Its enveloped sense

Or dumb somnambulist will obscurely reigns
Driving the atoms in their cosmic course
Whose huge unhearing movement serves perforce
The works of a strange blind omniscience.

The world's deep contrasts are but figures spun
Draping the unanimity of the One.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 162)

A GENERAL NOTE ON SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL LIFE

THERE were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a great revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human

nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other) it will fail, and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force, and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.¹

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility

1. This and the preceding paragraph were inserted here when this note was first published in 1948. — Ed.

the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghoshal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*. These [nine] articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, under the caption "New Lamps for Old" vehemently denounced the then congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress;

there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Mahratta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj, afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence, — Swaraj became one item of the fourfold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled *Deshar Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was moreover a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be even described as a constant struggle for independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a timid constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to

be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people, to make independence its aim and non-cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national, though not as yet an independent, Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.²

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda service; but he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the *Bande Mataram*, founded the new political party in Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda service and join the college as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the college with a salary of Rs. 150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long

2. This sentence, unlike the final one in this "General Note", was not revised before publication in 1948. — Ed.

expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of *Bande Mataram*, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and [they] decided then to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a *Bande Mataram* Company was started to finance the paper, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterji. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in *Bande Mataram* as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of Swaraj, the Extremists' term for independence, for this colonial self-government. Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do

this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word Swaraj to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the [Lahore] session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist Party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly moderate. The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of *Bande Mataram* became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death rather than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterji was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande Mataram* either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of *The Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manoeuvre succeeded and the life of the *Bande Mataram* came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The Nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would not be possible

to bring in the industrialists and manufacturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible, the industrialists and the landed magnates were too timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the status quo: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods — but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. The idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formations and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom. The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression

renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of *Bande Mataram* ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity were broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the [district] Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him. He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.

About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, *Nava Shakti*, and had moved from his rented house in Scott's Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of this newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period

that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow-accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval when he had no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoners' cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of Sri Aurobindo who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

When he came out from jail, Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*, which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at [Hooghly] in 1909: for in Bengal owing to the compromise at [Pabna] the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference, though there could be no representatives of the Nationalist party at the meeting of the Central Moderate Body which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in [Lahore] and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again the leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed

as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began however to consider how to revive the national movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress, but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw however that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of "no compromise" or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*, "no co-operation without control". It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government's intention

to search the office and arrest him. While considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone but in ten minutes was at the river ghat and in a boat plying on the Ganges, in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. This was the end of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of Forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections or action; even when he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some

height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice however he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on

the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

Written 7 November 1946; revised and published 1948

SRI AUROBINDO

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 47-66)

The great-souled who open themselves to the light and largeness of the diviner nature of which man is capable, are alone on the path narrow in the beginning, inexpressibly wide in the end that leads to liberation and perfection. The growth of the god in man is man's proper business; the steadfast turning of this lower Asuric and Rakshasic into the divine nature is the carefully hidden meaning of human life. As this growth increases, the veil falls and the soul comes to see the greater significance of action and the real truth of existence. The eye opens to the Godhead in man, to the Godhead in the world; it sees inwardly and comes to know outwardly the infinite Spirit, the Imperishable from whom all existences originate and who exists in all and by him and in him all exist always. Therefore when this vision, this knowledge seizes on the soul, its whole life-aspiration becomes a surpassing love and fathomless adoration of the Divine and Infinite. The mind attaches itself singly to the eternal, the spiritual, the living, the universal, the Real; it values nothing but for its sake, it delights only in the all-blissful Purusha. All the word and all the thought become one hymning of the universal greatness, Light, Beauty, Power and Truth that has revealed itself in its glory to the human spirit and a worship of the one supreme Soul and infinite Person. All the long stress of the inner self to break outward becomes a form now of spiritual endeavour and aspiration to possess the Divine in the soul and realise the Divine in the nature. All life becomes a constant Yoga and unification of that Divine and this human spirit.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 327)

ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

[Item (1) is a written exchange between Sri Aurobindo and one of his disciples, part of which was circulated as a message because of its relevance to the war issue.

Two months after it was written, letter (2), covering a token contribution to the Madras War Fund, was sent to the Governor of Madras and subsequently published in the newspapers. This contribution was the cause of some misunderstanding in India and even in the Ashram because of the unsympathetic attitude held by many towards the imperial British nation.

A request to Sri Aurobindo for a note to clarify his action received answer (3).

The text numbered (4) was written by Sri Aurobindo after a letter dated September 23, 1940, defending the contribution, was submitted to him for his approval.]

(1)

Disciple: Why are you not angry against the British Government when it acts in a way so detrimental to the Ashram?

Sri Aurobindo: Why be angry? It is quite natural that they should do so as it is their interest and they have the power.

Disciple: But it is not right and charitable!

Sri Aurobindo: When did you see that a Government is righteous and compassionate? In their outward dealings they are all the same.

Disciple: Then why do you support one against another?

Sri Aurobindo: This is quite another matter and depends on the play of forces acting behind the surface. Some forces are working for the Divine, some are quite anti-divine in their aim and purpose.

If the nations or the governments who are blindly the instruments of the divine forces were perfectly pure and divine in their processes and forms of action as well as in the inspiration they receive so ignorantly they would be invincible, because the divine forces themselves are invincible. It is the mixture in the outward expression that gives to the Asura the right to defeat them.

To be a successful instrument for the Asuric forces is easy, because they take all the movements of your lower nature and make use of them, so that you have no spiritual effort to make. On the contrary, if you are to be a fit instrument of the divine Force you must make yourself perfectly pure, since it is only in an integrally divinised instrument that the Divine Force will have its full power and effect.

July 4, 1940

(2)

We are placing herewith at the disposal of H. E. the Governor of Madras a sum of Rs. 500 as our joint contribution to the Madras War Fund. This donation which is in continuation of previous sums given by us for the cause of the Allies (10,000 francs to the French Caisse de Défense Nationale before the unhappy collapse of France and Rs. 1000 to the Viceroy's War Fund immediately after the Armistice) is sent as an expression of our entire support for the British people and the Empire in their struggle against the aggressions of the Nazi Reich and our complete sympathy with the cause for which they are fighting.

We feel that not only is this battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of nations threatened with the world domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of the civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.¹

(3)

As to your suggestion about a note on the subject of the contribution to the War Fund Sri Aurobindo does not feel very much inclined to enter into any public explanation of his action or any controversy on the subject. In his letter he made it very clear that it was on the War issue that he gave his full support and he indicated the reason for it. Hitler and Nazism and its push towards world domination are in his view an assault by a formidable reactionary Force, a purely Asuric force, on the highest values of civilisation and their success would mean the destruction of individual liberty, national freedom, liberty of thought, liberty of life, religious and spiritual freedom in at least three continents. In Europe already these things have gone down for the time being except, precariously, in a few small countries; if Britain were defeated, that result would be made permanent and in Asia also all the recent developments such as the rise of new or renovated Asiatic peoples would be miserably undone, and India's hope of liberty would become a dead dream of the past or a struggling dream of a far-off future. The abject position to which the Nazi theory relegates the coloured races is well known and that would be the fate of India if it conquered and dominated the world. Mankind itself as a whole would be flung back into a relapse towards barbarism, a social condition and an ethics which would admit only the brute force of the master and the docile submission of the slave. It is only by Britain's

1. This letter, published in *The Hindu* (Madras) on September 19, 1940, was signed by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

victory in the struggle to which she has challenged this destructive Force that the danger can be nullified, since she alone has shown at once the courage and power to resist and survive. This is Sri Aurobindo's view and, holding it, he could do nothing else than what he has done. There is no just reason here for any misunderstanding. This is what you can explain to anybody who questions, if it is necessary.

(4)

Sri Aurobindo's decision to give his moral support to the struggle against Hitler, which was made at the very beginning of the war, was based like all his actions on his inner view of things and on intimations from within. It was founded on his consciousness of the forces at work, of their significance in the Divine's leading of the world, of the necessary outer conditions for the spiritual development in which he sees the real hope of humanity. It would not serve any purpose to speak here of this view of things; but some outer considerations of the most material kind easily understandable by everyone can be put forward which might help to explain his action to the general mind, although they do not give the whole meaning of it; it is only these that are developed here.

The struggle that is going on is not fundamentally a conflict between two imperialisms — German and English — one attacking, the other defending itself. That is only an outward aspect and not the whole even of the outward aspect. For the Germans and the Italians believe that they are establishing a new civilization and a new world-order. The English believe that they are defending not only their Empire but their very existence as a free nation and the freedom also of other nations conquered by Germany or threatened by the push to empire of the Axis powers; they have made it a condition for making peace that the nations conquered shall be liberated and the others guaranteed against further aggression. They believe also that they are standing up for the principles of civilization which a Nazi victory would destroy. These beliefs have to be taken into consideration in assessing the significance of the struggle.

It is in fact a clash between two world forces which are contending for the control of the whole future of humanity. One force seeks to destroy the past civilization and substitute a new one; but this new civilization is in substance a reversion to the old principles of dominant force and a rigid external order and denies the established values, social, political, ethical, spiritual, altogether. Among these values are those which were hitherto held to be the most precious, the liberty of the individual, the right to national liberty, freedom of thought; even religious liberty is to be crushed and replaced by the subjection of religion to State control. The new ethics contemn and reject all the principles that can be summed up in the word "humanitarianism"; all that is to it a falsehood and a weakness. The only ethical values admitted are those of dominant force on the one side and, on the other, of blind obedience and submission, self-effacement and labour in the service of the State. Wherever this new idea conquers

or even makes its power felt, it is this order of things that it seeks to establish; it is not satisfied with setting itself up in one country or another, it is pushing for world conquest, for the enforcement of the new order everywhere, securing it, — this at least Germany, its principal agent, conceives to be the right method and carries it out with a scientific thoroughness by a ruthless repression of all opposition and a single iron rule.

The other force is that of the evolutionary tendencies which have been directing the course of humanity for some time past and, till recently, seemed destined to shape its future. Its workings had their good and bad sides, but among the greater values it had developed stood the very things against which the new force is most aggressive, — the liberty of the individual, national liberty, freedom of thought, political and social freedom with an increasing bent towards equality, complete religious liberty, the humanitarian principle with all its consequences and, latterly, a seeking after a more complete social order which will organise the life of the community, but will respect the liberty of the individual while perfecting his means of life and helping in every way possible his development. This evolutionary world-force has not been perfect in its action, its working is still partial and incomplete: it contains many strong survivals from the past which have to disappear; it has, on the other hand, lost or diminished some spiritual elements of a past human culture which ought to recover or survive. There are still many denials of national freedom and of the other principles which are yet admitted as the ideal to be put in practice; there may not be anywhere full individual freedom or full national liberty. But the movement has been more and more towards a greater development of these things and, if this evolutionary force still remains dominant, their complete development is inevitable.

Neither of these forces are altogether what we need for the future. There are ideas and elements in the first which may have their separate value in a total human movement; but on the whole, in system and in practice, its gospel is a worship of Force and its effect is the rule of a brutal and pitiless violence, the repression of the individual, not only a fierce repression but a savage extinction of all that opposes or differs from it, the suppression of all freedom of thought, an interference with religious belief and freedom of spiritual life and, in an extreme tendency, the deliberate will to “liquidate” all forms of religion and spirituality. On the side of the other more progressive force there are, often, a limited view, grievous defects of practice, an undue clinging to the past, a frequent violation of the ideal; but at the same time the necessary elements and many of the necessary conditions of progress are there, a tendency towards an enlargement of the human mind and spirit, towards an increasing idealism in the relation of men with men and of nation with nation and a tolerant and humane mentality. Both are, at present, or have been largely materialistic in their thought, but the difference is between a materialism that suppresses the Spirit and a materialism that tolerates it and leaves room for its growth if it can affirm its strength to survive and conquer.

At present the balance in the development of human thought and action has been turning for some time against the larger evolutionary force and in favour of a

revolutionary reaction against it. This reaction is now represented by totalitarian governments and societies, the other tendency by the democracies; but democracy is on the wane everywhere in Europe, the totalitarian idea was gaining ground on all sides even before the war. Now with Hitler as its chief representative, this force has thrown itself out for world domination. Everywhere the results are the same, the disappearance of individual and national liberty, a rigid "New Order", the total suppression of free thought and speech, a systematic cruelty and intolerance, the persecution of all opposition, and, wherever the Nazi idea spreads, a violent radicalism denying the human idea; outside Europe what is promised is the degradation of the coloured peoples to helotry as an inferior, even a subhuman race. Hitler, carrying with him everywhere the new idea and the new order, is now master of almost all Europe minus Great Britain and Russia. (Faced with the stubborn opposition of Britain he is turning southwards and if the plan attributed to him of taking Gibraltar and the Suez Canal and forcing the British fleet out of the Mediterranean and its coasts were to succeed, he would be able with his Italian ally to dominate Africa also and to turn towards Asia, through Syria and Palestine.)² There would be then nothing that could stand in his way except Russia; but Russia has helped his projects by her attitude and seems in no mood to oppose him. The independence of the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia would disappear as the independence of so many European nations has disappeared and a deadly and imminent peril would stand at the gates of India.

These are patent facts of the situation, its dangerous possibilities and menacing consequences. What is there that can prevent them from coming into realisation? The only material force that has stood between is the obstinate and heroic resistance of Great Britain and her fixed determination to fight the battle to the end. It is the British Navy alone that keeps the war from our gates and confines it to European and a strip of North African lands and seas. If there were defeat and the strength of Britain and her colonies were to go down before the totalitarian nations, all Europe, Africa and Asia would be doomed to domination by three or four powers all anti-democratic and all pushing for expansion, powers with regimes and theories of life which take no account of liberty of any kind; the surviving democracies would perish, nor would any free government with free institutions be any longer possible anywhere. It is not likely that India poor and ill-armed would be able to resist forces which had brought down the great nations of Europe; her chance of gaining the liberty which is now so close to her would disappear for a long time to come. On the contrary, if the victory goes to Britain, the situation will be reversed, the progressive evolutionary forces will triumph and the field will be open for the fulfilment of the tendencies which were making India's full control of her own life a certainty of the near future.

It is hardly possible that after the war the old order of things can survive unchanged; if that happened, there would again be a repetition of unrest, chaos, economic

2. Most of this bracketed sentence was cancelled by Sri Aurobindo without substitution.

disorder and armed strife till the necessary change is made. The reason is that the life of mankind has become in fact a large though loosely complex unit and a world-order recognising this fact is inevitable. It is ceasing to be possible for national egoisms to entrench themselves in their isolated independence and be sufficient for themselves, for all are now dependent on the whole. The professed separate self-sufficiency of Germany ended in a push for life-room which threatens all other peoples; nations which tried to isolate themselves in a self-regarding neutrality have paid the penalty of their blindness and the others who still maintain that attitude are likely sooner or later to share the same fate; either they must become the slaves or subservient vassals of three or four greater powers, or a world-order must be found in which all can be safe in their freedom and yet united for the common good. It will be well for India, if in spite of the absorption of her pressing need, she recognises that national egoism is no longer sufficient. She must claim freedom and equality for herself in whatever new order is to come or any post-war arrangement, but recognise also that the international idea and its realisation are something that is becoming insistent, necessary and inevitable. If the totalitarian powers win, there will indeed be a new world-order, — it may be in the end, a unification; but it will be a new order of naked brute force, repression and exploitation and for the people of Asia and Africa a subjection worse than anything they had experienced before. This has been recognised even by the Arabs who were fighting England in Palestine before the war; they have turned to her side. Not only Europe, Asia and Africa, but distant America with all her power and resources is no longer safe, and she has shown that she knows it: she has felt the peril and is arming herself in haste to meet it. In the other contingency, there will be not only the necessity for a freer new order but every possibility of its formation; for the idea is growing, it is already recognised as an actual programme by advanced progressive forces in England and elsewhere. It may not be likely that it will materialise at once or that it will be perfect when it comes, but it is bound to take some kind of initial shape as an eventual result in the not distant future.

These are some of the more obvious external considerations which have taken form in Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the War Fund accompanied by his letter. It is a simple recognition of the fact that the victory of Great Britain in this war is not only to the interest of the whole of humanity including India, but necessary for the safeguarding of its future. If that is so, the obligation of at least a complete moral support follows as a necessary consequence.

It is objected that Britain has refused freedom to India and that therefore no Indian should support her in the war. The answer arises inevitably from the considerations stated above; the dominant need for India and the world is to survive the tremendous attack of Asuric force which is now sweeping over the earth. The freedom of India, in whatever form, will be a consequence of that victory. The working towards freedom was clear already in the world and in the British Empire itself before the war; Eire, Egypt had gained their independence, Iraq had been granted hers; many

free nationalities had arisen in Europe and Asia; India herself was drawing nearer to her goal and the attainment of it was coming to be recognised as inevitable. If the totalitarian new order extends over Asia, all that will disappear; the whole work done will be undone. If there is the opposite result, nothing can prevent India attaining to the object of her aspirations; even if restrictions are put upon the national self-government that is bound to come they cannot last for long. In any case, there is no moral incompatibility between India's claim to freedom and support to Britain in the struggle against Hitler, since it would be a support given for the preservation of her own chance of complete liberty and the preservation also of three continents or even of the whole earth from a heavy yoke of servitude.

There remains the objection that all war is evil and no war can be supported; soul-force or some kind of spiritual or ethical force is the only force that should be used; the only resistance permissible is passive resistance, non-cooperation or Satyagraha. But this kind of resistance though it has been used in the past with some effect by individuals or on a limited scale cannot stop the invasion of a foreign army, least of all, a Nazi army, or expel it, once it is inside and in possession; it can at most be used as a means of opposition to an already established oppressive rule. The question then arises whether a nation can be asked to undergo voluntarily the menace of a foreign invasion or the scourge of a foreign occupation without using whatever material means of resistance are available. It is also a question whether any nation in the world is capable of this kind of resistance long-enduring and wholesale or is sufficiently developed ethically and spiritually to satisfy the conditions which would make it successful, especially against an organised and ruthless military oppression such as the Nazi rule; at any rate it is permissible not to wish to risk the adventure so long as there is another choice. War is physically an evil, a calamity; morally it has been like most human institutions a mixture, in most but not all cases a mixture of some good and much evil: but it is sometimes necessary to face it rather than invite or undergo a worse evil, a greater calamity. One can hold that, so long as life and mankind are what they are, there can be such a thing as a righteous war, — *dharma yuddha*. No doubt in a spiritualised life of humanity or in a perfect civilization there would be no room for war or violence, — it is clear that this is the highest ideal state. But mankind is psychologically and materially still far from this ideal state. To bring it to that state needs either an immediate spiritual change of which there is no present evidence or a change of mentality and habits which the victory of the totalitarian idea and its system would render impossible; for it would impose quite the opposite mentality, the mentality and habits on one side of a dominant brute force and violence and on the other a servile and prostrate non-resistance.

SRI AUROBINDO

(To be continued)

(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, February 1976, pp. 22-40)

‘MAKE ME A BURNING BRAZIER . . .’

February 2, 1914

O LORD, I would like to be so ardent a love that all lonelinesses may be filled up by it and all sorrows soothed.

O Lord, I cry unto Thee: Make me a burning brazier which consumes all suffering and transforms it into joyous light irradiating the hearts of all! . . .

Grant my prayer: Transform me into a brazier of pure love and boundless compassion.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 65)

‘WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND WITHIN YOURSELF THE LIGHT THAT NEVER WAVERS . . .’

[*ASPIRATION TALKS: Between March and August of 1970, Mother met weekly in her room a small number of Aurovilians, many from ‘Aspiration’ community — hence the name “Aspiration Talks”. After an offering of flowers and the introduction of new persons, there was usually a period of conversation, though sometimes only what Mother called a “bath of silence”. These talks were edited from tape-recordings of those twenty-two meetings.*]

A: We would like to speak to you about work in Aspiration. What we would like to know, what we are looking for, is the right attitude . . .

What is the trouble?

A: The trouble is . . .

Each one pulls in his own direction.

A: Each one pulls in his own direction. No one is really in contact with what is true.

We have to bear in mind that we are starting from the present state of humanity. So you must face all the difficulties; you must find the solution.

(Pointing to the tape-recorder) What is that?

B: I am recording for the people of Auromodèle, Sweet Mother.

(Mother laughs) You shouldn’t have told me!

A: But, Sweet Mother, you know, several solutions are open to us. For instance, on one hand . . .

Each man has his solution, and that is the great difficulty. To be in the Truth, each one has his solution. And yet we must find a way for all these solutions to work together.

(Silence)

So the framework must be vast, very flexible, and there must be a great goodwill from everyone: that is the first condition — the first individual condition — goodwill. To be flexible enough to do the best thing to be done at each moment.

A: But for example, we are told that we must have factories, that we must produce, and some of us have no feeling for that sort of work. We would prefer a seeking which is more . . .

More inward?

A: More inward, rather than to launch into factories, work, production for the sake of money, etc. That is not what we feel, that is not what we want to do in Aspiration at the moment. We would like to know what you think about it.

(Mother concentrates and there is a long silence.)

To be practical, you must first have a very clear vision of your goal, of where you are going. From this point of view, take money for example. An ideal which may be several hundred years ahead of its time, we don't know: money should be a power which belongs to nobody and which should be controlled by the most universal wisdom present. Put on the earth someone who has a vision vast enough to be able to know the needs of the earth and precise enough to be able to tell where the money should go — you understand, we are very far from that, aren't we? For the moment, the gentleman still says, "This is mine", and when he is generous, he says, "I give it to you." That's not it.

But there is a long way to go between what we are and what must be. And for that we must be very flexible, never losing sight of the goal, but knowing that we cannot reach it at one bound and that we must find the way. Well, that is much more difficult, even more difficult than to make the inner discovery. Truly speaking, that should have been made before coming here.

For there is a starting-point: when you have found within yourself the light that never wavers, the presence which can guide you with certitude, then you become aware that constantly, in everything that happens, there is something to be learnt, and that in the present state of matter there is always a progress to be made. That is how one should come, eager to find out at every minute the progress to be made. To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be: "A life that wants to grow and perfect itself", and above all, not in the same way for everyone — each one in his own way.

Well, now there are thirty of you, it is difficult, isn't it? When there are thirty thousand of you, it will be easier, because, naturally, there will be many more possibilities. You are the pioneers, you have the most difficult task, but I feel it is the

most interesting one. Because you must establish in a concrete, durable and growing way the attitude that is needed to truly be an Aurovilian. To learn every day the lesson that is needed to truly be an Aurovilian. To learn every day the lesson of the day Each sunrise is an opportunity to make a discovery. So, with that state of mind, you find out. Everyone does.

And the body needs activity: if you keep it inactive, it will begin to revolt by becoming sick and so on. It needs an activity, it really needs an activity like planting flowers, building a house, something really material. You must feel it. Some people do exercises, some ride bicycles, there are countless activities, but in your little group you must all come to an agreement so that each one can find the activity which suits his temperament, his nature and his need. But not with ideas. Ideas are not much good, ideas give you preconceptions, for example, “That is a good work, that work is not worthy of me,” and all that sort of nonsense. There is no bad work — there are only bad workers. All work is good when you know how to do it in the right way. Everything. And it is a kind of communion. If you are fortunate enough to be conscious of an inner light, you will see that in your manual work, it is as if you called the Divine down into things; then the communion becomes very concrete, there is a whole world to be discovered, it is marvellous.

You are young, you have plenty of time before you. And to be young, to be really young, we must always, always keep on growing, developing, progressing. Growth is the sign of youthfulness and there is no limit to the growth of consciousness. I know old people of twenty and young people of fifty, sixty, seventy. And if one does manual work, one keeps in good health.

So now you must find the solution.

A: All right.

Everything you can do . . . there are all sorts of things, all sorts. And you should see among yourselves how it can be arranged. You will come and tell me, all right?

B: Yes, all right.

Then, good-bye. Come again in a week.

10 March 1970

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 310-13)

“ NAMES ”

CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo

This is a pre-Pondy poem — a kind of ghazal — considerably touched up later. It is not mystic, nor does it aim at profundity: it just tries to express with apposite feeling the imagic, atmospheric and rhythmic suggestions or implications of two Arab names. Kindly give your impression.

NAMES

I'll call thee "Ayesha!" when the day resounds
 With bold and beautiful things,
The carmined sea, the tuneful rounds
 Of gay, ambitious wings,
And windy hills with green, shook hair,
 Aglow with high desire
As by their side the sun lays bare
 His loins of gorgeous fire!
And from the scabbard of calm sleep
My heart shall like a sabre leap
And flash to thee its quivering cry
Keen with the riotous passion of the sky!

But when the shadowy hours of evening steal
 On bold and beautiful things,
And wistful silences reveal
 Phantasmal whisperings,
And flowers whom day gave dazzled birth
 Sip the dim dew of night
And stir the moon-tranced thought of earth
 With fairy-winged delight!
When weary grows the wandering breeze
Lost in a wilderness of trees,
And mists enwreathe the ocean's din, [1]
Ah! then upon thy dream I'll breathe "Yasmin!"

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] *Words underlined by Sri Aurobindo*

It is all well done except the meaningless close repetition of similar sounds in the last two lines, enwreathe, dream, breathe. Unless enwreathe and breathe are intentional, but in that case it is unskilled work.

7 June 1932

*

I was not unconscious of this assonantal monotony, but I didn't realise it was so culpable. You have fully opened my eyes — or rather my ears — to its unskilled character. “Enwreathe” strikes me as so much the right word that I think it is better to recast the last line. What about a rounding-off like:

draw
Ah! then I'll lure thy dream-flesh with “Yasmin!”
snare

Perhaps you would prefer the two lines modified thus:

And mists entwine the ocean's din,
Ah! then I'll breathe upon thy dream “Yasmin!”

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

“Entwine” won't do, especially with “din”, “enwreathe” must remain. “Love thy dream-flesh” is detestable and the variations don't improve it.

8 June 1932

*

Since “dream-flesh” leaves so bad a taste in the critical mouth, I submit another, more delicate variant.

Ah! then I'll haunt thy dream-soul with “Yasmin!”

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is not wonderful. It is better than the others, but too sentimental, just as the lured flesh was too fleshy. The rest is not sentimental, so this is out of tune. If you can't find anything better, it will do.

Or, won't even the rejected version do, with the objectionable word changed?

Ah! then I'll lure thy dream-love with "Yasmin!"
-soul

[*Sri Aurobindo did not answer this question*]

[*Undated*]

*

Am I mistaken in thinking that

Ah! then I'll fathom thy dream-soul with "Yasmin!"

is the right finale?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

All very feeble; you are busy at manufacture.

12 June 1932

*

One more "go" for the bull's eye.

haunt

Ah! then I'll echo thy mystery with "Yasmin!"

or

Ah! then I'll invoke thy mystery with "Yasmin!"

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

There is only one thing to do. Kick out the lackadaisical, sentimental imp of "Ah!" which is probably at the root of the whole mischief and let us have something like this —

Then will I plumb thy dream-depths with "Yasmin!"

4 July 1932

* * *

NAMES

“Ayesha” I’ll call you when the day resounds
 With bold and beautiful things,
 The carmined sea, the tuneful rounds
 Of blithe ambitious wings,
 And windy hills with green tossed hair,
 Maenads drawn ever higher,
 As by their side the sun lays bare
 His loins of gorgeous fire!
 And from the scabbard of calm sleep
 My heart shall like a sabre leap
 And flash to you its quivering cry
 Keen with the riotous passion of the sky!

But when the shadowy hours of evening steal
 On bold and beautiful things,
 And wistful silences reveal
 Phantasmal whisperings,
 And flowers whom day gave dazzled birth
 Sip the dim dew of night
 And stir the moon-tranced thought of earth
 With fairy-winged delight —
 When weary grows the wandering breeze,
 Lost in a wilderness of trees,
 And mists enwreath the ocean’s din,
 Then will I plumb your dream-depths with “Yasmin!”

(From *The Secret Splendour – Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, p. 415)

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

“NOMS (FANTASIE ARABE)”
CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

Mother —

Will you please glance at this little composition in French and give your opinion, correcting where necessary. Its metre is not uniform and there are perhaps metrical flaws in it, too; these can be set right later, but is the expression tolerably French?

[*The corrective touches by the Mother are shown in italics above the original lines.*]

NOMS
(Fantaisie Arabe)

Je t'appellerai « Ayesha ! » quand le nouveau jour

Eclate sur

(Eclate) des choses (~~très~~) braves et belles —

La mer rougie, les innombrables tours

Mélodieux des gaies et aspirantes ailes —

Les montagnes avec leurs verts cheveux

Ebranlés par le vent d'un haut désir,

Comme dans la

(Dans une) splendeur impériale du feu

Le soleil d'aurore se révèle !

Et du fourreau d'un sommeil de plaisir

, éclair d'épée

Mon cœur jaillira (comme une épée)

Allumant

(Eclairant) son cri amoureux, aiguisé

A éblouissante

(Par) la passion (éblouissante) du ciel !

. . . Mais quand les heures ombreuses du soir

Obscurcissent

(Obsc****) les choses (~~très~~) belles et braves,

Et les silences mystérieux nous font voir

Des fantômes étoilés hanter l'azur grave —

Quand

(Et) les fleurs, à qui le jour a donné

sont ivres de

Ses vies, (buvottent une) rosée étrange et noire,

Troublant *la*
 (Agitant) les méditations de terre
fée ! —
 Par une volupté odoriférante de (fée —)
 Quand la sombre brise errante devient
le *des*
 Lasse, perdue dans (un) labyrinthe (de) palmes,
 Et la brume couronne l'inquiétude de la mer —
Alors j'alourdirai
 (Je donc plomberai) ton profond rêve calme
 Par la lente et douce musique de « Yasmin ! »

The Mother's answer:

J'ai dû changer comme je l'ai fait pour que les expressions deviennent françaises. Mais je n'ai pas changé les rimes qui ne sont pas correctes au point de vue de la poésie française. En effet, on ne peut associer une rime masculine à une féminine, ni faire un « à peu près » comme révèle et ciel, et mer et terre !

[I made these changes so as to give the language a French turn. But I have not changed the faulty rhymes according to the rules of French versification. Thus one cannot combine a masculine rhyme with a feminine one, nor make a compromise (an "à-peu-près") with *révèle* and *ciel*, and *mer* and *terre*!]

[Undated]

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one's inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a literary man or a poet or a painter as things worthwhile for their own sake, then it is no longer the yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be yogis, not merely poets, painters, etc.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 535-36)

THE PSYCHIC BEING

I

ONE of the key-concepts in the Philosophy and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is the psychic. The role of the psychic being in the sadhana of the Integral Yoga, which aims at a radical transformation of the human nature into the terms of the divine, is of crucial importance. For it is the influence of the psychic being that is first responsible for the awakening of man to the need of a higher life and it is again the increasing assumption of control over the various parts of the being by the psychic that speeds up the process of change from the human to the divine. What exactly is the psychic being? Is it the same as the Atman or the Self of the Upanishads? Is it in any way different from the 'psyche' of the modern systems of psychology and philosophy in the West? Is it other than what is called the soul in popular parlance?

The psychic in Sri Aurobindo's thought is the divine element in man. When the One Divine manifests itself as the Many, each self-formulation of the Divine takes its stand at the head of its particular course of manifestation as the being presiding over it. This being, the central being at the head, is the Jivatman presiding over the evolution of the truth-idea special to its manifestation. It stands above. But it delegates a ray of it as it were into the evolution. This ray, this element deriving from the Jivatman above, is the soul-stuff or the psychic essence in evolving nature. Each individual being in evolution carries this spark of the Divine and the whole of his career is a development and working out of the possibilities contained in that seed of the Divine. A principle or essential element or nucleus in the beginning, it acquires shape and the individuality of a being as it develops in the course of the evolution assimilating the essence of all experience. The psychic essence develops into the psychic being.

It is clear that this entity in evolution called the psychic is not the same as the Self or Atman which in truth is the One Divine that stands behind and above all manifestation of which evolution is a process. The psychic is the deputy involved in evolution of the Self that stands individualised as the Jivatman above the evolution. Nor is it the 'psyche' of the western psychologists to whom anything beyond or other than the surface human personality, or the dimensions of the physical universe analysable by means developed by physical science, is psychic. As used by them the 'psychic' covers a good deal of mind and life which overpasses the normal limits set by science. The psychic of our conception is something totally different: it is what stands behind the veil of mind and life as the soul, the essential supporting base of all.

It is necessary to make the distinction between the soul and the psychic being. The soul is the divine spark in the being, what we have called the psychic essence. This soul as it develops in evolution is the psychic being. The psychic being may be described as the personality of the soul in evolution. There can be, evidently, a soul

even when there is no psychic *being*; that is when the soul or psychic essence is not yet developed into a personality. Now, when the psychic being develops in the course of the evolution into full consciousness it joins the Jivatman, the central being above of which it has been both a part and a representative. It joins, but it does not change into it.

What is the relation of the psychic being to the rest of man, his mind, his life, his body? For man is a complex being constituted of several parts each of which is a formulation of a separate underlying principle: the physical body of the material principle, the life of the vital, the mind of the mental principle and so on. And each of these principles of the lower nature in evolution, in the *aparārdha*, is, in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, derived from a corresponding fundamental principle in the upper divine Nature, *parārdha*. The principle of Matter, Substance, is derived from Sat, Existence; the Life from Chit, Consciousness-Force; the Mind from Mahas or Supermind. From what principle or Power in the divine Self-existence is the Psychic derived? The Psychic, says Sri Aurobindo, represents in the evolution the divine principle of Ananda. It manifests in creation the underlying truth of Love and Delight.

Now, as we know, behind our surface physical parts is the subtle-physical being, *annamaya puruṣa*; behind the external vital is the inner vital being, *prāṇamaya puruṣa*; behind the surface mind is the inner mental being, *manomaya puruṣa*. Behind all these Purushas, at the nexus of the inner mental and the inner vital, stands the psychic being, what is called the *caitya puruṣa*.¹ The *caitya puruṣa* stands at the back supporting with its divine potencies of purity, love, Ananda, the evolution and development of all these differently active parts of the being and itself growing in their growth, itself also governing them gradually as it grows in personality.

Thus the psychic being is an actively participating entity in the evolution. It is not a witness, *sākṣī*, sitting aloof watching the activities of nature, Prakriti. On the other hand, as the psychic personality emerges in its clear formulation, it assumes control over the other parts of the being, begins to acquire mastery over Prakriti and stamps its own divine character over its movements.

The psychic essence and the psychic being developing out of it are situated at the core of one's being, deep within the heart, behind the cardiac centre. It is a most important part of Sri Aurobindo's yoga to concentrate and evoke this inmost Purusha

1. This *caitya puruṣa*, be it noted, is not derived from *citta* of the Sankhya system which is a totally different classification. In a note on this expression, Sri Kapali Sastriar observes (*Vide, Māṭṛtattvaparakāśa*, p.113) that the suggested derivation from *cit* or *citi* is doubtful. The term *caitya* which has obtained currency in the Vaishnava literature in Bengal has been used by Sri Aurobindo in the sense of the *puruṣa*, being, who assimilates in each life the essence of experiences gathered through the instrumentality of inner, subtle and outer gross organs like the mind, life, body, etc., and passes from birth to birth with the dissolution of the physical body. And, Sastriar adds, though this *puruṣa* is stationed in the heart, he is not the Lord who dwells in the deep skies of the Heart of creatures. On the other hand, basing himself on the Lord in the recesses of the Heart, like a ray born of Him, a portion of Him, he (*caitya puruṣa*) stands between the Lord deep within and the instrumental being and functions as the fount of manifestation.

into activity by sadhana. For this is the most direct and immediate representative of the Divine in the individual in touch with the parent-Divine who is sought after, and the one aim of the sadhaka must be to forge a contact with it, create conditions for it to emerge and participate in the godward evolution with its spontaneously purifying and joyous action.

II

The psychic being within is the divine *amśa*, portion, in us carrying with it the divine potencies of ananda and its powers of beauty, purity, joy. It is there in the caverns of the heart behind veils after veils of the emotional, the vital, the mental and the physical layers of our being. In the spiritual seeker it is there awake, alive. He does not need to awaken it; for it is the awakening and stir of the psychic being that is responsible for the turn to spiritual life.² What is necessary to be done is to bring the psychic to the front, release its workings in active consciousness and set it functioning in its rightful role.

For this there should be, first, a keen aspiration to feel and realise the psychic being. Before this aspiration becomes alive there should be felt the need for it. One must have realised the futility of the usual movements of the external nature centred round the desire-self or the ego and felt the necessity to purify oneself, change them into a different rhythm, to shift one's centre of life inward. It is only the psychic purusha that can impose its innate purity, godward impulse and direction on the outer members. There should be, then, a keen aspiration. Backing up this aspiration there should be a readiness, — in some developed part to begin with, but eventually in all parts of the being, to accept the motivation and control of the psychic. There must be simultaneously a conscious and sincere attempt to prepare oneself, in one's waking movements, by creating so to say the indispensable milieu for the psychic to live and function. The psychic can thrive only in an atmosphere of purity, harmony, peace, devotion, consecration, love. The seeker has got to reject from his nature all that is contrary to these godward and godly movements. Each such higher or deeper movement strengthens the aspiration and prepares the way for the effective response of the psychic. The psychic entity gains strength and grows by each step in the way of selflessness, purity, love. Thus with an ardent aspiration within, a readiness to accept the psychic influence and control in the being and an effective will to orientate one's life so as to prepare the temple for the deity to install itself, the call should be made. The call is to be directed to the heart centre within which awaits the psychic purusha,

2. Our soul from its mysterious chamber acts;
Its influence pressing on our heart and mind
Pushes them to exceed their mortal selves.
It seeks for Good and Beauty and for God . . .
Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*, Bk. VII, canto 2)

the *antarātman*, awake and ready for the passage to be cleared and the altar readied. It is not enough to make the passage. It is to be so maintained. Naturally this is not the matter of a day. A transition from the external ordinary consciousness to the inner and innermost layers has to be effected, with patience and vigilance. Movements of external nature have a way of covering up and neutralising the gains of sadhana in a trice; one has to persist and insist till the inward tendency and growth gains the upper hand.

The first response of the psychic is to send an answering ray, an influence which comes like the dew of peace, joy, purity over the rest of the being. One such ray does much more than hours of mental effort to change one's nature and to open and tune oneself to the deeper or higher consciousness. It is only as this influence spreads and settles more and more in the outer being that the psychic being itself glides to the front, first for a short while and then for longer and longer periods till it is able to permanently station itself as an effective factor controlling and directing the whole being to its spiritual destiny.

As an emanation, a spark of the Divine, the psychic always feels itself as a child, a bhakta, a lover of the Divine. And the sadhaka in whom the psychic influence is exerted naturally feels likewise. He experiences the movements of a servitor, a devotee, a child and all the movements of his life tend to mould themselves accordingly. His devotion and love for the Divine undergo a radical change. His love is purified of the dross of its vital element, unconscious ego-claims, etc. It blossoms into a causeless, spontaneous outflowing of tender love for the Divine Beloved. The psychic imposes its peace upon the mind, life and body of the seeker, establishes a quiet in them and subjects them to a silent process of purification. Again, the psychic being living as it does in an essential identity with the Divine Truth secret in all things, has a spontaneous feeling and perception of the truth of things and its guidance to the sadhaka is unerring. He does not need to reason out. He is guided to the right, the true, from within. He develops a sense and feeling for powers which are natural to the psychic, *viz.*, beauty, harmony, peace, bliss, all of which are the higher lines of divine manifestation. These are the directions in which the seeker is turned and trained to pass from his lower human nature into the higher divine nature. It is the incessant pressure of this psychic being that goes to effect the change gradually and prepare the nature for transformation. For as the nature is purged of its lower, gross movements, there is a natural, effortless opening to the vibrations of the deeper or higher consciousness which then begins to take possession of the aspiring human consciousness and assimilate it in its own nature of Light and Power. Sri Aurobindo gives prime importance to this nexus of the psychic being and the higher consciousness in effecting the spiritual transformation of man. It is again the psychic being that is most responsive in us to the touches of the Light and Power that operate from regions supramental. In fact, Sri Aurobindo insists upon the awakening and the intermediacy of the psychic being if the supramental change in man is to be achieved. The direct realisation of the Self, Atman, gives indeed libera-

tion. But for the transformation of nature and life it is indispensable to activate and enthrone in its full sway the psychic being which alone has the true aspiration for the opening of the entire nature to the Divine and for the rule of the Divine in the nature so prepared and uplifted. As he says:

Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven
 Or Heaven descend into earth's mortal state.
 But for such vast spiritual change to be,
 Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
 The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil
 And step into common nature's crowded rooms
 And stand uncovered in that nature's front
 And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book VII, Canto 2)

M. P. PANDIT

(*Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Eighteenth Number, 1962, pp. 20-24)

*“O Savitri, from thy hidden soul we come.
 We are the messengers, the occult gods
 Who help men's drab and heavy ignorant lives
 To wake to beauty and the wonder of things
 Touching them with glory and divinity;
 In evil we light the deathless flame of good
 And hold the torch of knowledge on ignorant roads;
 We are thy will and all men's will towards Light.
 O human copy and disguise of God
 Who seekst the deity thou keepest hid
 And livest by the Truth thou hast not known,
 Follow the world's winding highway to its source.
 There in the silence few have ever reached,
 Thou shalt see the Fire burning on the bare stone
 And the deep cavern of thy secret soul.”*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri — A Legend and a Symbol*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 501)

A TALK

[This intimate and enlightening talk was given, at the request of some old students of his, by Pavitra (P. B. St.-Hilaire) to the students and teachers of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education on August 8, 1964. It was recorded on tape at the time. This is a translation of the original French transcript.]

How difficult it is to be perfectly sincere!

I shall try my best to be exact but what I shall tell you is only the broad outline of the great voyage. I shall not be able to convey to you all the steps in thought, the ups and downs of feeling, or even the experiences, inner or outer.

I do not know if you have seen a film on the First World War. You have seen some on the Second, and perhaps you know the main difference . . . at least in practice for those who were engaged in the fighting. In the First War a considerable part of the four years that it lasted consisted of what is called 'trench warfare': that is, the two armies faced each other in trenches. They had dug trenches and shelters, and lived day after day, night after night, in conditions often difficult, at times — though not always — dangerous, with cold and rain as enemies and, of course, sometimes shells, bullets, illness and boredom.

Well! I was in those days a young officer. I was only twenty in 1914. I had finished — I am obliged to speak of myself because you have asked me to speak of myself — I had finished my science education. I was at the Polytechnic School, I had done a year at the Polytechnic, and like all young men there I had undergone military training even before I joined that school; so, in 1914, when the War was declared in the month of August I had to go for training as a private in an artillery regiment after a year of school where we had been doing mostly Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry.

The War was declared just on the eve of the day on which I was to leave to rejoin my regiment. I rejoined the regiment, but the conditions were different and we were immediately put under pressure. That is to say, we had to do riding for four or five hours a day. That was considered the best training for war. There was theoretical instruction . . . anyway, it was rather severe and at the end of some months, because of this military training we had undergone, we were appointed sub-lieutenants . . . sub-lieutenants in the Artillery, and in the month of October, that is, in three months, . . . at the end of October, let us say, four months after the declaration of the War . . . we left for the front. I was in the Artillery, a junior officer, in a battery of 105's which the English call a four-inch gun. It was a new [. . .] weapon of which France was very proud — and an interesting one.

At that time — I shall not keep it from you — I was a young man who had exactly the preoccupations of an ordinary young man of his age. I was like all my companions. I had the same preoccupations and the same interests as of those around

me. I liked studies. In general I liked what I did because I preferred to like it rather than to dislike it. It is better that way, is it not? It goes better in life — but really when I look back on the past I cannot say that I had spiritual aspirations. I had been brought up in the Catholic religion; it had not interested me particularly. Truly speaking, I had not put any questions to myself. Well, during the war we had at times what are called ‘hard knocks’, difficult moments, but also, from time to time a lot of leisure which it was necessary to fill up.

I do not know how — it was probably the hand of destiny — I started reading some books on what are called “psychic phenomena”, that is, phenomena which the science of that time, of that age, did not study at all but pushed aside, considered as outside its domain, extra-scientific.

There were all sorts of things . . . there were telepathy, clairvoyance, all the mediumistic phenomena — I do not know if you have heard of them — all those things, . . . even the pendulum and divination — all that is a little on the borderline of science. I approached everything with a scientific spirit, only to know, telling myself: “Look, here is a whole domain that science does not study.” Why? Nobody knows. I have never tried for, I was never interested in, the actual experience of a medium . . . seeing the future . . . and all that. That did not interest me; I was concerned with the possibility of these phenomena, their existence. Do they exist? Are they true? Are they false? Why does science not study them? It was not that I wanted to acquire them, or to know the future, or anything regarding myself, no!

Then, little by little, from book to book, I was led to read what are called in Europe books on Occultism. They included many things . . . I shall not quote the names of the authors . . . anyway, I read all that one could read on the subject: that which is called magic — not witchcraft, that did not interest me, but magic, precisely the possibility of handling certain forces, of proving their existence; and then, going on to the Middle Ages — because, naturally, when one studies Occultism one must go back to the times when Occultism flourished — the Kabbala, the secret societies, initiating bodies, the Hebrew tradition, alchemy, the alchemists — in the spiritual sense, that is to say, in the sense of transformation of nature — then, afterwards, the modern occultists, the door to India.

I must say that it was Theosophy which opened to me the door to India, and for that I am extremely obliged to it. For one thing, in Europe there was not much else, especially in those days; it was Theosophy which translated many sacred books of India, and which put within the reach of the Western intellect — one can almost say brought into vogue, though it wasn’t a question of vogue really — matters like reincarnation, karma, perfection on earth, the ideal of the *jivan-mukta*, that exist in Theosophy.

Talking of myself, as far as I remember, when I learnt of reincarnation and karma, they seemed to me completely axiomatic. One need not, there was no need to, discuss them. Never for a second, since the time I came across these ideas of reincarnation and karma, have I argued about them. I accepted them as part of myself. They seemed

self-evident to me. I knew, moreover, that one could not prove them; consequently, there was no point in discussing them: either one admitted them or one did not.

So, with these ideas of India I entered a new phase: it was — what shall I say? — of aspiration for spiritual perfection. There are two ways of studying the religions of India; one is the external — such as the Westerners, the French, generally follow, without participating in them, without living them: they study India as they study — really! — a colony of bees or ants. One gives an account of what they think, what they do.

But the other way, and the only one which interested me, was to live it all, to understand it first and then to live it. This was the ideal of perfection, realisable by man in time and through successive lives, which really satisfied me, seemed to me true and worthy to be lived.

Meanwhile the War continued. For two years I was at what is called “the front”, moving from one place to another, always in the artillery, in the 4-inch battery. And then for another two years or so I was at an Army Headquarters. In that position, as an officer of artillery intelligence, I had a job, almost like office work but very interesting because it meant compiling all the information we had, and giving it to the artillery, to the artillery corps of the army. An army comprised a varying number of corps, each corps consisted of two or three divisions, each division contained two brigades, and each brigade was made up of a certain number of regiments, therefore some thousands of men, so that a corps of the army represented, roughly, one or two hundred thousand men at the front with a considerable quantity of artillery and twelve or fifteen flying squadrons. My appointment involved study, compilation, scrutiny, sifting all that one could gather by way of intelligence. And at the same time, I had another work, a humane job: to keep contact with the units — that is, the units on the front, the visitors and strangers, because after a time we had the Americans in large numbers, and the English also.

But I can say that all the free time I had — there was not much, we were very busy — I devoted to study, often till late into the night. And more and more these ideas took possession of me, that is to say, I gave myself up to them, devoted myself to them. And in a few years — I can say from 1917, that is in two years — my point of view changed completely. I had been — I cannot say a materialist, because I did not have any opinion on the subject — I had been, as I have told you, a young man who had received a scientific education, logical, strict, but who had never asked himself questions on these subjects, and once they occupied my thoughts and feelings, well, I gave myself up to them totally.

In 1918, an epidemic, which at the time was called the Spanish fever or influenza, occurred in France, an epidemic which lasted sufficiently long, and which in all the world caused the death of 20 million people. I have seen recently a book on the subject. Well! I had the flu exactly at the time of the Armistice, that is, in November 1918. I was at the front, we had just pierced through the German lines and marched on Germany. It was in the German lines that I caught this influenza, but it was not an epidemic peculiar to Germany, all the world had it, all the countries.

That moment, I can say, was the decisive date in my life. In the country hospital, on the front, under the tents where I was, the sick died. Every morning there were three or four dead. I remember a very strong idea which removed for me all fear of death: it is the surrender, the giving of myself so that destiny, my spiritual destiny, may fulfil itself, whatever it be — with the offering, truly, sincerely, of my life if I must die, and, if I must live, well, consecration to the Divine.

I was 24 at that time, or a little over 24. After that I was demobilised soon enough, and it was necessary to take up my studies again. I did that . . . to finish something which I had begun, without much enthusiasm; but in any case I did not have anything else to do.

So I finished the Polytechnic School, the School of Bridges and Highways, and I was appointed a junior engineer in Paris. And, there, the very strong feeling that I could not live that life seized me. It was — was it not? — a life which in itself had nothing that might have made me recoil. It was a life of the engineer, with no lack of interesting jobs — a whole section of the Seine, particularly Paris, was under my jurisdiction, including all that required new construction, repair work, all that; but — how shall I put it? — I was completely submerged by work, it did not interest me: I did it because it had to be done but my mind was no longer there.

And then, in 1920, I took the decision to leave that life and to devote myself to the search for my spiritual teacher, my guru. I knew — I knew at last, it was for me a certitude — that my life was to be a life of spiritual realisation, that nothing else counted for me, and that somewhere on earth, on EARTH, he must exist who would give me, lead me to, the light.

This was at the beginning of 1920, in the early months of the year. I continued for some months with increasing inner difficulties, and finally I asked to be discharged. You understand, I had all my family against me. This was normal. I had my relations, a father, a mother, a brother. None of them appreciated what I did, nor why I did it. My father may have understood, he understood very well, he had followed me . . . he had followed me as well as he could — that is to say, he had tried to understand the reasons for my action, and he sympathised with me. But he said: “Well, my son, look. If these things, these psychic phenomena, interest you, all right. I shall give you whatever is necessary so that you may become a doctor and study them as a medical man would. For that, you should study medicine for the necessary time, and you can study these phenomena with — what shall I say? — all the knowledge and the method of a doctor of medicine.”

But what he could not understand was that I wanted to LIVE that life.

“But no, you should not commit yourself; because you lose your critical faculty. You cannot come to know the truth if you adopt, if you accept, one idea and if you try to put it into practice.”

That was the kind of difficulties I met at home. But I can say I was somewhat of a fanatic like all beginners. For example, I have not told you that when I was a junior officer at the front I was in charge of the officers’ mess, the officers’ kitchen. I ordered

the menu and I had the money. Well, I had become a vegetarian with much conviction . . . yes, conviction. To be a vegetarian at the front, in a French officers' mess, I can assure you, was not pleasant. I made everybody laugh, or else they pitied me and they wished that I would turn sane once more and go back to the traditional opinion of the French regarding food. I shall not keep from you that before the War I used to drink, to take wine, to take other drinks like the young people of my age. I did not have a particular liking for liquor, but, after all, drinking is something very normal for the French. You should not see it very severely; if I tell you this it is not in order that you should look at it with — what shall I say? — your traditional outlook that says: "Oh, that must be a very bad man" — because anyone who drinks is, according to Indians, generally a very bad man . . . I did not seek to sully myself, nor to [abstain]: I have told you just the truth.

Well, I was a little of a fanatic and I was ready to defy all to leave that life.

Then an opportunity came my way. I had friends who were leaving for the Far East, for Japan, and I decided to go with them. It brought me closer. As far as I was concerned I did not make a great difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. Was there not the same spirituality animating all religions of India? So I left for Japan. I went, not as an engineer, but as an ordinary individual; therefore it was necessary to earn my living there, it was not very convenient. It was not easy in an Asian country like Japan which did not welcome strangers except, like India today (is it not so?), those who are famous or those who bring money or else are supported by financial institutions. I was neither the one kind nor the other.

But at last, after some vicissitudes, many difficulties, a life somewhat hard, I remained in Japan four years. It was a series of several experiences, the study of Buddhism, especially of Zen Buddhism, life in the temples, work in the laboratories and, at home, in the evenings, the pursuit of my studies. My studies were on India, Japan and China. I went through the alternatives — rather the alternations, to speak French — the alternations of light and darkness, of an advance and stagnation, all the difficulties which meet those who look for light and who look by themselves, or at least seemingly so.

Then a delegation of Mongol monks, lamas, came to Japan and visited the laboratories, the factories where I worked. I entered into contact with them, because it is always (isn't it?) Asia and Central Asia which — from the point of view of location, place, centre — reunites things, makes them converge under the ridges of the Himalayas . . . on one side or the other, the North or the South . . . Tibet . . . the Himalayas.

And I saw here an opportunity. I asked myself if it was not a hint to go to Tibet. I had made the acquaintance of these monks. It was not very easy to talk to them because we did not have a common language. There was an officer of the old Russian army who was Mongol, who did not know even English or Chinese. And there was his wife who knew Chinese and English. Then we could chat through this intermediary, it was not very convenient, but little by little the possibility arose to go and live for

some time in their monastery, lamasery. It was necessary to go across China from the North, to go up to what is called Outer Mongolia, that is, Mongolia which was under Chinese suzerainty. This was in 1924. To put it briefly, I went with a Mongol lama who was a man full of wisdom, open. I learnt the Mongol language during this time, because I had to talk at least something to him. And so I applied myself to Mongol. How difficult it was to find books to learn the Mongol language — and with the few books I could find! I went across North China, Peking, . . . I shall not speak to you of this experience, the adventures, of all that, no, I do not have the time — but my attitude was somewhat like the following: “I know that I am on the way to the Truth, towards him who will take me to the Truth. I do not know where he is, and how to reach him. What I can do is to remain completely attentive and open to all signs that I perceive. If I see a door opening in one direction, I’ll follow it. If I see nothing, well, I stay, I wait.” And even today I think that it was the right attitude.

And so I left. It was necessary to cross China from the North and reach a monastery where there were only Tibetan lamas. I stayed there nine months, a whole winter, a winter in a cold country. But anyway I cannot say that I suffered from the cold. The place was well protected, completely isolated from all contacts. I did not see any European during those nine months, only some Chinese — merchants — and then the Mongols. It was, at certain times, rather hard. We withdrew into ourselves, abandoned to our conflicts, in periods of crises.

But what dominated was: “My God, if only I knew what I must do on earth, whatever it be, whether it be to sweep the street, well, I would do it with joy. But what is it that I have to do?” And already it was three years or four that the search had lasted. What must I do on earth? Where shall I find the clear indication?

I knew at that time of the existence of Sri Aurobindo and of the Mother through common friends. I had even had an issue of the French *Arya* in my hands before I left France. I had seen it. I must admit that it had not particularly attracted me. I had read the contents. I had said: “Yes, it is interesting.” But that which I wanted was the contact with something that I was looking for in the book, the book itself conveyed nothing to me . . . Moreover, it included the first chapters of “The Life Divine” — and then the studies on “Eternal Wisdom”. I had seen them all. Yes, it was really interesting. But it did not touch me more than the other things . . . I tell you that frankly.

Japan I reached just a little after the Mother had left. It was in 1920, and the Mother had left a few months earlier. Consequently I heard about Her. I had friends, common friends, I was interested in what they told me of Her and that is why I decided to write. So I wrote to Pondicherry. I did not get an answer . . . Never. I wrote twice. No answer. I think that at that time they did not answer letters often. Perhaps . . . I hope . . . they answer some more now.

Well, after that winter in Mongolia, a little severe, I felt very clearly that that experience was over and I must go elsewhere. But where? Why not to India? The moment had come for me to go to India. To what place there? This I did not know. As

I returned from Japan I had to go somewhere. To others, to my family, to my friends I had said: "I am returning to Europe *via* India."

But within me I knew I would stay on in India. I could not say that out, because they would ask me: "Where would you go?" "Oh, but I do not know." I had nothing material, on which I could base my inner certitude, except: "It is in India that I must find what I seek."

So I left . . . I set out again . . . I passed through Indochina where my brother was an engineer in the telecommunications, that is, in the TSF network in Indochina. I stayed there a month and then arrived in Ceylon, going South. I reached Ceylon with India before me, the door to India.

"Well, where do I go now?"

Pondicherry is very near, I shall go to Pondicherry. But I did not know what welcome I would receive. I did not even know if I would be received at all. I had not got any answer to my letters. I shall go to Pondicherry because it is the nearest port. Then? Well, we shall see. Perhaps I shall be able to go to Adyar, which is not far . . . perhaps! I shall see. This inner attitude was always the same, it was to see if a door would open.

I waited a fortnight in Ceylon because rail traffic to India had been disrupted by floods. You know, this still happens. The railway lines had been cut; and for three weeks I stayed in Ceylon. Then I arrived in Pondicherry one morning by train. I went to the Hotel d'Europe, and immediately came to the Ashram. At that time Sri Aurobindo lived in the room where Anilbaran has lived afterwards. You know that.

There I asked if I could be received by Sri Aurobindo.

At that time, Sri Aurobindo still received, still saw his disciples. He agreed to see me. I related to Him my story. What I was searching for, why I had left Europe and why I had come to India, and that which I hoped I would find here.

It was I who spoke the first day.

He asked me to come again the next day. In the evening I was received by the Mother — I remember particularly Her eyes, Her eyes of light. I repeated my story to Her, perhaps a little more briefly. She spoke a few words to me, and I returned to my hotel. I remember I went for a walk on Cours Chabrol and someone said: "There! they are the Swadeshis." That is, the people who were dressed in white and who were members of the Ashram. There were not many. There were — how many? — twelve or fifteen.

The next morning I came back, and Sri Aurobindo received me. And it was He who spoke. He told me what I was seeking — that is to say, evidently I had revealed to Him my desire for liberation, I had told Him that it was that which I was seeking, not so much the liberation from rebirth, but liberation of the self, from the ego, from ignorance, and sin, falsehood, from all that which makes the ordinary human life. It was liberation, *moksha*, that was my ideal. I did not place it in another world. I did not desire particularly to avoid suffering. But it was the weight of ignorance, falsehood, ugliness, all that, and — more than avoiding something — it was something positive.

I searched rather for the light, not so much the avoidance of suffering, the end of suffering or falsehood, but the light, knowledge, truth.

Then He said that there were in India some people who could give me what I looked for, but they were not easily accessible, not easy to approach, especially for a European. And then He continued, thus: He considered what I was seeking, that is, union with God, the realisation of the Brahman, to begin with as a first step, a necessary stage, but it was not all, there was another — that was the descent of the divine Power into the human consciousness to transform it, and it was this that He, Sri Aurobindo, was trying to do.

And He said to me: “Well, if you wish to try, you can stay.” I fell at His feet. He gave me His blessings, and it was over. A leaf in my life had been turned. The search — the search for the source of light, the search for Him who would guide me to the Truth — was over. Something else was beginning . . . that is, the realisation, . . . to put it in practice. But I had found Sri Aurobindo. I had found my Guru.

Well, that is how I came here.

As I have told you, I was accepted. There was no Ashram then. There were some houses belonging to Sri Aurobindo, and the Mother looked after Sri Aurobindo especially, and some disciples; but all were left, more or less, to themselves. The Ashram was started a year later, in 1926. And so I had the great privilege to see Sri Aurobindo every day, to listen to him, to listen to him every day replying to questions which we put to Him. But that is another thing, and I shall not speak of that today. But I have something to tell you . . . How? If you permit me to give you an advice which this experience has taught me, I shall tell you that what is important is to give yourself wholly to whatever you do. Whatever it is that you do, do it completely, do not do it in part. And then, try to do something . . . I say, if you have a choice of a profession, of a job — well, do what interests you, that which you are happy to do, do not seek a petty, easy life, in which you will be sheltered, in which you will not have much of boredom, much worry, or much work. It is not that which is important. What is important is to do something which interests you, to which you can give yourself completely. And if you do that, well, you will always be guided, because now, looking at my life with the perspective which, to be sure, is given by age, I see that, from the beginning, behind all that I did, even stupidities, even the errors, all that, behind it all, there was the Hand . . . the protecting Hand of the Guidance. And at the bottom, even finally, all that I did, all my experiences — I am not trying to justify them — all had a sense. But finally I have reached where I had to reach.

There! I thank you.

PAVITRA

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THE YOGA OF SELF-PERFECTION AND THE TRIPLE TRANSFORMATION

(Continued from the issue of September 2008)

The Magic Leverage

THE idea behind Yoga is that any human faculty can be turned from its ordinary functions to a higher purpose by purifying and concentrating its action. Even apart from spirituality, all intellectual, ethical and aesthetic culture does this to some degree. Reason, will and emotion are freed from the confusions of their haphazard workings in the undisciplined nature and trained to dedicate themselves to the pursuit of truth, good or beauty. The primary task of culture has always been to lift these most conscious powers of our normal being out of subjection to the obscure and disorderly movements of the lower nature into the clear light of self-awareness. But throughout history, as Sri Aurobindo shows in *The Human Cycle*, the supreme expressions of thought, art and moral idealism have tended to go further than this. Not content with raising humanity from the infrarational to the rational level, culture at its highest has been in effect a preparation for Yoga, where the same psychological powers are directed deliberately towards a superhuman and suprarational object.

The great dreamers and doers rise above our ordinary limits by sheer force of genius and character despite the resistance of human nature and society. But these are exceptional cases which seem to have no rational explanation. In Yoga, on the other hand, a principle is recognised by which the surpassing of the current stage of general development becomes a natural and intelligible possibility. Three factors have to be taken into account: the individual, the universal and the transcendent. Referring to the second of these as “Nature”, Sri Aurobindo reveals how the link between the individual and the transcendent that is the secret of Yoga can change the rules of the cosmic game:

If the individual and Nature are left to themselves, the one is bound to the other and unable to exceed appreciably her lingering march. Something transcendent is needed, free from her and greater, which will act upon us and her, attracting us upward to Itself and securing from her by good grace or by force her consent to the individual ascension.¹

So far, human evolution as a whole has proceeded at the pace of Nature’s “lingering march”, however much it may have speeded up in comparison with the staggering expanses of time involved in biological evolution. If the individual’s evolution is quickened by introducing another factor with a freer law, this should have an effect on the general movement.

But if individual liberation is seen as an end in itself, drawing souls away from the world, its potential impact on the collective evolution will be neutralised. That is what tended to happen in India in the past. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, refused to regard a quietistic liberation as the ultimate goal of Yoga. According to his experience, a one-pointed concentration of thought, will or feeling that brings us into contact with something beyond ourselves can and should have more dynamic consequences. It may even set in motion the “magic leverage” whose effect he evokes in *Savitri*:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea
 Can link man’s strength to a transcendent Force.
 Then miracle is made the common rule,
 One mighty deed can change the course of things;
 A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.²

This suggests the possibility of not only a union of the human soul with a transcendent Existence — the traditional conception of the aim of Yoga — but a linking of all human powers with the Force or Shakti of that Transcendence.

This linkage can be brought about by a heightened working of the same emotional, volitional and cognitive faculties as are directed to more exclusively spiritual purposes in the paths of Bhakti, Karma and Jnana as usually conceived. “Prayer” in these lines from *Savitri* represents the emotional relation with the Divine — though prayer is not the only way of establishing that relation. It can create “the contact of man’s life with God, the conscious interchange” that “is a much greater power than our own entirely self-reliant struggle and effort”,³ with results that could well seem miraculous. The disinterested work of the Karmayogi is done with calm detachment, unmoved by success or failure. Yet by serving as the instrument of a greater Will, his “master act” may change things far more effectively than a vehement activism could do. The “lonely thought” of the Jnani or man of knowledge turns from the mutable appearances of life to the unchanging Truth that underlies them. But if it discovers behind these appearances the secrets of the manifestation of the Eternal in Time, it might return with the “king idea” that can transform the world.

When divested of otherworldly tendencies, therefore, any one of these three approaches could provide a starting-point for a dynamic spirituality. A convergence of all three would lead naturally to “the wideness of the integral way by which the liberated soul transcends all, embraces all”.⁴ Yet Sri Aurobindo found that something more was needed for a Yoga which, without lowering its aspiration or compromising its integrity, accepts life in order to uplift and transfigure it. It is not enough that a divine Force should act through us and override our limitations. Our nature itself must change from top to bottom:

The aim of our effort at perfection must be to make the spiritual and supramental action no longer a miracle, even if a frequent or constant miracle, or only a luminous intervention of a greater than our natural power, but normal to the being and the very nature and law of all its process.⁵

This defines, as concisely as possible, the aim of the Yoga of self-perfection where it goes beyond what is attempted in the other paths. Anything less than this would fall short of the transformation Sri Aurobindo considered necessary to establish “a secure and settled new principle, a new creation, a permanent new order of being in the field of terrestrial Nature.”⁶ Such a thoroughgoing change of our complex nature may look forbiddingly difficult, even impossible. The difficulty must be admitted, but not the impossibility. It should be kept in mind that each manifestation of a new principle in the evolution — as when living creatures and, later, thinking beings first appeared — would, if there had been anyone to observe it, have seemed equally impossible until it actually happened.

A spiritual evolution beyond this reasoning animal who now regards himself as the summit of earthly possibility has been in preparation throughout most of the known history of the race. Diverse means have been found for taking the step from mind, the principle of separative consciousness, to a higher principle that is at home with oneness and infinity. What has still to be done is, first, to make the liberating, unifying and transformative knowledge of the Spirit the object of widespread seeking in place of the divisive and regressive beliefs that have so often travestied it; and, second, when that knowledge is attained, to apply it as integrally as possible to our inner and outer life. That application in its fullness is what Sri Aurobindo called the Yoga of self-perfection. The outline of his approach to it in Part Four of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, incomplete though it is, may yet play a role in shaping the spirituality of the future.

Life and the Suprarational

At the heart of the difficulty of spiritualising human existence and elevating it towards the suprarational is the resistance of the parts of our being that seem to belong intrinsically to the domain of the infrarational. Our physical nature offers an inert obstruction to any radical change. But before we can even hope to deal with it, we must master the life-force connecting mind and body — the vital being, as Sri Aurobindo called it — whose problematic character already raises serious doubts about the possibility of an integral transformation.

We have seen that the leading powers of human nature — the intellect, the ethical will and the aesthetic and higher emotional faculties — may be said to be pursuing, each in its own way, some ideal of truth, good or beauty that points beyond itself to the Divine and Infinite. The vital being, on the other hand, appears to have no motive

except its own self-assertion and enjoyment. Ethics, religion and spirituality have generally responded to its waywardness with coercion and repression, frustrating or throttling its impulses instead of transmuting them. Yet its free and enthusiastic cooperation is needed for the fullness of living. The vital nature dominates much of our individual and social existence. If it cannot be converted, the idea of spiritually perfecting our embodied life would seem to be a chimera.

The viability of a Yoga of self-perfection depends, therefore, on the discovery that “this great mass of vital energism contains in itself the imprisoned suprarational”. It has, in other words, an “instinctive reaching out for something divine, absolute and infinite which is concealed in its blind strivings”. Sri Aurobindo makes this point in a chapter of *The Human Cycle* entitled “The Suprarational Ultimate of Life” — the longest chapter in the book, whose extensive revision indicates the importance he gave to it. He goes on to observe: “The first mark of the suprarational, when it intervenes to take up any portion of our being, is the growth of absolute ideals”. As instances of vital ideals of this kind, he continues,

we need only note, however imperfect and dim the present shapes, the strivings of love at its own self-finding, its reachings towards its absolute — the absolute love of man and woman, the absolute maternal or paternal, filial or fraternal love, the love of friends, the love of comrades, love of country, love of humanity.⁷

It is relevant to note that one of these ideals, “the absolute love of man and woman”, is the theme of the ancient story of Savitri and Satyavan. If Sri Aurobindo, instead of completing *The Synthesis of Yoga* and other works, devoted most of his literary energy in his later years to an epic based on this legend, it was evidently because through this tale of the victory of love over death he could symbolise a truth that was central to his message. That truth, we may say in the terminology of *The Human Cycle*, is the presence of “the imprisoned suprarational” in human life and the possibility of releasing it, with a consequent transformation extending even to the conquest of death.

It is the depiction of the Yoga of King Aswapati in Part One of *Savitri*, especially in the third canto, that resembles most closely in a number of places the Yoga of self-perfection as described in *The Synthesis* and in Sri Aurobindo’s diary, the *Record of Yoga*. But the poem as a whole, through the way the legend itself is told, conveys symbolically an essential aspect of the Yoga: the power of the Spirit over life and matter and the deliverance of our vital and physical being from subjection to the determinism of the present laws of Nature. Moreover, the debate between Savitri and Death provides an opportunity for bringing out the significance of the ideals which Sri Aurobindo saw as signs of a suprarational influence. In *The Human Cycle*, after mentioning the various expressions of love’s “reaching towards its absolute”, he goes on to say:

These ideals of which the poets have sung so persistently, are not a mere glamour and illusion, however the egoisms and discords of our instinctive, infrarational way of living may seem to contradict them. Always crossed by imperfection or opposite vital movements, they are still divine possibilities and can be made a first means of our growth into a spiritual unity of being with being.⁸

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo joins his own voice to those of the poets who have chanted through the ages “the anthem of eternal love”.⁹ In Book Ten, Canto Two, “The Gospel of Death and Vanity of the Ideal”, and in “The Debate of Love and Death” which follows, he takes up precisely the question raised in *The Human Cycle*. Are such ideals mere self-delusion or do they point to a divine possibility? Death heaps scorn on them, harping on human selfishness and the mutability of this world. Savitri’s reply is reminiscent of *The Human Cycle*, where Sri Aurobindo maintains that human relations, however disfigured by our present egoism, can become “not the poor earthly things they are now, but deep and beautiful and wonderful movements of God in man fulfilling himself in life”.¹⁰ Savitri traces love to its source in a transcendent Bliss that is seeking to manifest in our lives:

Even in all that life and man have marred,
A whisper of divinity still is heard,
A breath is felt from the eternal spheres.
Allowed by Heaven and wonderful to man
A sweet fire-rhythm of passion chants to love.
There is a hope in its wild infinite cry;
It rings with callings from forgotten heights,
And when its strains are hushed to high-winged souls
In their empyrean, its burning breath
Survives beyond, the rapturous core of suns
That flame for ever pure in skies unseen,
A voice of the eternal Ecstasy.¹¹

This passage is preceded by a more personal declaration on the part of Savitri. In response to Death’s contemptuous appraisal of love as nothing but a “hunger of the body and the heart”, she asserts:

My love is not a hunger of the heart,
My love is not a craving of the flesh;
It came to me from God, to God returns.¹²

A close look at what this implies brings us back to the Yoga of self-perfection, whose first stage is one of purification, called in Sanskrit *śuddhi*.

Purification and the Will to Delight

The “heart”, or emotional being, is one of the parts of our nature whose perfection as an instrument for expressing an aspect of the Spirit is — like the ideal working of the mind, vital energies and body — an essential element of the integral Yoga. The characteristic function of the heart is love. But before its capacity for love (*prema-sāmarthya*)¹³ can be fully realised in a tranquil intensity of feeling not subject to fluctuations of mood, it must be freed from illegitimate interference by other parts of the being and from its own natural deformations in an egoistic consciousness. Love, in other words, must cease to be “a hunger of the heart” or “a craving of the flesh”, as it all too often is because of the intrusion of vital demands and physical desires. By this purification it becomes a movement of something deeper in us, “a soul of love and lucid joy and delight, a pure psyche”, capable of receiving “with an untroubled sweetness and clarity the various delight which God gives it in the world.”¹⁴ Love is then revealed in its true essence as a feeling that comes to us “from God, to God returns.”

As this example suggests, “purification” in this Yoga means unravelling the confused and self-defeating mutual interference of the various parts of our nature which normally prevents them from functioning at their highest potential. What this psychological operation brings about is not what is usually meant by purity in a moral, religious or even spiritual sense. Morality and religion ordinarily try to inculcate purity mainly by the negative method of prohibiting certain kinds of actions and, if possible, suppressing the thoughts, feelings and impulses that motivate them. Contemplative disciplines often go further and cultivate a quietistic, ascetic purity intended to prepare the being for a liberating immobility and passivity. “But here,” Sri Aurobindo notes, “we have the more difficult problem of a total, unabated, even an increased and more powerful action founded on perfect bliss of the being”. What is needed for this purpose “is not a negative, prohibitory, passive or quietistic, but a positive, affirmative, active purity”.¹⁵

The difference between these two approaches will become clearer if we consider the case of the vital being, whose purification is a crucial step in the process of clearing away the obstacles to a higher perfection. For this part of our nature, with its desires and passions, is likely to present the most effective opposition to any attempt to transfer the basis of life and action from the separative ego to the unity of the Spirit. So antagonistic to inner peace and illumination are its normal impulses that for spiritual purposes there might seem to be no alternative to the negative, coercive method of dealing with it.

Yet according to Sri Aurobindo, desire and the disturbances it generates are not inherent in the very nature of the life-force. They belong to a particular stage in the evolutionary struggle of life to emerge out of matter and they may disappear at a higher stage. Behind the surface phenomena of the thirst for power and pleasure is something deeper:

The essential turn of the soul to possession and enjoyment of the world consists in a will to delight, and the enjoyment of the satisfaction of craving is only a vital and physical degradation of the will to delight.¹⁶

Once this is discovered, it becomes possible to conceive of purifying the vital being, not negatively by repression, but positively by eliciting its true in place of its deformed working. All depends on learning to “distinguish between pure will and desire, between the inner will to delight and the outer lust and craving of the mind and body”. Subtle as this distinction may seem, the necessity of making it is inescapable. The inability to do so has been responsible for the failures of religion, spirituality and ethics in their dealings with life. “If we are unable to make this distinction practically in the experience of our being,” Sri Aurobindo observes, “we can only make a choice between a life-killing asceticism and the gross will to live or else try to effect an awkward, uncertain and precarious compromise between them.” These unsatisfactory alternatives account for almost the whole range of attitudes that human beings have adopted with respect to their own vital nature. To be more precise,

a small minority trample down the life instinct and strain after an ascetic perfection; most obey the gross will to live with such modifications and restraints as society imposes or the normal social man has been trained to impose on his own mind and actions; others set up a balance between ethical austerity and temperate indulgence of the desiring mental and vital self and see in this balance the golden mean of a sane mind and healthy human living.¹⁷

But if our aim is an integral spiritual perfection in which all the energies of the being will participate freely and fully, none of these solutions is adequate. Rigid suppression or uninhibited indulgence of the vital force, or any compromise between these extremes, implies in each case accepting desire as intrinsic to the life-principle and the motive of all its activity. Underlying the disagreements about the amount of control to which the vital impulses should be subjected is a widely shared assumption that their fundamental nature cannot be changed. But it was Sri Aurobindo’s experience that the vital being can be radically purified in a “positive, affirmative, active” sense and converted into a magnificent vehicle for the manifestation of the Spirit. This depends only on our ability to “get at the pure will undeformed by desire, — which we shall find to be a much more free, tranquil, steady and effective force than the leaping, smoke-stifled, soon fatigued and baffled flame of desire, — and at the calm inner will of delight not afflicted or limited by any trouble of craving”.¹⁸

(To be concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 32.
2. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 20.
3. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 567.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 445.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, p. 805.
6. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 923.
7. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 165.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 165-66.
9. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 462.
10. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 166. Sri Aurobindo began to publish *The Psychology of Social Development* (later renamed *The Human Cycle*) in the *Arya* in August 1916, the month of the first drafts of *Savitri*.
11. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 612-13.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 611-12.
13. See *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vols. 10-11, pp. 12, 686, 1471, and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 737.
14. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 661.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 643.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 658.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 658-59.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 659.

The psychic transformation and the first stages of the spiritual transformation are well within our conception; their perfection would be the perfection, wholeness, consummated unity of a knowledge and experience which is already part of things realised, though only by a small number of human beings. But the supramental change in its process carries us into less explored regions; it initiates a vision of heights of consciousness which have indeed been glimpsed and visited, but have yet to be discovered and mapped in their completeness. The highest of these peaks or elevated plateaus of consciousness, the supramental, lies far beyond the possibility of any satisfying mental scheme or map of it or any grasp of mental seeing and description.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 919)

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

2. Mother Tulsi, Come!

MEMORIES have a way of pushing you forward and backward with illogical coherence. News of a terrorist blast has temporarily upset me. Phone calls to the victimised city have been frustrating but mercifully the news has come that my friends are safe. But it does not calm my mind as yet. How about the actual victims? What happened that this group from various families died about the same time from the same cause? Is life just an accident? Is fate incorrigible? Can I try to understand it?

Each group tragedy has made me indrawn for a day or two till the rhythm of everyday life takes over. There is a reason why it has been so with me for the last fifty-five years. I was just fifteen years old when our Professor began teaching a non-detailed text, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder. The story, on the face of it seemed very simple. An accident to a suspension footbridge spanning a gorge in Peru hurtled down five people to their death into the depths below. The victims were a rich Marquesa, the orphaned Esteban, Uncle Pio bitten by wanderlust, the young Pepita and little Jamie. A Franciscan friar, Brother Juniper tries to find some meaning in the tragedy by tracing the relatives of the victims. The Brother is not able to arrive at any crystalline conclusion about memory and love, both of which are intertwined to bring human beings together. We have to be satisfied with the intuitive comment of the Abbess:

But soon we shall die and all memory of those will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge of love, the only survival, the only meaning.

I do not think I understood much of it in terms of experience, for experience I had none at that time. But the story left a deep impress upon me and made me wonder wherein lie the reserves of love that bears losses and still hopes for a new dawn. These days the cell phone in the hand has made it easy for me to call up the affected city to find out about the safety of my friends. But what sustained my grandmother when her son went to far-off places in search of a living? I suppose it was just the rigour of a severely disciplined lifestyle that gave no room for worry or lamentation that immobilises us. Added to it was an unshaken faith in the Divine. Any disturbing news from a distant city meant an automatic turning to the corner in the kitchen which was “God’s Place”; and going to the backyard and bowing at the “Tulsi Place” (*Thulasi Mādam*).

For a Vaishnava family the Tulsi is sacred. There has to be a plant in the backyard.

In my childhood, I saw that every morning the place had to be cleaned and a *kolam* drawn. Then grandmother would pluck a few tender leaves, murmuring a sloka. She would not allow me to pluck the plant at random, nor before I had taken my bath. And I had to repeat the sloka before touching the plant. “O Mother Tulsi, dear to Lord Keshava, I am plucking your leaves for the sake of the Lord, be kindly towards me.” She would call it “*Thiru-thuzhāy*” (the holy basil) and that growing it in one’s backyard would give us countless good (*punyam*). Looking back, I realise her disciplined life combined with such sterling devotion must have given her strength of mind and strength of purpose. It was almost as if she dared the Supreme: “I am doing my duties faultlessly, now it is your duty to protect my son!”

It was not much better when her son went to England in 1950. My amma had to be alone in a huge, isolated house for a few months with my brother and myself, both very young. My grandmother had her commitments in the village and we could not take such a long leave from the school. She told amma: “Do not be afraid. My son will come back safely with a lot of fame. You just read a canto of Valmiki’s *Sundara Kanda* daily. Hanuman and Sita will protect you.” Amma accepted her mother-in-law’s words literally, but said haltingly: “I do not know the proper way to read it, I am not educated. I have no knowledge of the puja and all that.” “Whatever you do will be accepted by Mother Sita. Set apart a time in the God’s Corner,¹ read the work and when you finish, keep a couple of plantains or a handful of dried fruits in a cup before the book, offer it mentally to God and do namaskar. That is enough. Mother Sita knows our worries and sorrows.”

Who else but Sita could know our problems, she who went through all the horrors of living in a forest, was imprisoned in a foreign land and was rejected repeatedly by her beloved Rama! Amma followed my grandmother to the letter. Even after father returned from England, she continued to read the *Sundara Kanda* for it proved to be a welcome discipline. Besides, by the time father returned, amma’s faith in the work had become unshakeable. She gave up reading only during the last week of her life when due to extreme weakness she could not open her eyes to read. If we were at home, amma would give us all a little of the ‘prasad’ (usually a mix of sultanas and sugar candy) and father would receive it, take it to his eyes in reverence and say: “Bhesh, bhesh,² what was the canto today?” Amma would say, “Hanuman saw Ravana talking to Sita” or “Sita prayed to the Fire-God”. Occasionally father would tell us something from Masti Venkatesa Iyengar or V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. Each time the lesson went in imperceptibly: patience: self-discipline.

“Now listen to how our Sri Aurobindo has translated this passage of Valmiki,” he would say, take out the book and read a passage. We would sit self-lost, as if we were in the palace at Ayodhya:

1. In Hindu households a room or at least a corner is set apart for keeping the icons and portraits where a lamp is lit and prayers offered.

2. A colloquial ejaculation indicating “very good”.

But if death came before his season, if one
 By anguish of unbearable heavy grief
 Naturally might win him, then today
 Would I have hurried to his distant worlds
 Of thee deprived, O Rama, O my son.
 Why should I vainly live without thine eyes,
 Thou moonlight of my soul? No, let me toil
 After thee to the savage woods where thou
 Must harbour; I will trail these feeble limbs
 Behind thy steps as the sick yearning dam
 That follows still her ravished young.³

I did not understand any of this at that time. But much, much later, with family history becoming clearer, I could realise why there was that sombre look on father's face and amma's eyes were moist. The discipline shown by amma in reading the *Sundara Kanda* was often pointed out to me by father who said that this was more valuable than the academic degrees I was getting. He was himself drawn into translating the work⁴ because of this atmosphere and in the detailed introduction to the published book he refers to how his elders at home recited the Book regularly and speaks of amma also: "My wife too has continued this honoured discipline during the last thirty years."

His translation led him to read a mass of literature on the *Ramayana* which makes his introduction very interesting. Sri Aurobindo was his guide in the *Ramayana* studies too and the introduction begins with choice quotes from *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. These are not mere old wives' tales! The poets who created our ancient narratives were sages who wished the sacred to penetrate secular life and raise it to higher planes of consciousness:

. . . they wrote with a sense of their function as architects and sculptors of life, creative exponents, fashioners of significant forms of national thought and religion and ethics and culture. A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea runs through these poems and the whole ancient culture of India is embodied in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation.⁵

I have often wondered whether life is a series of accidents or a predetermined, pre-scripted drama. A mother-in-law seeks to quieten the distant hysteria in her daughter-in-law's voice by asking her to read the *Sundara Kanda* regularly and the young lady

3. *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp.10-11.

4. *The Epic Beautiful* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1983).

5. *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol. 14, p. 285.

undertakes the discipline in full faith. Several decades pass by and one day the young lady's husband, charmed by the fervour and faith of his wife, decides to translate the work into English. The work draws him deeper and deeper into the sublime ocean of *Ramayana* literature making him meditate on the figure of Sita in the Ashoka grove. Is it actually Rama's story or Sita's tale? Sita's of course! Had not Valmiki himself admitted it: *Sitayah charitam mahat? Sitayana: Epic of the Earth-born* (1987) was thus inspired by the Eternal Feminine, his mother, wife and all womanhood that has suffered and yet faced the sufferings heroically, with yogic discipline. The Prologue makes this clear and Sita merges in the Mother to whom he had surrendered completely:

Of womanhood I write, of the travail
and glory of motherhood;
of Prakriti and her infinite modes
and unceasing variety;

of the primordial Shakti's myriad
manifestations on earth;
of the lure and leap of transcendences
of the ruby feminine . . .

O Mother, mighty, fair, immaculate,
your compassionate descent,
your divine ministry of sufferance
amidst us, hasn't been in vain.

Not in vain, for although the average
and even the elect fail
oftentimes in charity, yet we know
your Grace will redeem us still.⁶

Was this why the Mother gave Tulsi with its aromatic leaves and flowers the spiritual names, Discipline, Devotion? Is it because we need both to make our life meaningful? Tulsi is earth-born, Sita is earth-born, the Tamil hymnologist Andal was found as a baby near a Tulsi bush. What are these recurring symbols that tease our thought-processes? For how many millennia have we been associated with these terms?

Today is a rainy day. Ideal for the remembering of things past and burrowing in the personal library. Is it because I began with Tulsi and moved on to Sita that I see Sita everywhere? So many approaches in ever so many languages! The immediate attraction is the never-failing 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta). From him we know of Sri

6. *Sitayana*, pp. XIX-XX.

Ramakrishna's absorption in Sita. 'M' records on 16th December, 1883:

His (Sri Ramakrishna's) body became motionless and his mind stopped functioning; tears streamed down his cheeks. After a while he said, "O Mother, make me like Sita, completely forgetful of everything — body and limbs — totally unconscious of hands, feet and sense-organs — only the one thought in her mind, 'Where is Rama?'"⁷

Was the Master inspired by the ideal of Sita to teach 'M' the yearning that a devotee should feel for God? Sita's very life was centred in Rama. Completely absorbed in the thought of Rama, Sita forgot even the body, which is so dear to all.

Sri Ramakrishna has also spoken of his meeting Sita in a vision as a lady totally intent on Rama and that even her body remembered Rama all the time. That is the very fruition of bhakti yoga, pure devotion and nought else.

I turn aside a little and it is not without some trepidation that I pick up *Mahavidyādi Sūtra Granthavali*. The eminent Vedic scholar Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni had composed it ninety years ago. Unlike 'M', he is not easy to read. He was a rare tapasvin who had mastered Sri Vidya Upasana and had meditated with the Mother, seeing her as an incarnation of Shakambhari. Though his aphorisms on the Dasha Maha Vidyas (Kali, Tara, Sundari, Bhuvaneshwari, Bhairavi, Prachanda Chandika, Dhumavati, Bhagalamukhi, Matangi and Kamalatmika) are very famous among adepts, it must be remembered that he wrote striking Sūtras on other powers like Gayatri, Sita and Krishna.

Ganapati Muni sees Sita as incarnate power of the Divine Mother. Sweet in her form, personality and speech. For us she is sweet in life-story (*asmākam tu charite madhurā*). Bringing out the subtle difference between a 'fall' and an 'incarnation', Ganapati Muni points out that the former is simply being 'born' without being conscious of one's power, but the incarnation is conscious of the reason of his coming and so is illumed by intelligence. Sita is such an incarnation and her greatness is reflected in the events associated with her:

Sita is the ideal for pativratas (*Sita patidevatanam nidarsanam*), as she remained loyal to him even in separation; her greatness is visible in the five elements; it was seen in Agni when she prayed for Hanuman's safety, and she herself entered it; in her seeking refuge in earth; her shoreless yoga is noted in her severe upavasa in Lanka; the lady became a goddess to Rama as he saluted her in her iconised form; Sita with her holy story must be cherished by us; as an incarnation of Lakshmi we must meditate upon her.⁸

7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. I, p. 342.

8. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

Ganapati Muni makes it plausible to envision Sita as a yogini. But generally we see Sita very much in the human context whether it is in Valmiki or Kamban or Kumaran Asan. The Telugu poet, Viswanatha Satyanarayana places special emphasis on the domestic life of Sita and Rama. His Sita is sprightly and there are many lovely passages. Here is one full of painful irony, as Sita pleads with Rama to take her to the forest:

“Besides, if the husband goes to foreign places, usually the wife goes to her natal place. What is the point in my going to my father’s city and making him sad? Besides, a husband gets no respect if his wife is looked after in the house of his in-laws. O great Karma Yogi! Will Janaki be a burden to you if she comes? The husband is the very image of all gods for the wife. A wife will even jump into the fire for her husband’s sake. In ancient times, Savitri Devi who had imbibed Vedic knowledge, worshipped Yama with Vedic mantras and saved her husband. That incident has been inscribed in my heart. That dharma is my duty”.

Rama laughed and said:

“So Yama should come in the forest and take my life away. My Sita will save me.” Hugging Janaka’s daughter who looked alarmed, Rama said: “O dear! Must you be angry at this? How are you going to manage with my words in the pathways of the forest?”

Sita replied: “My dearest husband! Yama should never come to take you. Let Yama or some other ghoulish take me instead.

“More than Yama who was in danger from the crescent-crowned Lord for having dared to drag away Markandeya’s life, whoever tries to attack you who is the life of my life, will undergo ten times the torture!”⁹

Savitri again. Sita. Draupadi. Devahuti. These classical heroines have been the armour for Indian womanhood since the times of Gargi Vachaknavi. Sri Aurobindo returns to India in 1893 and possibly for the first time makes their acquaintance. He is overwhelmed. Is such heroism possible? Such patience, discipline, devotion to the ideal? By 1899 he has completed a narrative poem on the legend of Ruru and Pramadvara found in the Adi Parva of the *Mahabharata*. He dedicates it to his brother, Prof. Manmohan Ghose and writes a letter in reply to the brother’s condemnation of the characters of Indian legends as no more than types to drive home an ethical point:

Yet are these great figures, are Rama, Sita, Savitrie, merely patterns of moral excellence? I who have read their tale in the swift and mighty language of Valmekie and Vyasa and thrilled with their joys and their sorrows, cannot per-

9. Translated by Prema Nandakumar from the prose version of the epic by J. Venkateswara Rao.

suade myself that it is so. Surely Savitrie that strong silent heart, with her powerful and subtly-indicated personality, has both life and charm; surely Rama puts too much divine fire into all he does to be a dead thing, — Sita is too gracious and sweet, too full of human lovingness and loveliness, of womanly weakness and womanly strength!¹⁰

I repeat the last sentence to myself many times. I have done so even before. Sri Aurobindo might have planned to write a large-scale epic on Sita. His translation of Sita's speech from the Ayodhya Kanda of Valmiki reveals his admiration. Such plucky and daring words from a demure bride? That is how Indian womanhood should rise again like the fabled phoenix! The reserves of power in an Indian woman cannot be fathomed at all. But when he finally chose, it was Savitri: "the strong and silent heart" which would become the icon of Aurobindonian yoga.

Apparently these women learnt to conserve and also increase their spiritual powers of endurance by going on with their daily tasks in terms of an iron discipline. Tending the Tulsi plant; cleaning the place around; putting a *kolam*; lighting a lamp. One can gaze and gaze at the portrait of M. S. Subbulakshmi putting *kolam* in front of the Tulsi plant in the backyard of her house. She has washed her hair and looks like a classical heroine as she gazes at the *kolam* she is drawing with white flour. The same intensity the Nightingale of India brought to her learning and delivery of songs. I can almost hear her voice as I silently gaze at the Tulsi plant in my own backyard. A lovely song of Tyagaraja she must have sung daily when she circumambulated the Tulsi plant: *Amma ravamma Tulasamma!* Mother Tulasi who gave birth to me, do come!

Musician, yogi, queen or commoner: it has been a tale of combining discipline and devotion to gain freedom from fear, to achieve success and rise to the planes of higher consciousness. Have we not seen Savitri the Taponvita at her altar and kitchen in the forest hermitage?

A worshipped empress all once vied to serve,
 She made herself the diligent serf of all,
 Nor spared the labour of broom and jar and well,
 Or close gentle tending or to heap the fire
 Of altar and kitchen, no slight task allowed
 To others that her woman's strength might do.
 In all her acts a strange divinity shone:
 Into a simplest movement she could bring
 A oneness with earth's glowing robe of light,
 A lifting up of common acts by love.¹¹

10. 'A Defence of Hindu Legend', *Sri Aurobindo Circle Thirtieth Number*, p. 71.

11. *Savitri*, Book VII, canto 1.

Tulsi is also known as Brinda. Married to the Asura Jalandhara, she was a very chaste wife but it was fated that her chastity should be tested by Vishnu himself to put an end to Jalandhara. It was due to her curse that Vishnu was born as Rama and had to remain separated from his wife for a considerable time. Brinda in her rebirth as Tulasi married Vishnu. It is a conglomeration of legends but certain ideas recur. The high importance given to female chastity; Sita being earth-born; Andal found in a Tulsi bush, considered a reincarnation of Sita and getting merged in the Vishnu icon of Ranganatha. Through obscure channels in the consciousness these ideas of remaining close to the earth as herbs and plants, cherishing chastity and upholding devotion to the Supreme at all times have percolated into the psyche of Indian womanhood. I bow to my grandmother, the first heroine I saw in my life remembering her near the Tulsi plant and read the Mother's message on Tulsi (*ocimum basilicum*, *ocimum sanctum*):

Discipline: 'Sets the example and hopes to be followed.'

"Without discipline you cannot go anywhere, without discipline you cannot even live the normal life of normal man."

Devotion: 'Modest and fragrant, it gives itself without seeking for anything in return.'

This is yoga!

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 199)

UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

(Continued from the issue of September 2008)

Envoy to the US

IN 1972 the Government of India decided that as part of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary Celebrations they would finance the visit abroad of two persons, one eastwards and one to the West. The Mother chose me to be sent out west and I began to get ready for the long tour to Europe, America and Canada, which would be for about 3 to 4 months. Then when I was ready to leave I informed the Mother of it and she suddenly asked me how I felt about going out. I answered that I was happy to do so because she had given me this task and it was always a joy to me to do such things the Mother herself had asked me to do. But she insisted that she saw some hesitation in me all the same.

The Mother then asked me why I had this hesitation and I had to give the real reason which was that ever since I had come to her, more than 30 years back, I had never left her for so long a time and this made me a bit sad. Then she said in a very serious tone, "Udar, I give you my solemn promise that wherever you are and whenever it is I shall be closer to you than I am now, sitting in front of you." Then when I was in the U.S.A. she sent me by post, of her own accord, a card on which she had written:

13.10.72

Always with you Udar
with my love and blessings.
(signed) The Mother.

Udar

*

When I reached America, they began to call me "swamiji". I looked to see if there was anyone else around! I told them, "I am not a swami, I am just an ordinary person whom Mother has sent to speak on Sri Aurobindo."

I had a wonderful trip to America. I found the people generous and warm. We were often treated as guests at restaurants. People helped us freely on the road when our van broke down. In private homes we were received with gracious hospitality.

Udar

*

This promise the Mother is keeping wonderfully well. She is always with me, very, very close and, if I do not realise that sometimes, I have only to call her and I feel her presence at once. I have a very strong feeling, too, that the way it all happened shows that somehow the Mother must have been aware that the next year (1973) she would leave us physically and she took this occasion to show how she was not leaving us really but, on the contrary, making it easier for her to come to us instead of us having to wait to go to her.

I am also sure that this promise of the Mother is not to me alone. It is to all her children.

Udar

*

While I was visiting America, there was a three-day seminar at Cornell University — an inter-religious conference. Leaders of all the world religions were invited. My hosts tried to get me on the programme, but the offer was declined because the conference had been planned two years prior. However, they said, I could come and participate in the discussions, so I agreed.

Suddenly I received a call from them that the main speaker had fallen ill. Could I come and replace him? I said, “Yes.” They asked me to send a speech, but I wrote that I only spoke extemporaneously. This was accepted, and all throughout I felt Mother's presence and help, even saw her face before me. The Mother had told me before I left India, “You have only to call me and I will be with you at once, at every moment I will be with you.”

Udar

*

One day I asked her, before going to America, when she told me she would be with me at all times,

“But Mother how will I know it is you?”

She said, “You have asked me a very good question. Because there are forces, which will immediately try to deceive. But if you ask me in all sincerity, then be sure that I will come. Falsehood cannot pass through the veil of sincerity.”

Udar

*

Mother's Replies to Visiting Students from America, January 1970

The Mother: They want to know the meaning of the Divine?

X: Yes.

The Mother: (After some silence) The Perfection that you have to realise, not necessarily in this life, that Perfection is the Divine.

Y: What should be the aim of our life?

The Mother: Materially speaking, to be clever, spiritually speaking, to be sincere.

Z: What is the nature of responsibility?

The Mother: Power and sincerity and also straightforwardness.

*

Weddings

There were a boy and a girl in our Ashram who fell in love with each other and with Mother's approval, wanted to get married. The girl's mother wanted the marriage to be performed by one of the Purohits in the Ashram. But due to some quarrel, the Purohits refused to perform the marriage. The lady was sad about this and wrote to Mother for help and guidance. Mother turned to me and said, "Udar, you are a Brahmin and a priest. So you marry them." I was quite taken aback and thought that perhaps Mother was joking but I found her to be quite serious, so I just kept quiet. Then when I told the lady what Mother had said she was overjoyed and so I had, perforce, to accept the assignment and agree to perform the marriage.

Now I am quite ignorant of how these ceremonies are performed and know only something of the Christian system. So I felt that it would be foolish to try to learn anything about all this now and that it would be best if I made up quite a new ceremony with selections from *Savitri*. This is what I did.

Udar

*

World War II

This war (WW II) was a very crucial one. If the powers of Darkness were to win, the whole progress of the world in its evolutionary ascent would be put back for a very long time. And so it was most necessary that the forces of Light should win. That is why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took so much interest in the way the war was moving and they had to be kept informed of the developments from day to day.

The news was broadcast daily by radio but there was no radio-set in the Ashram

at that time. We had one at the house where I and my family were living at that time, the one near the Parc à Charbon, and every night Pavitra and Pavita would come to our house for the 9.30 p.m. news broadcast and Pavita would take it down in shorthand and later transcribe her notes and send them to Sri Aurobindo.

Udar

*

A God's Labour

One day, in the morning, after Balcony Darshan when Mother would give some of us a flower each and talk at times, there was a mention of Sri Aurobindo's poem *A God's Labour*. Mother said that when she first read the poem she went at once to Sri Aurobindo and said to him, "Lord, what have you done. In this poem of yours, you have exposed my secrets to the whole world." Sri Aurobindo just gave a loving smile, Mother added.

This poem is truly a poem about the Mother.

Then Chinmayi asked me if I had read the poem myself. I said I most certainly had. She then asked me if I knew it by heart. I replied that I had not committed it to memory but could do so easily. I felt I could do it and said so. Chinmayi was surprised and turning to Mother she said, "Look, Mother, Udar says he can learn the poem by heart between now and lunchtime. Can he do it?" There were five to six hours in which to commit to memory the thirty-one verses, each of four lines.

Mother asked me, "Can you?"

"I feel that I can," I replied.

Mother then said, "Very good! Go learn it by heart and then you will recite it to me."

I went home and I began to learn the thirty-one verses by heart. It was not difficult. At lunchtime, Mother asked me if I was ready to recite the poem by heart. And I did without a single fault or even any hesitation. Then I knew that in setting this task before me, she had given me her Grace and the capacity to do it, and so I was able to do it so well. This is her way of working. We must be ready to take up anything she says we could do and however difficult it is, she will give us the capacity to do it.

Udar

*

Some Recollections

Mother said that I had been with Sri Aurobindo and herself in many previous births. Once, in Delhi, I had been to someone who was supposed to have the capacity to tell you of your previous births. In my case he became very modest and offered to help me find this out myself. So we went together into a deep meditation and there I experienced my association with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be right from the beginning of this world, even when there was no life and there was only rock and sand and sea. When I recounted this story to the Mother, she confirmed it at once.

Udar

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One day, after she had given her Darshan and was coming into the corridor Mother called out to me to come to her. Then looking through the shutters of a window she said to me, "Look, Udar! While I am giving Darshan it begins to rain. That is nothing but Grace coming down and the people there below put up their umbrellas to stop that Grace!" This shook me very much. When I went home I threw away my umbrella. Never again would I use one to stop her Grace from falling on me.

Udar

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One day I asked the Mother, "I have been doing the yoga for many years but I am not absolutely certain how to do the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. I read all the books and try to do the yoga but I am not certain how far I have progressed." I asked the Mother to help me.

"You are doing it all wrong," she said.

"But what shall I do?" I asked.

She replied, "I will do the yoga for you."

I was thrilled! "What do I have to do?" I then asked.

"Give yourself over to me and I will do it for you," she said.

I asked, "How do I surrender?"

She asked me, "Do you sincerely want to?"

I answered, "Yes, certainly, Mother."

Then the Mother asked, "When you get up in the morning what is the first thing you do?"

I said, "I brush my teeth."

She asked, "How do you brush your teeth?"

I wondered, "How? Like everybody else does."

She said, "Then you're doing it unconsciously. Instead, think of me while you're doing it. Think that I'm doing it. Or when you're washing your face, think that I'm doing it with you, or when you're eating that I'm eating with you, that I'm enjoying your food with you." She added, "When you go to sleep that is the time when you should be very conscious of me. Let me put you to sleep and then the whole night you will have a conscious sleep. When you awake and begin your day you will then begin it in a more conscious way."

So one has to be always consciously aware of her Presence and remain open to her.

Udar

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When we were having our meals with the Mother I used to tell her many stories and she liked them quite a bit. One day she said to me, "You know, Udar, when I was a little girl in France I felt, even then, a great urge to go to India. For one thing I expected good stories, as it was said in France that Indians are great storytellers. But when I did finally come here I did not find the storytellers and I wondered why Indians had had such a reputation. But when I met you, I knew."

Udar

*

Udar mentions how Mother once told him never to become a cynic and lose faith in others. If that were allowed, Mother said, "The world may call you wise, but spiritually you are dead."

M. P. Pandit
(‘Diary Notes’ — 4.8.1972)

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A Letter and a Reply

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 blessing for the year 1947 and obtain for me also, I pray Thee, the benediction of our Lord.

Udar

Indeed last year has given you the opportunity of being drawn much closer to us, and thus in 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's signature)

(Concluded)

P. AND G.

... as the Gita points out, the sattwa binds, as much as the other gunas, and binds just in the same way, by desire, by ego; a nobler desire, a purer ego, — but so long as in any form these two hold the being, there is no freedom. The man of virtue, of knowledge, has his ego of the virtuous man, his ego of knowledge, and it is that sattwic ego which he seeks to satisfy; for his own sake he seeks virtue and knowledge. Only when we cease to satisfy the ego, to think and to will from the ego, the limited "I" in us, then is there a real freedom. In other words, freedom, highest self-mastery begin when above the natural self we see and hold the supreme Self of which the ego is an obstructing veil and a blinding shadow. And that can only be when we see the one Self in us seated above Nature and make our individual being one with it in being and consciousness and in its individual nature of action only an instrument of a supreme Will, the one Will that is really free. For that we must rise high above the three gunas, become triguṇātīta; for that Self is beyond even the sattwic principle. We have to climb to it through the sattwa, but we attain to it only when we get beyond sattwa; we reach out to it from the ego, but only reach it by leaving the ego. We are drawn towards it by the highest, most passionate, most stupendous and ecstatic of all desires; but we can securely live in it only when all desire drops away from us. We have at a certain stage to liberate ourselves even from the desire of our liberation.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 223)

DIAMOND WARRIOR, GOLDEN LION

Mother had so many ways to help us!

I have been asked to write about the diamond warrior because in the Agenda Mother tells of my meeting him and who he is. At the same time there was her golden lion.

*

THE few months' stay in the Ashram in 1967-1968 must have been the happiest period of my life. It was later that I experienced that inner joy that never leaves.

I lived alone with the new advantage of silence.

I met people who had grown up with the Mother: each one different but all exhaling a quiet and smiling accomplishment that was lived by their outer personality even if contrastive to it.

I met people who had arrived some time before, months or years or many years, who would tell me how they came.

I floated happily from one to another, finding at last those with whom I could speak the same language.

The Mother saw me at that time every fortnight, she was pressing hard! And many things happened and many things I saw and experienced.

Both my friends Nata and Kalyan warned me that it would not always be like this, harder times would come and this was just the colourful beginning.

I was an inner fire, and I could feel it and carried it through the monsoon rains in November, walking back home from the Samadhi late in the evening, along the seaside road, at that time Cours Chabrol, with the sound of the grey winter waves. Yes, everything was damp, and yet I felt sometimes like a sparkle, sometimes like a deep warm quietness.

It was during that period that I made the acquaintance of the diamond warrior and the lion, the golden lion.

They accompanied me in my inner adventures.

When I came back to the Ashram at the end of 1968 after a few months absence I wrote to the Mother asking her who these two beings helping me and protecting me were. The Mother answered that the diamond warrior was her vital being and the golden lion was her lion. (Yes, Durga Mahakali has a lion that is well-known!) She spoke about my seeing the diamond warrior to Satprem. It is very significant for me that it was New Year's day 1969, the day of the advent of the new consciousness, as she explained later.

The diamond warrior is an extremely beautiful being. Very big and shining integrally with an inner light, a diamond light, diamond energy. I knew it came from the Mother and was not surprised when she said it was her vital being, but did I really

understand what that meant? Probably not, but it was all so natural to me as it came from the Mother. But later, to reflect that her vital being is diamond: think of ours!

As I travelled I sometimes met with darker forces or beings or situations. But it was very simple: the diamond warrior was there near me and we passed on, or things melted.

The vital being of Mother: who could resist. So everything happened very quickly. I did not know there was not much time, I did not consider that anything special was happening, I just went on because. . . I liked the adventure with the Mother so much.

I was told that I was “walking on the shoulders” of those who had been there for so many years and done with Mother and Sri Aurobindo so much hard difficult yoga. I was speeding along the path they had prepared.

This confirms what I have said before: this is not my story, I have no story; it is just an episode of our story, all of us together.

Talking about protection, I am reminded also of a phenomenon that many have experienced, but at the time I was quite ignorant and it came by surprise.

I was sitting in the car leaving the ashram after one of my first visits when suddenly a column of white light fell on me and never left. Wherever I went I was in this column of protective whiteness.

I still remember walking down busy Via del Corso in Rome and I was in this dense column of protective white substance.

The other day, speaking to a friend on New Year’s day, 2008, he said that during his meditation he had had the impression of the roar of a lion.

In 1972, Sri Aurobindo’s centenary year, the lion was very present. The Mother wrote something to me on lion-coloured paper. All was solid gold and blazing sun.

Also, the Mother had said of her disciple Champaklal who was always at her feet that he was her lion.

I loved Champaklal. He opened the door to the Mother’s room.

Once he danced for me singing my name.

Once, quite some time later, I had been called to the Ashram to see the Mother who was unexpectedly receiving some disciples after a long period of being closed in.

I had been fetched at the very last moment (I had been closed in too) and we arrived when everybody had passed.

I do not know how I flew up the stairs: there was Champaklal holding the door open, waiting for me: “Hurry up, hurry up!”

I found myself kneeling in front of the Mother. What did I see? I know I said “Isn’t she beautiful?”

A few minutes later, downstairs in Mother’s corridor, I realised I had a circle of red light round my body, at the height of the waist. Maggi explained what it was.

Coming back to the golden lion I experienced at the beginning of my yoga, what I loved doing was just riding in his flaming mane, protected and confident, and that is how I gradually went down, down, down through the subconscious layers taking there the light-force the Mother had put into me.

Then the black, going through hard black and then touching the rock bottom black from where suddenly springs up a flaming golden substance.

At that point I had lost the golden lion, I was bursting up and out through even the physical layers that fell to pieces (it was thought I was going to leave the body I was told afterwards, but the Mother saw to that).

The inner being had grown into a living form, a kind of new body, fluid and dense, of an orange-like colour, a consciousness that saw things in a different way, with a precision of minute details, a feeling of beauty, strength and music.

When I saw the golden lion again I had grown and could not hide in his flaming mane anymore.

He would walk or sit by my side.

So the adventure continued.

I soared up through blue and clear blue regions, clearer and clearer, and leaped through the border with my new orange coloured fluid body into a world of sun.

FELICITY

Love, bhakti, surrender, the psychic opening are the only short cuts to the Divine — or can be; for if the love and bhakti are too vital, then there is likely to be a seesaw between ecstatic expectation and Viraha, Abhiman, despair, etc., which makes not a short cut but a long one, a zigzag — not a straight flight — a whirling round one's own ego instead of a running towards the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 536)

A VISIT WITH SRI AUROBINDO

AFTER the interview with Jung in Switzerland, and while studying Indology at the Sorbonne, it became more and more imperative to me to visit Sri Aurobindo. When, during that final summer session at the Academy of International Law at The Hague, in Holland, I discovered that I could obtain passage to India and then across the Pacific for very little more than returning to America via the Atlantic, the decision was made.

Correspondence with the *āśram* in Pondicherry began. I discovered Sri Aurobindo now appeared in public only four times a year. The next scheduled *darśan* (literally, “face-seeing”, but with the connotation of “blessing”) was to be November 24th. I was granted permission to attend.

First by a Dutch ship, the *Oranje*, I went through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean to Colombo, Ceylon, then by boat-train to India. In 1950, Pondicherry, on the Southeastern tip of India, was still a French colony.

I discovered other Americans had come: a woman physical education teacher from New York City, studying *Hathayoga*, and two men from Stanford. There were many more visitors from Europe as well as from India proper. The visitors, including myself, were housed at Golconda, a delightful guest house built by a Japanese disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright. My room had an air of simplicity and peace that is hard to describe. The large louvered windows overlooked a garden; along the length of the windows was a raised platform upon which sat a cool water jug. The bed was complete with mosquito netting; and the floor was of dark stone and cool to the feet during the return monsoon weather. Outside hibiscus bloomed; and in the pool in the courtyard, lotus made bright splashes of colour while goldfish darted around and under their leaves.

A great number of the permanent residents were from Pakistan [*East Bengal, as it was then called*] and had followed Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry upon the division of India, a division of which Sri Aurobindo did not approve. (He believed India should form one whole nation.) Some residents lived at Golconda, some in the main building with dining room two blocks away, and other married residents had separate small homes of their own.

In the month or so before *darśan*, I found there was time to explore the countryside and small Indian villages by bicycle, to investigate the French restaurants in town, and to swim in the ocean two blocks from the guest house. There were events at the *āśram* each day, but one attended or not, without obligation. Mornings, breakfast was served at the main dining hall: usually a banana, homemade grain bread, and cocoa or milk. At noon, if it was ordered in advance, a girl in a sari brought around the shiny, brass, hitched-together dishes with vegetable curries and other dishes. On the lower floor, on a breezeway, there was a place to eat lunch at Golconda. A young Hindu, Vishnu Patel, whose family all lived in Pondicherry, soon introduced us to Indian

sweets and to a kind of vegetable-flour doughnut, dipped in a hot sauce, for which I am still often hungry. In Vishnu's company, those of us from the United States and Europe were led to the bazaar, a *dhobi* who would wash and iron our clothes, and to the best place to buy sandals to wear in this heat.

Each morning, after breakfast, there was a meeting with Mirra Alfassa, called The Mother. There was a flower ceremony, in which visitors both offered and received flowers from her — each flower with its own esoteric meaning for spiritual development. In a small marble-floored room opening onto the central court, there was also a morning group meditation period with the Mother.

Day by day, more people arrived at the *āśram* at Pondicherry. There were now exhibitions and sports competitions among the younger members of the colony, a fact which highly displeased some of the older Indian visitors. Others were disturbed because there was no "set routine". One visiting professor of philosophy from Bombay finally explained to me that Sri Aurobindo's *āśram* was a revolutionary departure from the old style *āśram*. He suggested that before leaving India, I should also visit Ramdas, called "The Laughing Sage" of India at his *āśram* on the Mangalore Coast. This I did for a week, later, and it gave me greater insight into just how unusual the establishment in Pondicherry was, by older standards. Although I also found Ramdas a charming man, the entire atmosphere differed. There, women and men were expected to sit in separate sections; all food was Indian; and there were none of the modern conveniences one took for granted at Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

In Pondicherry, I was soon told, of course, that Margaret Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson of the United States had spent her last years here at the *āśram* and had died there. I also discovered that in 1947, the entire colony had been besieged by communists who had sought a French protectorate where communism was still legal. One *āśram-ite* had been killed.

At night, Pondicherry became a place out of some romantic novel with ships arriving at a free port, loaded with what one suspected were gold bars to be smuggled into India proper. Huge fires on the beach flamed into the night, as white-turbanned figures moved here and there. All of this, of course, was at the village pier, and few regular *āśram-ites* ventured out at night except to affairs in the central *āśram* hall. But those of us from America had to take in *all* the sights, while we were there.

Afternoons as a rule, I did research in the *āśram* library, taking notes on books, most of which are now available in America. Evenings, a group of us sometimes took in an outdoor movie in the village. On one such occasion, things became entirely too exciting. The movies were shown in a large tent, with a meagre number of benches for Americans and Europeans; most of the villagers sat crosslegged on the sand. Suddenly, on this particular occasion, there was a scurry. A snake had been seen. From then onward, throughout the movie, my feet were under my body on top of the bench. On another occasion in the bazaar, a Hindu snake charmer, angry because I had refused to pay for his show, held a live cobra by the tail, writhing almost in my

face. When he accidentally lost hold of the snake and several Hindu men had it slither near their feet, I discovered that Indian men could be extremely volatile and most amusingly fluid of language.

At last, it was the morning of November 24th. At Golconda, rumours flew. Although thousands had now arrived for this *darśan*, it was said that Sri Aurobindo was ill and might find it impossible to appear. Then, at the last minute, we were told he was well enough. A long line led from the main building, around the block: people of every colour, every style of dress, government officials and high-ranking professors, young and old, from dozens of countries, wanted to see the philosopher-sage. Each of us finally climbed the stairs to the floor where, at the end of a long narrow room, Sri Aurobindo in white, and the Mother in a gold sari, sat side by side upon a slightly raised platform.

As a Westerner, the idea of merely passing by these two with nothing being said, had struck me as a bit ridiculous. I was still unfamiliar with the Hindu idea that such a silent meeting could afford an intensely spiritual impetus. I watched as I came up in line, and I noted that the procedure was to stand quietly before the two of them for a few silent moments, then to move on at a gesture from Sri Aurobindo. What happened next was completely unexpected.

As I stepped into a radius of about four feet, there was the sensation of moving into some kind of a force field. Intuitively, I knew it was the force of Love, but not what ordinary humans usually mean by the term. These two were “geared straight up”; they were not paying attention to me as ordinary parents might have done; yet, this unattachment seemed just the thing that healed. Suddenly, I loved them both, as spiritual “parents”.

Then, all thought ceased, I was perfectly aware of where I was; it was not “hypnotism” as one Stanford friend later suggested. It was simply that during those few minutes, my mind became utterly still. It seemed that I stood there a very long, an uncounted time, for there *was* no time. Only many years later did I describe this experience as my having experienced the Timeless *in* Time. When there at the *darśan*, there was not the least doubt in my mind that I had met two people who had experienced what they claimed. They *were* Gnostic Beings. They had realised this new consciousness which Sri Aurobindo called the Supramental. Later, this same experience made me understand what Heidegger meant by “standing presence”.

RHODA P. LECOCQ

(*The Radical Thinkers – Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo* by Rhoda P. LeCocq,
published by the Author, 1969, reprinted 1972, pp. 196-99)

WHAT SRI AUROBINDO MEANS TO ME

It was since 1925, when I joined Karnatak College, Dharwar, as a young matriculate that I moved close to Sri Aurobindo's thought. I had read an account of his life and work, in Kannada by then. But it was D. R. Bendre, a secondary teacher in Dharwar and our great poet, who had all the *Arya* volumes at home. He used to celebrate 15th August as Sri Aurobindo's birthday even then. And he used to collect a few students like me and read to us from *The Life Divine* and *The Future Poetry*. He himself went for Sri Aurobindo's *darshan* as late as 1944. But he used to see Sri Aurobindo in dream practically every night and Sri Aurobindo explained to him on a blackboard, chalk in hand, problems that confronted him in his attempt to formulate a numerical account of metaphysics.

We could not read any of Sri Aurobindo's writings, for Bendre was unwilling to lend the *Arya* volumes for our reading. I went to Oxford in 1936 for studying English language and literature. And I returned home in 1938, an inveterate Marxist bent on drastic social change and on the liquidation of India's poverty. The dreamer in me was at loggerheads with this new-formed Marxist. It was about this time that Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* was published in book form. I read it avidly and I was thrilled to plunge into a philosophy that reconciled the highest and deepest evolution that I could think of for the individual and my ardent and comprehensive social aspirations. I almost felt that, if I had Sri Aurobindo's genius and experience, I would have written that book myself.

It was not long after this that D. R. Bendre went for Sri Aurobindo's *darshan* to Pondicherry. And he returned to narrate to us such glowing accounts of Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother, the Asram as a new social achievement and the flower-symbolism so familiar to asramites there that we all agreed that Bendre was a changed man. I felt that I had to go to Pondicherry if only I wanted to find out what had really happened to my dear friend.

But this was not to be for quite a few years.

...

But something significant happened. . . . I had collected all of Sri Aurobindo's available writings. Now or never! I said to myself. I decided to spend some time every morning in meditation and in reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

...

My study and meditation . . . bore fruit. Sri Aurobindo figured so prominently in my public lectures that some of my pupils in college wrote to the Asram and secured autographed portraits of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be presented to me. I was deeply moved when they brought them to my office in the college. I told them that I would go to the home where they were received and take them there. The father of the student was a learned shastri and what was my surprise when, as I went to receive the photograph on a Sunday morning, I was made to sit before a sacrificial fire in the

presence of a distinguished gathering and the photographs of my Master and the Mother were handed over to me to the chanting of Vedic hymns!

I wrote to the Mother and I was in raptures when I received her blessings. I sent an article for the *Pathamandir* Annual, as suggested by Nolini-da. The Asram atmosphere was gradually growing around me.

I was transferred to the college at Kolhapur in June 1949. I was now much nearer Pondicherry. I planned to be in Pondicherry for the *darshan* on 24th April 1950. And I succeeded, in spite of a number of domestic and official handicaps. 5 p.m. was the time for the last train by which I could have left. I received my passport by post at 2 p.m. on that day.

I reached Pondicherry in the evening, sleepless and tired. But the late Shri Shankar Gauda, our dear friend, said that Mother would give flowers to everyone at night. He added that, these days, she used to come very late, 11 p.m. or midnight. We all sat near the Service Tree, waiting for the Mother after dinner.

I was very tired and, like a rebellious child, I protested in my own mind, saying that it was unfair on the part of the Mother to make tired persons like ourselves wait indefinitely, however busy she might be. And then I was deeply excited to hear at about 10 p.m. that the Mother was coming down immediately, contrary to her routine. We assembled in the meditation hall and the pranam-and-flower ceremony began. Each one filed past, bowing down to the Mother and receiving the flower. I was one of the very last to go. As I bowed down and stood with outstretched palms, the Mother went on playing with the flower in her own hand instead of giving it to me. And she did this, probably for more than a minute. When she did give the flower to me, there was a peculiar smile — a smile of ‘knowing’ — playing on her lips. She had found out the culprit who was responsible for disturbing her routine this night!

The next day was 24th April and long queues had been forming hours in advance of *darshan* time. I had joined the queue at one point and was moving slowly but steadily towards the great event — the *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Our line entered the room from which we could see Sri Aurobindo and the Mother seated near the threshold of Sri Aurobindo’s room. There were three or four persons ahead of me. The person who went before me persisted in standing before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother even after they had seen him. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, bent a little towards the left to have a look at me and then the person in front of me moved on. For a moment I stood before them. Sri Aurobindo threw at me a searching glance which penetrated my heart through my eyes and shook the very roots of my being. He then looked at the Mother who saw me in return, her pupils moving like little fish in the depths of her eyes. I at once realised that I was recognised for what and who I was. This glance of recognition made all the helplessness in my heart surge up and I bowed down to them and stretched my hands in vain to touch their feet.

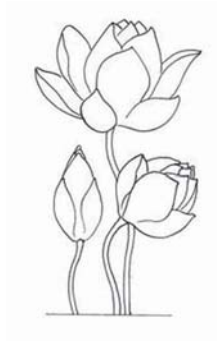
I should also record the fact that, when the Mother gave balcony *darshan*, I saw her face as that of Sri Aurobindo.

As I came out of the *darshan* room, fundamental issues had risen within me. Should I join the Asram? How was I to fashion my life in the coming years? It was clear to me then that my life had to run its course outside the Asram, not inside. But I would have to go there periodically to replenish myself at these great fountains of inspiration. The supernatural path was open before me and here were the masters that would guide me by the hand.

The Asram satisfied another part of my being. It was a commune, — a brotherhood and sisterhood founded on love and spontaneous service. It was a blueprint for a new human society.

V. K. GOKAK

(*Sri Aurobindo – Seer and Poet* by Vinayak Krishna Gokak, published by Abhinav Publications, N. Delhi, 1973, pp.10-13)



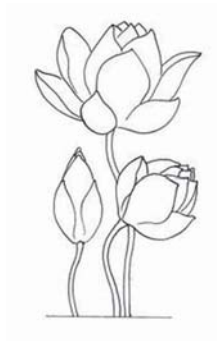
COMPASSION AND FORCE

IN 1959, Prem, my husband was posted in Madras and we started coming to the Ashram. We just came like visitors but having met some very senior people, Prem was very keen to come and settle down. But we just kept visiting and it took about nine years to finally come to the Ashram. When I came — to tell you very frankly — I had no such experience, as some people have had, of seeing and hearing the Mother in a vision. I came with an open mind, without negative feelings, and the Mother started working on me.

The first time when I went to see Her with Prem it was at the Interview Room. And people used to go to Her in the afternoon. I still remember the dress She was wearing, and what I told Her. I said: “Mother, I don’t know anything about You but I want to know; please open me to Your force and explain what You are”; —which She started doing right there. Then we went back to Calcutta and started reading books about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We came for the inauguration of Auroville in February 1968 and in May we returned finally. Obviously it seemed I came because Prem came but really it was not so. As Prem told me much later, the Mother was using different forces with me and him. For example (we used to go together to the Mother), She would look at me in a very compassionate way and at Prem with a powerful look giving all the force necessary for his work. I could feel that there was something happening to me and it was due to that I decided to stay in the Ashram.

SANTOSH MALIK

(Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, p. 34)

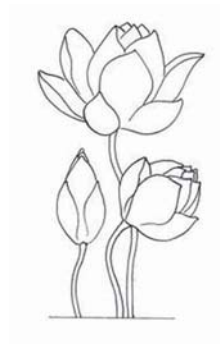


A COLUMN OF LIGHT

My contact with the Mother started in 1953, when I came here as a student of the *Post Graduate Course in Ecology* in the Botany department of Annamalai University. My professor Dr. T.C.N. Singh had brought us here, so that he could place the entire team who were working on “The Effect of Music on Plants” before the Mother. She used to encourage that experiment. The first time I saw Her in 1953 was in the Playground where activities were going on. We stood in a line and I bowed down at Her Feet. She straightaway gave me the *Hymn to Durga*, which was the first book I received from Her. I thought it was over with that. All the students who were with me left and I too was going out but just stood at the entrance to the Playground and looked to my right — by then She had moved from Her seat near the map to the classroom where She was taking the classes. As I stared, I saw a column of light and I was stuck to the place. Tears were rolling down my eyes; I could not move. I do not know how much time elapsed till somebody came and prompted me, “Come on, all the people have left.” So, that was my first contact with the Divine Mother. It started like that and never left me afterwards.

DAYANAND

(*Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, p. 114)



‘A MOMENT SO DIVINE’

*“And nothing happens in the cosmic play
But at its time and in its foreseen place.”*

Savitri (p. 389)

WELL then, there I was at last, with all my dreams come true, actually on my way to Sri Aurobindo-Darshan, to Priya-milan, to Divine-milan! Carried by the swift-winged, joy-conditioned chariot of the Divine Mother’s infinite Grace, I reached Pondicherry two days ahead of time to be blessed on the happy and most auspicious occasion of the golden-hued Lord’s 76th birthday on the 15th August 1948 — the day when the Lord of the worlds seated along with the Divine Mother (it is only by the Mother’s force the Divine gives!) would shower His gracious boons and His Divine gifts freely on all who having heard His Call were driven helplessly towards His lotus-feet, either overpowered by the sweet wine of His Life Divine, or charmed by the sweet glimpses of His infinite Grace, or else maddened by the sweet fragrance of His lotus-name!

Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan days brought a new magic to the ever enchanting, ever smiling atmosphere of the Ashram; each Darshan Day brought a new sweetness, a new joy, a new light and a new song to the Truth-hungry hearts of His disciples and devotees; hardly one Darshan was over when one would eagerly begin to look forward to the next; hardly one cloud-burst of His Grace was over when the disciples, like the Chataka birds, would eagerly, longingly begin to wait for the next one.

Just one Darshan of Sri Aurobindo was enough to hypnotise a soul into being His willing slave forever, and I had twelve!

The sweet and sacred memory of His most precious last twelve Darshans which I was extremely fortunate to have and of the blessed days and the loving ways He made me His devoted slave forever will ever remain engraved in my heart.

On this gracious day of His most auspicious birthday at about 2 o’clock in the afternoon, with my heart full of love and worship and reverence, I too, joined the long queue of the seekers of Soma wine — His privileged devotees and chosen disciples of calm and open faces — carrying beautiful garlands of fresh, sweet-smelling roses and jasmines and red and white lotus flowers, moving slowly, meditatively to see the one for whom my thirsty heart had come so far. Full of sweet suspense and sweet expectations I reached the top landing of the staircase leading to His chambers, from where one could have a full direct view of His divinely beautiful and sweet and compassionate face. Between Him and me there still lingered about a dozen persons (but who could blame them for their helplessness to move faster from His sweet nearness!). Impatient as my heart was, I bent my head a little to the right and quickly stole my first glance of Him. Ah, sweet beyond words! But He surprised my heart completely and arrested me then and there with His laughing, Heaven-pure eyes which most unexpectedly I found waiting for mine. Having been caught red-handed while

stealing a glance of the Lord and happy to be so caught and surprised, I at once pleaded guilty, and then in that fraction of a moment His love-full eyes said “Ah, there you are, come, I was expecting you!” Having been punished so sweetly and so divinely for stealing a glance and crushed completely under the weight of His sweet mercy and kindness and bound forever by the sweet cords of His Love and Light, I moved on towards the Supreme moment of my felicity, prepared for me from all eternity and who knows through what chequered voyages and across what dark millenniums, which brought me face to face with Sri Aurobindo — the most cherished Idol of my heart, the most exalted Lord of all creation! His magnetic and tranquil eyes, His calm, radiant and flame-pure face drenched in Divine beauty and adorned with a pure white lustrous beard and His glorious luminous body spreading out Peace, Joy and Light was a marvel of human and Divine to behold. Within the short moment that one was allowed to quench one’s thirst for His Darshan, I drank with my eyes as much of the honey from His lotus-face as I could, but still thirsty, when I prayed for some more, He, the All-Lover, the All-Beautiful, the Golden Purusha, held me fast with His blissful gaze and tenderly, rapturously branded my heart with His Divine Seal making impossible forever my escape! Henceforth, none but Sri Aurobindo could have a claim upon me. Even I myself had no claim upon myself. Sri Aurobindo had made me totally His and forever. His immortal seal on my heart neither Death, nor Fate, nor Time could ever erase! Like a most loving father He had taken me in His boundless heart and given me more than what I was ignorantly seeking for. Like Sri Krishna to poor Sudama for a mere handful of rice, Sri Aurobindo had given me the most precious treasure of His Love and Grace and refuge in His boundless heart for the mere offering of a handful of my heart. It was not easy to move away from His sweet and sacred nearness but a captive and a slave of His Will, I was compelled to move when His love-full eyes tenderly led me to seek the Divine Mother’s lotus-feet who was seated next to Him on His right like Parvati with Shiva or Lakshmi with Vishnu, and left me there until our eyes met again exactly a hundred days after.

In the earth’s entire history was there indeed ever a moment so divine and so wonderful and so gracious when a man could see God from so close upon earth and himself aspire to become God? Such indeed were the blessings of even a moment’s Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother who was there only because Sri Aurobindo was there; otherwise who ever heard of the Divine Mother’s Incarnation upon earth in a human body before!

Always, always sweet is the remembrance of Sri Aurobindo’s eternally fresh lotus-face, His glorious luminous body and His unforgettable Darshan days!

Always, always sweet is the remembrance of Sri Aurobindo’s loving nearness, His loving gaze, His glorious life and His loving Divine Ways!

G. N. GOYLE

(The God-Touch by G. N. Goyle published by Editions Auropress, 1978, pp. 69-73)