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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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MAN, THE THINKING ANIMAL

A trifling unit in a boundless plan
Amidst the enormous insignificance
Of the unpeopled cosmos' fire-whirl dance,
Earth, as by accident, engendered man:

A creature of his own grey ignorance,
A mind half-shadow and half-gleam, a breath
That wrestles, captive in a world of death,
To live some lame brief years. Yet his advance,

Attempt of a divinity within,
A consciousness in the inconscient Night,
To realise its own supernal Light
Confronts the ruthless forces of the Unseen.

Aspiring to godhead from insensible clay
He travels slow-footed towards the eternal day.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 163)

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

[Sri Aurobindo wrote these notes between 1943 and 1947 to correct erroneous or misleading statements about his life made in his biographies, other books or newspaper articles that were submitted to him by the authors before publication or brought to his attention by others after publication. — Ed. note in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 2006.]

The *Indu Prakash* Articles

Sri Aurobindo revolved these things in his mind, and read, wrote and thought incessantly. Could not something be done? Could he not find an opportunity for service in the larger life of Bengal, — of the Indian nation itself?

He had already in England decided to devote his life to the service of his country and its liberation. He even began soon after coming to India to write on political matters (without giving his name) in the daily press, trying to awaken the nation to the ideas of the future. But these were not well received by the leaders of the time, they succeeded in preventing farther publication and he drew back into silence. But he did not abandon either his ideas or his hope of an effective action.

*

[*New Lamps for Old*, the series of articles he published in the *Indu Prakash*, was on Indian civilisation.]

This title did not refer to Indian civilisation but to Congress politics. It is not used in the sense of the Aladdin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress.

*

It is said that Sri Aurobindo was persuaded to discontinue his contribution to *Indu Prakash* by the late Mahadeo Govind Ranade.

The facts are: After the first two articles, Ranade called the proprietor [saying] that these articles were revolutionary and dangerous and a case for sedition might be brought against the paper. The proprietor alarmed told the editor K. G. Deshpande

that this series must be discontinued. It was finally concluded that the tone should be moderated, the substance made more academic and the thus moderated articles could then continue. Sri Aurobindo lost interest in these muzzled productions, sent in numbers at long intervals and finally dropped the whole affair.

Sri Aurobindo saw Ranade at this time, his only contact; Ranade advised him to take some special subject and write about [it], he recommended Jail Reform, perhaps thinking that this writer would soon have personal experience of jails and thus become an expert on his subject!

[*Another version:*] The facts about the articles in the Indu Prakash were these. They were begun at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, who was editor of the paper, but the first two articles made a sensation and frightened Ranade and other Congress leaders. Ranade warned the proprietor of the paper that, if this went on, he would surely be prosecuted for sedition. Accordingly the original plan of the series had to be dropped at the proprietor's instance. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented, but felt no farther interest and the articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves altogether.

*

[The authorities objected to his patriotic activities.]

Is the reference to the Baroda authorities? Sri Aurobindo is not aware that his utterances or writings were ever objected to by them. His articles in the Indu Prakash were anonymous, although many people in Bombay knew that he was the writer. Otherwise, except for a few speeches at functions in the Palace itself such as the reception of Dr. S. K. Mullick which had nothing to do [with] politics, he spoke mainly as Chairman of the Baroda College Union, there was no objection made at any time and he continued to preside over some of these debates until he left Baroda. It was in England while at Cambridge that he made revolutionary speeches at the meetings of the Indian Majlis which were recorded as a black mark against him by the India Office.

Beginnings of the Revolutionary Movement

During his stay at Baroda Sri Aurobindo got into touch with men that counted, groups that counted. He went to Bengal "to see what was the hope of revival, what was the political condition of the people, and whether there was the possibility of a real movement".

It might be added that he had begun a work that was still nameless; and it was in the course of that work that he went to Bengal “to see what was the hope of revival etc.”

*

He found that in Bengal “the prevailing mood was apathy and despair”. There was no other go except to bide his time.

It should be added, “and continue his political work behind the scenes in silence. The moment for public work had not yet come.”

Once his work was started he continued it until circumstances made it possible to join in a public movement.

*

Even his own intrepid province of Bengal was in no mood to be persuaded by Sri Aurobindo and his gospel of virile nationalism.

It was anything but intrepid at the time; it was the mantra of Bande Mataram and the leap into revolutionary action that changed the people of the province.

*

[He sent some of his friends from Baroda and Bombay to Bengal to prepare for the revolutionary movement.]

It was not any of his friends at Baroda and in Bombay who went to Bengal on his behalf. His first emissary was a young Bengali who had by the help of Sri Aurobindo’s friends in the Baroda Army enlisted as a trooper in a cavalry regiment in spite of the prohibition by the British Government of the enlistment of any Bengali in any army in India. This man who was exceedingly energetic and capable, formed a first group in Calcutta which grew rapidly (afterwards many branches were established); he also entered into relations with P. Mitter and other revolutionaries already at work in the province. He was joined afterwards by Barin who had in the interval come to Baroda.

*

[Among the leading lights of the day was P. Mitter who was a positivist.]

P. Mitter had a spiritual life and aspiration of his own and a strong religious feeling; he was like Bepin Pal and several other prominent leaders of the new nationalist

movement in Bengal, a disciple of the famous Yogi Bejoy Goswami, but he did not bring these things into his politics.

*

[At this time there was at Bombay a secret society headed by a Rajput prince of Udaipur.]

This Rajput leader was not a prince, that is to say a Ruling Chief but a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur. The Thakur was not a member of the council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the council helped him to organise Maharashtra and the Mahratta States. He himself worked principally upon the Indian Army of which he had already won over two or three regiments. Sri Aurobindo took a special journey into Central India to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments.

*

Since 1902 Sri Aurobindo wished to enter the political fray and to contribute his mite to the forces that were seriously working for the country's redemption and rehabilitation. He held private talks, he corresponded, he put pressure on front-rank leaders; but as yet he could do little.

This does not give a correct idea. He had already joined with some of the more advanced leaders to organise bodies for political action which would act when the time for action came;¹ it was only in public as yet that he could do little.

Attitude towards Violent Revolution

[Sri Aurobindo did not believe in, nor did he like, violent revolution.]

This is incorrect. If Sri Aurobindo had not believed in the efficacy of violent revolu-

1. The programme of this organisation was at first Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott — Swaraj meaning to it complete independence. The word Swaraj was first used by the Bengali-Maratha publicist, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, writer of *Deshar Katha*, a book compiling all the details of India's economic servitude which had an enormous influence on the young men of Bengal and helped to turn them into revolutionaries. The word was taken up as their ideal by the revolutionary party and popularised by the vernacular paper *Sandhya* edited by Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya; it was caught hold of by Dadabhai Naoroji at the Calcutta Congress as the equivalent of colonial self-government but did not long retain that depreciated value. Sri Aurobindo was the first to use its English equivalent "independence" and reiterate it constantly in the *Bande Mataram* as the one and immediate aim of national politics. [*Sri Aurobindo's note.*]

tion or had disliked it, he would not have joined the secret society whose whole purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. His historical studies had not taught him the lesson indicated here. On the contrary, he had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national liberation, the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He took much of his inspiration from these movements and their leaders, especially Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini. In his public activity he took up noncooperation and passive resistance as a means in the struggle for independence but not the sole means and so long as he was in Bengal he maintained a secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt, in case passive resistance proved insufficient for the purpose.

General Note

(referring especially to the Alipur Case and Sri Aurobindo's politics)

There seems to be put forth here and in several places 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 Mahatma Gandhi and his gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite [incorrect] and, if left, would give a wrong idea about Sri Aurobindo. He has given his ideas on the subject, generally, in the Essays on the Gita, First Series (Chapter IV?) where he supports the Gita's idea of *dharma yuddha* and criticises, though not expressly, the Gandhian ideas of soul-force. If he had held the pacifist ideal, he would never have supported the Allies (or anybody else) in this War, still less sanctioned some of his disciples joining the Army as airmen, soldiers, doctors, electricians etc. The declarations and professions quoted in the book are not his, at the most they may have been put forward by his lawyers or written, more prudentially than sincerely, by colleagues in the *Bande Mataram*. 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 part of a gospel of Non-violence or Peace. Peace is 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 (mental 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 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 of the Gandhian kind. 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. Those of them who took a share in revolutionary activities, kept a veil over them for reasons which need not be discussed now. Sri Aurobindo knew of all these things and took his own path, but he has always remained determined not to lift the veil till the proper time comes.

It follows that the passages which convey the opposite idea must be omitted in the interests of Truth or rewritten. Nothing need be said about the side of the Nationalist activities of that time in connection with Sri Aurobindo.

Sister Nivedita

[Sister Nivedita was invited to Baroda in 1904 by the Maharaja of Baroda.]

I do not remember whether she was invited but I think she was there as a State guest. Khaserao and myself went to receive her at the station.

*

[Sri Aurobindo had talks with Nivedita about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.]

I do not remember Nivedita speaking to me on spiritual subjects or about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We spoke of politics and other subjects. On the way from the station to the town she cried out against the ugliness of the College [building] and its top-heavy dome and praised the Dharmashala near it. Khaserao stared at [her] and opined that she must be at least slightly cracked to have such ideas! I was very much enamoured at the time of her book *Kali the Mother* and I think we spoke of that; she had heard, she said, that I was a worshipper of Force, by which she meant that I belonged to the secret revolutionary party like herself and I was present at her interview with the Maharaja whom she invited to support the secret revolution; she told him that he could communicate with her through me. Sayajirao was much too cunning to plunge into such a dangerous business and never spoke to me about it. That is all I remember.

*

[Sri Aurobindo was influenced by the patriotic fervour of Swami Vivekananda's utterances, such as his "Mission of the Vedanta" speech.]

Sri Aurobindo was not aware of this speech or of any political action by Vivekananda. He had only heard casually of Vivekananda's intense patriotic feelings which inspired Sister Nivedita.

Bhawani Mandir

Bhawani Mandir was written by Sri Aurobindo but it was more Barin's idea than his. It was not meant to train people for assassination but for revolutionary preparation of the country. The idea was soon dropped as far as Sri Aurobindo was concerned, but something of the kind was attempted by Barin in the Maniktala Garden and it is to this evidently that Hemchandra refers.

*

[An attempt was made to find a site where the Bhawani Mandir idea could be put into operation; later the plan was dropped.]

Sri Aurobindo does not remember anything of this kind nor of any formal decision to abandon the Bhawani Mandir idea. This selection of a site and a head of the monastery must have been simply an idea of Barin. He had travelled among the hills trying to find a suitable place but caught hill-fever and had to abandon his search and return to Baroda. Subsequently he went back to Bengal, but Sri Aurobindo did not hear of any discovery of a suitable place. Sakaria Swami was Barin's Guru: he had been a fighter in the Mutiny on the rebel side and he showed at the breaking of the Surat Congress a vehement patriotic excitement which caused his death because it awoke the poison of the bite of a mad dog which he had reduced to inactivity by a process of his Yogic will; but Sri Aurobindo would not have chosen him for any control of the political side of such an institution. The idea of Bhawani Mandir simply lapsed of itself. Sri Aurobindo thought no more about it, but Barin who clung to the idea tried to establish something like it on a small scale in the Maniktala Garden.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 67-75)

BHAWANI MANDIR

OM
Namas Chandikayai.

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the mother, among the hills. To all the children of the mother, the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.

WHO IS BHAWANI?

Who is Bhawani, the mother, and why should we erect a temple to Her?

BHAWANI IS THE INFINITE ENERGY.

In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns mightily in its courses, the Infinite Energy which streams forth from the Eternal and sets the wheel to work, looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. Sometimes She is Love, sometimes She is Knowledge, sometimes She is Renunciation, sometimes She is Pity. This Infinite Energy is Bhawani. She also is Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi. She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all.

BHAWANI IS SHAKTI.

In the present age, the Mother is manifested as the mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti.

THE WHOLE WORLD IS GROWING FULL OF THE MOTHER AS SHAKTI.

Let us raise our eyes and cast them upon the world around us. Wherever we turn our gaze, huge masses of strength rise before our vision, tremendous, swift and inexorable forces, gigantic figures of energy, terrible sweeping columns of force. All is growing large and strong. The Shakti of war, the Shakti of wealth, the Shakti of Science are tenfold more mighty and colossal, a hundredfold more fierce, rapid and busy in their activity, a thousandfold more prolific in resources, weapons and instruments than ever before in recorded history. Everywhere the Mother is at work; from Her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas are leaping forth into the arena of the world. We have seen the slow but mighty rise of great empires in the West, we have seen the swift, irresistible and impetuous bounding into life of Japan. Some are Mleccha Shaktis clouded in their strength, black or

blood-crimson with *tamas* or *rajas*, others are Arya Shaktis, bathed in a pure flame of renunciation and utter self-sacrifice: but all are the Mother in Her new phase, remoulding, creating. She is pouring Her spirit into the old; She is whirling into life the new.

WE IN INDIA FAIL IN ALL THINGS FOR WANT OF SHAKTI.

But in India the breath moves slowly, the afflatus is long in coming. India, the ancient mother, is indeed striving to be reborn, striving with agony and tears, but she strives in vain. What ails her, she, who is after all so vast and might be so strong? There is surely some enormous defect, something vital is wanting in us; nor is it difficult to lay our finger on the spot. We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti. The Mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.

The wish to be reborn we have in abundance, there is no deficiency there. How many attempts have been made, how many movements have been begun, in religion, in society, in politics! But the same fate has overtaken or is preparing to overtake them all. They flourish for a moment, then the impulse wanes, the fire dies out, and if they endure, it is only as empty shells, forms from which the Brahma has gone or in which it lies overpowered with *tamas* and inert. Our beginnings are mighty, but they have neither sequel nor fruit.

Now we are beginning in another direction; we have started a great industrial movement which is to enrich and regenerate an impoverished land. Untaught by experience, we do not perceive that this movement must go the way of all the others, unless we first seek the one essential thing, unless we acquire strength.

OUR KNOWLEDGE IS A DEAD THING FOR WANT OF SHAKTI.

Is it knowledge that is wanting? We Indians born and bred in a country where Jnana has been stored and accumulated since the race began, bear about in us the inherited gains of many thousands of years. Great giants of knowledge rise among us even today to add to the store. Our capacity has not shrunk, the edge of our intellect has not been dulled or blunted, its receptivity and flexibility are as varied as of old. But it is a dead knowledge, a burden under which we are bowed, a poison which is corroding us rather than as it should be a staff to support our feet, and a weapon in our hands; for this is the nature of all great things that when they are not used or are ill used, they turn upon the bearer and destroy him.

Our knowledge then, weighed down with a heavy load of *tamas*, lies under the curse of impotence and inertia. We choose to fancy indeed, now-a-days, that if we acquire Science, all will be well. Let us first ask ourselves what we have done with the knowledge we already possess, or what have those, who have already acquired

Science, been able to do for India. Imitative and incapable of initiative, we have striven to copy the methods of England, and we had not the strength: we would now copy the methods of the Japanese, a still more energetic people; are we likely to succeed any better? The mighty force of knowledge which European Science bestows is a weapon for the hands of a giant, it is the mace of Bheemsen: what can a weakling do with it but crush himself in the attempt to wield it?

OUR BHAKTI CANNOT LIVE AND WORK FOR WANT OF SHAKTI.

Is it love, enthusiasm, Bhakti that is wanting? These are ingrained in the Indian nature, but in the absence of Shakti we cannot concentrate, we cannot direct, we cannot even preserve it. Bhakti is the leaping flame, Shakti is the fuel. If the fuel is scanty how long can the fire endure?

When the strong nature, enlightened by knowledge, disciplined and given a giant's strength by Karma, lifts itself up in love and adoration to God, that is the Bhakti which endures and keeps the soul for ever united with the Divine. But the weak nature is too feeble to bear the impetus of so mighty a thing as perfect Bhakti; he is lifted up for a moment, then the flame soars up to Heaven, leaving him behind exhausted and even weaker than before. Every movement of any kind of which enthusiasm and adoration are the life, must fail and soon burn itself out so long as the human material from which it proceeds is frail and light in substance.

INDIA THEREFORE NEEDS SHAKTI ALONE.

The deeper we look, the more we shall be convinced that the one thing wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength — strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others. If we have strength, everything else will be added to us easily and naturally. In the absence of strength we are like men in a dream who have hands but cannot seize or strike, who have feet but cannot run.

INDIA, GROWN OLD AND DECREPIT IN WILL, HAS TO BE REBORN.

Whenever we strive to do anything, after the first rush of enthusiasm is spent, a paralysing helplessness seizes upon us. We often see in the cases of old men full of years and experience that the very excess of knowledge seems to have frozen their powers of action and their powers of will. When a great feeling or a great need overtakes them and it is necessary to carry out its promptings in action, they hesitate, ponder, discuss, make tentative efforts and abandon them or wait for the safest and easiest way to suggest itself, instead of taking the most direct; thus the time when it

was possible and necessary to act passes away. Our race has grown just such an old man with stores of knowledge, with ability to feel and desire, but paralysed by simple sluggishness, senile timidity, senile feebleness. If India is to survive, she must be made young again. Rushing and billowing streams of energy must be poured into her; her soul must become, as it was in the old times, like the surges, vast, puissant, calm or turbulent at will, an ocean of action or of force.

INDIA CAN BE REBORN.

Many of us utterly overcome by *tamas*, the dark and heavy demon of inertia, are saying now-a-days that it is impossible; that India is decayed, bloodless and lifeless, too weak ever to recover; that our race is doomed to extinction. It is a foolish and idle saying. No man or nation need be weak unless *he* chooses, no man or nation need perish unless *he* deliberately chooses extinction.

WHAT IS A NATION? THE SHAKTI OF ITS MILLIONS.

For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha-Mardini sprang into being from the Shaktis of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred millions of people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of *tamas*, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of *tamas* we have but to wake the Brahma within.

IT IS OUR OWN CHOICE WHETHER WE CREATE A NATION OR PERISH.

What is it that so many thousands of holy men, Sadhus and Sannyasis, have preached to us silently by their lives? What was the message that radiated from the personality of Bhagawan Ramkrishna Paramhansa? What was it that formed the kernel of the eloquence with which the lionlike heart of Vivekananda sought to shake the world? It is this that in every one of these three hundred millions of men from the Raja on his throne to the coolie at his labour, from the Brahmin absorbed in his *sandhya* to the Pariah walking shunned of men, GOD LIVETH. We are all gods and creators, because the energy of God is within us and all life is creation; not only the making of new forms is creation, but preservation is creation, destruction itself is creation. It rests with us what we shall create; for we are not, unless we choose, puppets dominated by Fate and Maya: we are facets and manifestations of Almighty Power.

INDIA MUST BE REBORN, BECAUSE HER REBIRTH IS DEMANDED BY
THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD.

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is *she* who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul. In the sphere of morality, likewise, it is her mission to purge barbarism (mlecchahood) out of humanity and to *aryanise* the world. In order to do this, she must first re-aryanise herself.

It was to initiate this great work, the greatest and most wonderful work ever given to a race, that Bhagawan Ramkrishna came and Vivekananda preached. If the work does not progress as it once promised to do, it is because we have once again allowed the terrible cloud of *tamas* to settle down on our souls — fear, doubt, hesitation, sluggishness. We have taken, some of us, the Bhakti which poured forth from the one and the Jnana given us by the other, but from the lack of Shakti, from the lack of Karma, we have not been able to make our Bhakti a living thing. May we yet remember that it was Kali, who is Bhawani mother of strength, whom Ramkrishna worshipped and with whom he became one.

But the destiny of India will not wait on the *falterings* and failings of individuals; the mother demands that men shall arise to institute her worship and make it universal.

TO GET STRENGTH WE MUST ADORE
THE MOTHER OF STRENGTH.

Strength then and again strength and yet more strength is the need of our race. But if it is strength we desire, how shall we gain it if we do not adore the Mother of strength? She demands worship not for Her own sake, but in order that She may help us and give Herself to us. This is no fantastic idea, no superstition but the ordinary law of the universe. The gods cannot, if they would, give themselves unasked. Even the Eternal comes not unaware upon man. Every devotee knows by experience that we must turn to Him and desire and adore Him before the Divine Spirit pours in its ineffable beauty and ecstasy upon the soul. What is true of the Eternal, is true also of Her who goes forth from Him.

RELIGION THE TRUE PATH.

Those who, possessed with western ideas, look askance at any return to the old sources of energy may well consider a few fundamental facts.

THE EXAMPLE OF JAPAN.

I. There is no instance in history of a more marvellous and sudden up-surgings of strength in a nation than modern Japan. All sorts of theories had been started to account for the uprising, but now intellectual Japanese are telling us what were the fountains of that mighty awakening, the sources of that inexhaustible strength. They were drawn from religion. It was the Vedantic teachings of Oyomei and the recovery of *Shintoism* with its worship of the national Shakti of Japan in the image and person of the Mikado that enabled the little island empire to wield the stupendous weapons of western knowledge and science as lightly and invincibly as Arjun wielded the Gandiv.

INDIA'S GREATER NEED OF SPIRITUAL REGENERATION.

II. India's need of drawing from the fountains of religion is far greater than was ever Japan's; for the Japanese had only to revitalise and perfect a strength that already existed. We have to create strength where it did not exist before; we have to change our natures, and become new men with new hearts, to be born again. There is no scientific process, no machinery for that. Strength can only be created by drawing it from the internal and inexhaustible reservoirs of the Spirit, from that Adya-Shakti of the Eternal which is the fountain of all new existence. To be born again means nothing but to revive the Brahma within us, and that is a spiritual process, — no effort of the body or the intellect can compass it.

RELIGION THE PATH NATURAL TO THE NATIONAL MIND.

III. All great awakenings in India, all her periods of mightiest and most varied vigour have drawn their vitality from the fountainheads of some deep religious awakening. Wherever the religious awakening has been complete and grand, the national energy it has created has been gigantic and puissant; wherever the religious movement has been narrow or incomplete, the national movement has been broken, imperfect or temporary. The persistence of this phenomenon is proof that it is ingrained in the temperament of the race. If you try other and foreign methods, we shall either gain our end with tedious slowness, painfully and imperfectly, or we shall not attain it at all. Why abandon the plain way which God and the Mother have marked out for you to choose faint and devious paths of your own treading?

THE SPIRIT WITHIN IS THE TRUE SOURCE OF STRENGTH.

IV. The Brahma within, the one and indivisible ocean of spiritual force is that from which all life material and mental is drawn. This is beginning to be as much recog-

nised by leading western thinkers as it was from the old days by the East. If it be so, then spiritual energy is the source of all other strength. *There* are the fathomless fountain-heads, the deep and inexhaustible sources. The shallow surface springs are easier to reach, but they soon run dry. Why not then go deep instead of scratching the surface? The result will repay the labour.

THREE THINGS NEEDFUL.

We need three things answering to three fundamental laws.

I. BHAKTI — THE TEMPLE OF THE MOTHER.

We cannot get strength unless we adore the Mother of strength.

We will therefore build a temple to the white Bhawani, the mother of strength, the *Mother of India*; and we will build it in a place far from the contamination of modern cities and as yet little trodden by man, in a high and pure air steeped in calm and energy. This temple will be the centre from which Her worship is to flow over the whole country; for there worshipped among the hills, She will pass like fire into the brains and hearts of Her worshippers. This also is what the Mother has commanded.

II. KARMA — A NEW ORDER OF BRAHMACHARINS.

Adoration will be dead and ineffective unless it is transmuted into Karma.

We will therefore have a *math* with a new Order of Karma-Yogins attached to the temple, men who have renounced all in order to work for the Mother. Some may, if they choose, be complete Sannyasins, most will be Brahmacharins who will return to the *grihasthasram* when their allotted work is finished; but all must accept renunciation.

WHY? FOR TWO REASONS: —

(1) Because it is only in proportion as we put from us the pre-occupation of bodily desires and interests, the sensual gratifications, lusts, longings, indolences of the material world, that we can return to the ocean of spiritual force within us.

(2) Because for the development of Shakti, entire concentration is necessary; the mind must be devoted entirely to its aim as a spear is hurled to its mark; if other cares and longings distract the mind, the spear will be carried out from its straight course and miss the target. We need a nucleus of men in whom the Shakti is developed to its uttermost extent, in whom it fills every corner of the personality and overflows to fertilise the earth. These, having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land.

III. JNANA — THE GREAT MESSAGE.

Bhakti and Karma cannot be perfect and enduring unless they are based upon Jnana.

The Brahmacharins of the Order will therefore be taught to fill their souls with knowledge and base their work upon it as upon a rock. What shall be the basis of their knowledge? What but the great *so-aham*, the mighty formula of the Vedanta, the ancient gospel which has yet to reach the heart of the nation, the knowledge which when vivified by Karma and Bhakti delivers man out of all fear and all weakness.

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ।

THE MESSAGE OF THE MOTHER.

When, therefore, you ask who is Bhawani the mother, She herself answers you, “I am the Infinite Energy which streams forth from the Eternal in the world and Eternal in yourselves. I am the Mother of the Universe, the Mother of the Worlds, and for you who are children of the Sacred land, *aryabhumi*, made of her clay and reared by her sun and winds, I am Bhawani Bharati, Mother of India.”

Then if you ask why we should erect a temple to Bhawani the mother, hear Her answer, “Because I have commanded it and because by making a centre for the future religion, you will be furthering the immediate will of the Eternal and storing up merit which will make you strong in this life and great in another. You will be helping to create a nation, to consolidate an age, to *aryanise* a world. And that nation is your own, that age is the age of yourselves and your children, that world is no fragment of land bounded by seas and hills, but the whole earth with her teeming millions.”

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped, — inactive because the God in us is concealed by *tamas*, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled, with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship, each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her not, She may well be wroth in the day of Her coming; but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their Mother!

APPENDIX.

The work and rules of the new Order of Sannyasis will be somewhat as follows

GENERAL RULES.

1. All who undertake the life of Brahmacharya for the Mother, will have to vow themselves to Her service for *four* years, after which they will be free to continue the work or return to family life.

2. All money received by them in the Mother's name will go to the Mother's Service. For themselves they will be allowed to receive shelter and their meals, when necessary, and nothing more.

3. Whatever they may earn for themselves, e.g. by the publication of books etc., they must give at least half of it to the service of the Mother.

4. They will observe entire obedience to the Head of the Order and his one or two assistants in all things connected with the work or with their religious life.

5. They will observe strictly the discipline and rules of *achar* and purity, bodily and mental, prescribed by the Heads of the Order.

6. They will be given periods for rest or for religious improvement during which they will stop at the *math*, but the greater part of the year they will spend in work outside. This rule will apply to all except the few necessary for the service of the Temple and those required for the central direction of the work.

7. There will be no gradations of rank among the workers and none must seek for distinction or mere personal fame, but practise strength and self-effacement.

II. WORK FOR THE PEOPLE.

8. Their chief work will be that of mass instruction and help to the poor and ignorant.

9. This they will strive to effect in various ways —

1. Lectures and demonstrations suited to an uneducated intelligence.

2. Classes and nightly schools.

3. Religious teachings.

4. Nursing the sick.

5. Conducting works of charity.

6. Whatever other good work their hands may find to do and the Order approves.

III. WORKS FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS.

10. They will undertake, according as they may be directed, various works of public utility in the big towns and elsewhere connected especially with the education

and religious life and instruction of the middle classes, as well as with other public needs.

IV. WORK WITH THE WEALTHY CLASSES.

11. They will approach the zamindars, landholders and rich men generally, and endeavour —

1. To promote sympathy between the zamindars and the peasants and heal all discords.

2. To create the link of a single and living religious spirit and a common passion for one great ideal between all classes.

3. To turn the minds of rich men to works of public beneficence and charity to those in their neighbourhood independent of the hope of reward and official distinction.

V. GENERAL WORK FOR THE COUNTRY.

12. As soon as funds permit, some will be sent to foreign countries to study lucrative arts and manufactures.

13. They will be as Sannyasis during their period of study, never losing hold of their habits of purity and self-abnegation.

14. On their return they will establish with the aid of the Order, factories and workshops, still living the life of Sannyasis and devoting all their profits to the sending of more and more such students to foreign countries.

15. Others will be sent to travel through various countries on foot, inspiring by their lives, behaviour and conversation, sympathy and love for the Indian people in the European nations and preparing the way for their acceptance of Aryan ideals.

After the erection and consecration of the Temple, the development of the work of the Order will be pushed on as rapidly as possible or as the support and sympathy of the public allows. With the blessing of the Mother this will not fail us.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 75-92)

[*Bhawani Mandir*. 1905. This famous pamphlet was written by Sri Aurobindo not long before August 1905, when a copy was received by a British official in Broach (a town not far from Baroda) and reported to the government.

It was used as evidence in the Alipore Bomb Trial, and later cited in the Rowlatt Report (1919).

Rediscovered after independence among the Alipore Bomb Trial papers, it was

reproduced in the *Hindusthan Standard* in October 1956 and later in various publications of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. — Note by Editors of *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest.*]

INVOCATION

15 August 1947

O our Mother, O Soul of India, Mother who hast never forsaken thy children even in the days of darkest depression, even when they turned away from thy voice, served other masters and denied thee, now when they have arisen and the light is on thy face in this dawn of thy liberation, in this great hour we salute thee. Guide us so that the horizon of freedom opening before us may be also a horizon of true greatness and of thy true life in the community of the nations. Guide us so that we may be always on the side of great ideals and show to men thy true visage, as a leader in the ways of the spirit and a friend and helper of all the peoples.

*

(About “the Mother’s flag”, which contains her symbol in gold centred on a silver-blue background)

It is the flag of India’s spiritual mission. And in the accomplishment of this mission will India’s unity be accomplished.

15 August 1947

*

It is by being sincere, courageous, enduring and honest that you can best serve your country, make it one and great in the world.

October 1948

*

(Message for the Society for the Spiritual and Cultural Renaissance of Bharat)

Let the splendour of Bharat’s past be reborn in the realisation of her imminent future with the help and blessings of her living soul.

23 August 1951

The Mother

(Words of the Mother I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 352)

**‘O LORD, BECOME
THE SOVEREIGN MASTER OF OUR LIVES . . .’**

February 5, 1914

WHAT could be said that is not always the very same aspiration: the law of divine love, the purest expression of what we can conceive of Thee, must be realised more and more upon earth and triumph over all ignorant egoism; we must become more and more perfectly the faithful servitors of that power of love and light, we must live in it, by it; that alone must live and act in us.

O Lord, become the sovereign Master of our lives and dispel all the obscurities which can still prevent us from seeing Thee and constantly communing with Thee.

Liberate us from all ignorance, liberate us from ourselves that we may open wide the doors of Thy glorious manifestation.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 66)

‘HE KNOWS BETTER THAN YOU DO . . .’

[*This is the last portion from the Mother’s conversation of 17 January 1970.*]

YOU know, I do not believe in external decisions. I simply believe in one thing only: the force of the Consciousness which is making a *pressure* like that (*crushing gesture*). And the pressure goes on increasing . . . which means that it will sift out the people. I believe only in that — the pressure of the Consciousness. All the rest are things that men do. They do them more or less well, and then it lives, and then it dies, and then it changes, and then it gets distorted, and then . . . everything they have done. It is not worth the trouble. The power of execution must come from above, like that, imperative (*gesture of descent*)! And for that, this (*Mother points to her forehead*), this must keep quiet. Not to say, “Oh, that must not be, oh! this must be, oh! we ought to do . . .” Peace, peace, peace. He knows better than you do what is needed. There.

So since there are not many people who can understand, I say nothing. I watch and I wait.

(*Silence*)

If they can come to an agreement, the work will go faster. There. Objections about details have no importance, because one sets out with one idea and one arrives with another . . . one makes a lot of progress in between. So that does not need to be discussed, it is only . . . Only try to unite your energies to get started more quickly, that’s all.

(*Mother laughs.*)

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother — I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 308-09*)

ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

(Continued from the issue of October 2008)

(5)

NEW YEAR PRAYER OF 1941

THE world is fighting for its spiritual life menaced by the rush of hostile and undivine forces.

Lord ! we aspire to be Thy valiant warriors so that Thy glory may manifest upon the earth.

January 1, 1941

THE MOTHER

(6)

It has become necessary to state emphatically and clearly that all who by their thoughts and wishes are supporting and calling for the victory of the Nazis are by that very fact collaborating with the Asura against the Divine and helping to bring about the victory of the Asura.

The Asuric power that is acting with Hitler as instrument and seeking through him domination of the world is the same power that has been opposing Sri Aurobindo's work and trying to destroy it and to frustrate the divine fulfilment.

Those, therefore, who wish for the victory of the Nazis and their associates should now understand that it is a wish for the destruction of our work and an act of treachery against Sri Aurobindo.

May 6, 1941

THE MOTHER

(7)

The world situation is critical today. India's fate too is hanging in the balance. There was a time when India was absolutely secure, there was no danger whatever of her being a victim to Asuric aggression. But things have changed. People and forces in India have acted in such a way as to invite Asuric influences upon her: these have worked insidiously and undermined the security that was there.

If India is in danger, Pondicherry cannot be expected to remain outside the danger zone. It will share the fate of the rest of the country. The protection I can give is not unconditional. It is idle to hope that in spite of anything and everything, the protection will be there over all. My protection is there if conditions are fulfilled. It goes without saying that any sympathy or support for the Nazis (or for any ally of theirs) auto-

matically cuts across the circle of protection. Apart from this obvious and external factor, there are more fundamental psychological conditions which demand fulfilment. The Divine can give protection only to those who are whole-heartedly faithful to the Divine, who live truly in the spirit of Sadhana and keep their consciousness and preoccupation fixed upon the Divine and the service of the Divine. Desire, for example, insistence on one's likes and conveniences, all movements of hypocrisy and insincerity and falsehood, are great obstacles standing in the way of the Divine's protection. If you seek to impose your will upon the Divine, it is as if you were calling for a bomb to fall upon you. I do not say that things are bound to happen in this way; but they are very likely to happen, if people do not become conscious and strictly vigilant and act in the true spirit of a spiritual seeker. If the psychological atmosphere remains the same as that of the outside world, there can be no sure wall of security against the dark Forces that are working out in it the ordeal of danger, suffering and destruction entering here.

May 25, 1941

THE MOTHER

(8)

NEW YEAR PRAYER OF 1942¹

Glory to Thee, O Lord, conquerer of every foe!
Give us the power to endure and share in Thy victory.

THE MOTHER

(9)

Lord, give us the indomitable courage that comes from a perfect trust in Thee.

April 4, 1942

THE MOTHER

(10)

Calcutta is now in the danger zone. But the Mother does not wish that anyone should leave his post because of the danger. Those who are very eager to remove their children can do so, but no one should be under the illusion that there is any safe place anywhere.

April 6, 1942

SRI AUROBINDO

1. The Mother has said about her New Year Prayers: "During the war it was wonderful, it was like a prophecy of what was going to come." (*Questions and Answers 1953*: December 30)

(11)

To those who quake for their skin and run away . . .

Why should you be in safety when the whole world is in danger? What is your special virtue and special merit for which you are to be specially protected?

In the Divine alone is there safety. Take refuge in Him and cast away all fear.

May 26, 1942

THE MOTHER

(12)

It appears that there are some who think of Pondicherry as a safe place and this is one of their reasons for remaining. This may turn out to be a serious error. Pondicherry can be a safe place only if the Japanese think it not worth their attention because it has no military objectives and no importance as a port or an industrial centre. Even then bombs might fall by accident or mistake as the town is well within the war area. But there are local circumstances which might lead them to think it a place of capital importance from the military point of view and in that case it would be exposed to all the dangers and horrors of modern warfare, a place under military occupation and a field of battle. Those who elect to remain here, must dismiss all idea of an assured personal safety. Either they should be those who prefer to die here rather than live elsewhere or, at the least, they must be prepared to face any eventuality, any risk, discomfort or suffering. These are not times when there can be a guarantee of safety or ease. It is a time of great ordeals, an hour for calm patience and the highest courage. Reliance on the Divine Will should be there, but not the lower vital's bargain for a guaranteed and comfortably guarded existence.

SRI AUROBINDO

(13)

You have said that you have begun to doubt whether it was the Mother's war and ask me to make you feel again that it is. I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of

mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.

July 29, 1942

SRI AUROBINDO

(14)

NEW YEAR PRAYER OF 1943

The hour has come when a choice has to be made, radical and definitive.

Lord, give us the strength to reject falsehood and emerge in Thy truth, pure and worthy of Thy victory.²

THE MOTHER

(15)

What I have said is not that the Allies have never done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have shown that side in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? It is only individuals and not too many of them who can be described in that style. But there is the other side also. Your correspondents are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; but looked at like that, all big nations and many small ones

2. This is no question of a general theory; it belongs to the actuality of things. The Asura is the force of falsehood, anti-divine, which reigns as sovereign over the physical world; his influence is felt everywhere, it is in everything in Matter. But the time has now come when the separation, the purification, can be made, the falsehood, the Asuric influence rejected and there can be an exclusive living in the Divine Truth. [A note of the Mother]

have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and introduced self-governing bodies and parliamentary institutions where they did not exist; and whatever the relative worth of these things, they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage, in a forward evolution. (What about the others? What about the Axis' new order? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. On the whole she has been for some time moving away steadily from imperialism towards a principle of free association and cooperation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction. She is turning in spirit in the direction of a world-union of some kind after the war; her new generation no longer believes in an "imperial mission"; she has offered India Dominion independence (even, if she prefers it she can choose or pass on to isolated independence) after the war, on the base of an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves; though this, it has been feared, leaves a loophole for reactionary delay, it is in itself extremely reasonable and it is the Indians themselves with their inveterate habit of disunion who will be responsible if they are imbecile enough to reject the opportunity.

All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, in Cuba, the Philippines, — everywhere apart from some islands in the Pacific which would go plop into other hands if she withdrew from them. It is perhaps possible, some suggest, that she may be tempted towards a sort of financial imperialism, the rule of the Almighty American dollar, by her new sense of international power, or led into other mistakes, but if so we may fairly assume from her other strong tendencies that she will soon withdraw from it. The greater danger is that she may retire again into a selfish isolationism after the war and so destroy or delay the chance of a possible beginning that may lead eventually to some beginning of a free world-union. But still there again is the evolutionary force. Is there a similar trend on the part of the Axis? The answer is plain enough both from their own declarations and their behaviour. Avowedly and openly, Nazi Germany today stands for the reversal of this evolutionary tendency, for the destruction of the neo-international outlook, the new Dharma, for a reversion not only to the past, but to a far-back primitive and barbaric ideal. She fully intended to reimpose it on the whole earth, but would have done so if she had had, as for a time she seemed to have, the strength to conquer. There can be no doubt or hesitation here; if we are for the evolutionary future of mankind, we must recognise that it is only the

victory of the Allies that can save it. At the very least, they are at the moment the instruments of the evolutionary Forces to save mankind's future, and these declarations of their own show that they are conscious of it. Other elements and motives there are, but the main issue is here. One has to look at things on all sides to see them steadily and whole. Once more, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has first to be safeguarded; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated.

For us the question put by you does not arise. The Mother made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions (past or present or possible backslidings in the future) which are common to human nature and to all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least stand for human values, though they may often have acted against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the "virtues" of the *Herrenvolk*, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a decisive importance.

Nolini, I suppose, gave the Kurukshetra example not as an exact parallel but as a traditional instance of a war between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because its leaders made themselves his instruments. I don't suppose he envisaged it as a battle between virtue and wickedness or between good and evil men or intended to equate the British with the Pandavas, nations with individuals or even individuals with individuals, — shall we say, Stafford Cripps with Yudhisthira, Churchill with Bhima and General Montgomery with Arjuna! After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, calm and holy and quite unselfish and without passions? There are many incidents in the Mahabharata which seem to show the contrary, that they had their defects and failings. And in the Pandava army and its leaders there must have been many who were not paragons of virtue, while there were plenty of good men and true on Duryodhana's side. Unselfishness? but were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests — just and right, no doubt, but still personal claims and interests? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmya-yuddha*, but it was for right and justice in their own case. The Allies have as good or even a better case and reason to call theirs a righteous quarrel, for they are

fighting not only for themselves, for their freedom and very existence, but for the existence, freedom, maintenance of natural rights of other nations, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Belgians, Dutch, French, Greece, Yugoslavia and a vast number of others not yet directly threatened, they too claim to be fighting for a Dharma, for civilised values, for the preservation of great ideals and, in view of what Hitler represents and openly professes and what he wishes to destroy, their claim has strong foundations. And if imperialism is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tinted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter (alas for Ahimsa!) that they might establish their sole imperial rule over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? Such a criticism would be grotesquely out of place, but it would be a natural result of weighing ancient happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as a world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, — and in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter.

Who are the people who have such a tenderness for Hitler and object to his being compared to Duryodhana? I hope they are not among those (spiritual people among them, I am told) who believe — or perhaps once believed? — Hitler to be the new Avatar and his religion (God help us!) to be the true religion which we must help to establish throughout the wide world or among these who regard Hitler as a great and good man, a saint, an ascetic and all that is noble and god-like. I don't see why Hitler should not be compared to Duryodhana, except that Duryodhana, if alive, might complain indignantly that the comparison was a monstrous and scandalous injustice to him and that he never did anything like what Hitler has done. By the way, what about Krishna's "*jahi śatrūn, bhūñjasva rājyam samṛddham*"?³ An unholy and unethical bribe? Or what on earth did he mean by it? But battle and conquest and imperial rule were then a Dharma and consecrated by a special form of sacrifice. We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or medieval times and even quite recently but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged but nothing more — exploitation was not excluded. No doubt, many nations in the past were jealous of their own independence and some like the Greeks and later the English had the ideal of freedom, more especially of individual liberty. But the passion for individual liberty went along in ancient times with the institution of slavery which no Greek democrat ever thought to be wrong; no Greek state or people thought it an injustice to take away the freedom of other Greek states, still less of foreign peoples, or deemed it

3. "Conquer thy enemies and enjoy an opulent kingdom" (*Gita* XI. 33).

immoral to rule over subject races. The same inconsistency has held sway over human ideas until recent times and still holds sway over international practice even now. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty, both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or, short of such absolutist [attitudes] such compromises as the British idea of training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement, a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice, — an infant Dharma that would be throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his “Avataric” mission and established his new “religion” over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialism; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world-order evolves which will make the old things impossible, — a difficult task, but not, with God’s grace, absolutely impracticable.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses them as His instruments even if they are not flawless in character, without stain or sin or fault, exemplary in virtue, or angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord’s side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies (I am speaking of the “big” nations, America, Britain and China) would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities open to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real issue and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us.

September 3, 1943

SRI AUROBINDO

P.S. This is in answer to what is implied in your letter and, I suppose, in those of your correspondents, not to anything in K’s letter. His observations are all right, but circumstances alter cases. Ours is a *sādhana* which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of Him in all things and beings but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world, a spiritual force to be brought on the world, under difficult conditions; then one has to see one’s way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and planes, in either case *ghoram karma*:⁴ the means and times and persons differ, but it does not seem to me that Nolani is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra. As for war, violence, the use of force to maintain freedom for the world, for the highest values of human civilisation, for the salvation of humanity

4. Terrible action (*Gita* III. i).

from a terrible fate, etc. the old command rings out once again after many ages for those who must fight or support this battle for the right: “*mayaivete nihatā pūrvameva nimittamātram bhava savyasāchin.*”⁵

(16)

NEW YEAR PRAYER OF 1944

O Lord, the world implores Thee to prevent it from falling back always into the same stupidities.

Grant that the mistakes recognised may never be renewed.

Grant lastly that its actions may be the exact and sincere expressions of its proclaimed ideals.

THE MOTHER

(17)

NEW YEAR PRAYER OF 1945

The earth will enjoy a lasting and living peace only when men understand that they must be truthful even in their international dealings.

O Lord, it is for this perfect truthfulness that we aspire.

THE MOTHER

(18)

The Victory has come, Thy Victory, O Lord, for which we render to Thee infinite thanksgiving.

But now our ardent prayer rises towards Thee. It is with Thy force and by Thy force that the victors have conquered. Grant that they do not forget it in their success and that they keep the promises which they have made to Thee in the hours of danger and anguish. They have taken Thy name to make war, may they not forget Thy grace when they have to make the peace.

August 16, 1945

THE MOTHER

(*Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, April 1976, pp. 57-76)

5. “By Me and none other already even are they slain, do thou become the occasion only, O Savyasachin.” (*Gita* XI. 33).

AN ALL-ROUND REVELATION

SRI AUROBINDO'S spiritual vision of the world can be considered an all-round revelation because it finds some essential truth in every world-view reached by mystical, philosophical or scientific research, and weaves it into its own comprehensive system. There is nothing it rejects or fails to explicate.

Take even the very denial of it, the most extreme Materialism of our day, basing itself on blind physical phenomena, random genetic mutation, mindless natural selection of mutated forms by the environment, extensively wasteful processes of evolutionary life, mechanical reactions and reflexes of organisms, dependence of psychological movements on bodily processes. This very world-view can obtain its rationale in the Aurobindonian *Weltanschauung* when the latter is taken in its coverage of the lowest rung of things, no less than of their highest.

What is, in outline, Sri Aurobindo's scheme of reality? The supreme aspect of reality for him is an infinite and eternal quaternary of Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss and Supermind — the last-named a creative divinity bringing forth the truths inherent in the triple depth of Spirit behind it and holding in a perfect or archetypal cosmos a balanced interplay of the One and the Many.

The Supermind manifests below itself a hierarchy of "planes" disclosing the reality in various partial ways. At the lower end of the ladder there are the realms of Universal Mind, Life-Force and Subtle-Physical Substance, each organised into a set of interacting individual features. A realm of Soul-principle — a plane of World-Soul — exists at the back of them and is related to the universe we commonly know in our daily experience. The realms at the lower end of the hierarchy lie beyond this universe though they press upon it constantly for the expression of their powers and the evocation of its potencies.

Our commonly known universe emerges from a tremendous concealment not only of the supreme aspect but also of all its partial manifestations. That concealment constitutes an utter opposite of all we may regard as divine, a boundless "Inconscient" where the quaternary "Superconscient", along with everything below it, lies "involved", locked in. From this involution, which the ultimate reality achieves as an extreme challenging adventure of self-loss and self-discovery, all evolves, progressively releasing the higher in the lower and integrating the lower with the higher. But the evolution marches across the huge obstacles put up by the reality's initial negation of its own being. With the Soul-principle stirring from behind, Matter is evolved from the chaos of the Inconscient, then Life from Matter and Mind from Life. Veiled by Mind, as Mind is by Life and Life by Matter, Supermind and its accompaniments wait to be evolved. What is initially veiled will be of necessity laid bare in the terminal outcome.

Here is a basic spiritual monism that prevents reality from being a jostle of disparates. At the same time there is a diverse pluralism that does justice to all agencies obviously different from one another though closely associated.

Such a synthesising vision recognises, even while it exceeds, the grounds from which all one-sided views derive, including the most extreme Materialism, the ground for which would here be the multi-moded Inconscient taken as all in all. Logically, the Inconscient would give rise to whatever blindness, randomness, mindlessness, wastefulness, mechanicality and Matter-dependence that science notes as fundamental in its study of our universe.

Sri Aurobindo does not need to proceed, as science does, from these data in order to posit them. He starts the other way round and posits the Highest Spirit, yet provides a valid reason for their appearance.

Without denying them or explaining them away, he supplies also a valid reason for all that extreme Materialism faces as a paradox — the outburst of sentient vitality from brute Matter, the breaking forth of self-conscious mentality from instinctive organic process, the upsurge of idealistic soul-sense and luminous spirituality from the perceptual-conceptual half-knowledge of the labouring intelligence. That upsurge carries even the promise of a fulfilled Mind, an accomplished Life-Force and even a perfected body because of the divine archetypes of these principles already subsisting in the Supermind and pressing upon their counterparts in the evolutionary world studied by extreme Materialism.

Such a promise is eminently in accord — although in a key undreamt-of by science — with this Materialism's own finest hope and endeavour — the push towards an ever greater achievement of all human powers within an embodied existence on earth rather than in a postulated Hereafter to which "souls" may be called, leaving earth as a mere temporary passage of little importance in the final assessment.

Thus the Aurobindonian spiritual vision assimilates and consummates instead of contradicting even the apparent stark antithesis of it. In doing this it renders itself acceptable automatically by the Age of Science and provides to this Age not only a self-transcendence but also a self-justification which makes the self-transcendence a natural move forward rather than a defeat and an annulment.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Aspects of Sri Aurobindo, published by The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 1995, pp. 167-69)

THE WORLD WAR — ITS INNER BEARINGS

THIS is a war to which even spiritual seekers can hardly remain indifferent with impunity. There are spiritual paths, however, that ask to render unto God what is God's and unto Satan what belongs to Satan; in other words, spirituality is kept apart from what is called worldliness, clean and untouched by the dust and murk of Ignorance — Maya. The injunction accordingly is that they who are worldly must remain worldly, they have no business, no right to meddle with spirituality, and they who are spiritual should, on the other hand, remain strictly spiritual, should have nothing to do with worldliness. Because of this complete divorce between the spiritual and the worldly, the world remains worldly even today, continues to be the empire of unspirituality and obscurity, of suffering and grief, it is unable to become a dynamic and living expression and embodiment of the Spirit.

Not that spiritual men have not served and worked for the welfare of the world; but their work could not be wholly effective, it was mixed, maimed, temporary in effect. This could not be otherwise, for their activity proceeded from inferior and feebler sources of inspiration and consciousness other than those that are purely spiritual. Firstly, little more was possible for them than to exercise an indirect influence; their spiritual realisation could bring into the life of the world only a reminiscence, an echo, just a touch and a ray from another world. Or, secondly, when they did take part in worldly affairs, their activity could not rise much beyond the worldly standard; it remained enclosed within the sphere of the moral and the conventional, took such forms as, for example, charity and service and philanthropy. Nothing higher than ideas and ideals confined to the moral, that is to say, the mental plane, could be brought into play in the world and its practical life, — even the moral and mental idea itself has often been mistaken for true spirituality. Thus the very ideal of governing or moulding our worldly preoccupations according to a truly spiritual or a supramental or transcendental consciousness was a rare phenomenon and even where the ideal was found, it is doubtful whether the right means and methods were discovered. Yet the sole secret of changing man's destiny and transmuting the world lies in the discovery and application of a supreme spiritual Conscious-Power.

Humanists once affirmed that nothing that concerned man was alien to them, all came within their domain. The spiritual man too can make the affirmation with the same or even a greater emphasis. Indeed the spiritual consciousness in the highest degree and greatest compass must needs govern and fashion man in his entire being, in all his members and functions. The ideal, as we have said, has seldom been accepted; generally it has been considered as a chimera and an impossibility. That is why, we repeat, even to this day the world has its cup of misery full to the brim — *anityam asukham*.

All this has to be said by way of explanation and apology. For if we are spiritual seekers even then, or rather because of that, we too, we declare, have our say in a

matter which looks so mundane as this war. We refuse to own the nature and character so often ascribed to us by the West, which finds a graphic description in the well-known lines of Matthew Arnold:

The East bow'd low before the blast
 In patient deep disdain.
 She let the legions thunder past,
 And plunged in thought again.

In fact, however, there is no insurmountable disparity between spirituality and “worldliness”, between meditation and the most “terrible work” — *ghore karmani*: the Gita has definitively proved the truth of the fact millenniums ago. War has not been the monopoly of warriors alone: it will not be much of an exaggeration to say that Avatars, the incarnations of the Divine, have done little else besides that. And what of the Divine Mother herself? The main work of an Avatar is often to subdue the evil-doers, those that follow and pull others to follow the Wrong Path. And the Divine Mother, she who harbours in her bosom the supreme Truth and Consciousness and Bliss, is in one of her essential aspects, the slayer of the Demon, of the Asura.

Now, it is precisely with the Asura that we have to deal in the present war. This is not like other wars — it is not a war of one country with another, of one group of Imperialists with another, nor is it merely the fierce endeavour of a particular race or nation for world-domination: it is something more than all that. This war has a deeper, a more solemn, almost a grim significance. Some thinkers in Europe, not the mere political leaders, but those who lead in thought and ideas and ideals, to whom something of the inner world is revealed, have realised the true nature of the present struggle and have expressed it in no uncertain terms. Here is what Jules Romains, one of the foremost thinkers and litterateurs of contemporary France, says:

“Since the end of the Middle Ages, conquerors did harm perhaps to civilisation, but they never claimed to bring it into question. They ascribed their excesses and crimes to motives of necessity, but never dreamed for a moment to hold them up as exemplary actions on which subject nations were called upon to fashion their morality, their code, their gospel . . . Since the dawn of modern times the accidents of military history in Europe have never meant for her the end of her most precious spiritual and moral values and a sudden annulment of all the work done by the past generations in the direction of mutual respect, equity, goodwill — or, to put all into a single word, in the direction of humanity.”

Modern thinkers do not speak of the Asura — the Demon or the Titan — although the religiously minded sometimes refer to the Anti-Christ; but the real, the inner significance of the terms is lost to a mind nurtured in science and empiricism; they are considered as more or less imaginative symbols for certain undesirable qualities of nature and character. Yet some have perceived and expressed the external manifestation

and activities of the Asura in a way sufficient to open men's eyes to the realities involved. Thus they have declared that the present war is a conflict between two ideals, to be sure, but also that the two ideals are so different that they do not belong to the same plane or order; they belong to different planes and different orders. On one side the whole endeavour is to bring man down from the level to which he has arisen in the course of evolution to something like his previous level and to keep him imprisoned there. That this is really their aim, the protagonists and partisans themselves have declared frankly and freely and loudly enough, without any hesitation or reservation. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* has become the Scripture of the New Order; it has come with a more categorical imperative, a more supernal authority than the Veda, the Bible or the Koran.

When man was a dweller of the forest, — a jungle man, — akin to his forbear the ape, his character was wild and savage, his motives and impulsions crude, violent, egoistic, almost wholly imbedded in, what we call, the lower vital level; the light of the higher intellect and intelligence had not entered into them. Today there is an uprush of similar forces to possess and throw man back to a similar condition. This new order asks only one thing of man, namely, to be strong and powerful, that is to say, fierce, ruthless, cruel and regimented. Regimentation can be said to be the very characteristic of the order, the regimentation of a pack of wild dogs or wolves. A particular country, nation or race — it is Germany in Europe and, in her wake, Japan in Asia — is to be the sovereign nation or master race (*Herrenvolk*); the rest of mankind — other countries and peoples — should be pushed back to the status of servants and slaves, mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. What the helots were in ancient times, what the serfs were in the mediaeval ages, and what the subject peoples were under the worst forms of modern imperialism, even so will be the entire mankind under the new overlordship, or something still worse. For whatever might have been the external conditions in those ages and systems, the upward aspirations of man were never doubted or questioned — they were fully respected and honoured. The New Order has pulled all that down and cast them to the winds. Furthermore in the new regime, it is not merely the slaves that suffer in a degraded condition, the masters also, as individuals, fare no better. The individual here has no respect, no freedom or personal value. This society or community of the masters even will be like a bee-hive or an ant-hill; the individuals are merely functional units, they are but screws and bolts and nuts and wheels in a huge relentless machinery. The higher and inner realities, the spontaneous inspirations and self-creations of a free soul — art, poetry, literature — sweetness and light — the good and the beautiful — are to be banished for ever; they are to be regarded as things of luxury which enervate the heart, diminish the life-force, distort Nature's own virility. Man perhaps would be the worshipper of Science, but of that Science which brings a tyrannical mastery over material Nature, which serves to pile up tools and instruments, arms and armaments, in order to ensure a dire efficiency and a grim order in practical life.

Those that have stood against this Dark Force and its overshadowing menace — even though perhaps not wholly by choice or free-will, but mostly compelled by circumstances — yet, because of the stand they have taken, now bear the fate of the world on their shoulders, carry the whole future of humanity in their march. It is of course agreed that to have stood against the Asura does not mean that one has become *sura*, divine or godlike; but to be able to remain human, human instruments of the Divine, however frail, is sufficient for the purpose, that ensures safety from the great calamity. The rule of life of the Asura implies the end of progress, the arrest of all evolution; it means even a reversal for man. The Asura is a fixed type of being. He does not change, his is a hardened mould, a settled immutable form of a particular consciousness, a definite pattern of qualities and activities — *gunakarma*. Asura-nature means a fundamental ego-centricism, violent and concentrated self-will. Change is possible for the human being; he can go downward, but he can move upward too, if he chooses. In the Puranas a distinction has been made between the domain of enjoyment and the domain of action. Man is the domain of action *par excellence*; by him and through him evolve new and fresh lines of activity and impulsion. The domain of enjoyment, on the other hand, is where we reap the fruits of our past Karma; it is the result of an accumulated drive of all that we have done, of all the movements we have initiated and carried out. It is a status of being where there is only enjoyment, not of becoming where there can be development and new creation. It is a condition of gestation, as it were; there is no new Karma, no initiative or change in the stuff of the consciousness. The Asuras are *bhogamaya purusha*, beings of enjoyment; their domain is a cumulus of enjoyings. They cannot strike out a fresh line of activity, put forth a new mode of energy that can work out a growth or transformation of nature. Their consciousness is an immutable entity. The Asuras do not mend, they can only end. Man can certainly acquire or imbibe Asuric force or Asura-like qualities and impulsions; externally he can often act very much like the Asura; and yet there is a difference. Along with the dross that soils and obscures human nature, there is something more, a clarity that opens to a higher light, an inner core of noble metal which does not submit to any inferior influence. There is this something More in man which always inspires and enables him to break away from the Asuric nature. Moreover, though there may be an outer resemblance between the Asuric qualities of man and the Asuric qualities of the Asura, there is an intrinsic difference, a difference in tone and temper, in rhythm and vibration, proceeding as they do from different sources. However cruel, hard, selfish, ego-centric man may be, he knows, he admits — at times, if not always, at heart, if not openly, subconsciously, if not wholly consciously — that such is not the ideal way, that these qualities are not qualifications, they are unworthy elements and have to be discarded. But the Asura is ruthless, because he regards ruthlessness as the right thing, as the perfect thing, it is an integral part of his swabhava and swadharma, his law of being and his highest good. Violence is the ornament of his character.

The outrages committed by Spain in America, the oppression of the Christians by Imperial Rome, the brutal treatment of Christians by Christians themselves (the Inquisition, that is to say) or the misdeeds of Imperialists generally were wrong and, in many cases, even inhuman and unpardonable. But when we compare with what Nazi Germany has done in Poland or wants to do throughout the world, we find that there is a difference between the two not only in degree, but in kind. One is an instance of the weakness of man, of his flesh being frail; the other illustrates the might of the Asura, his very spirit is unwilling. One is undivine; the other antidivine, positively hostile. They who cannot discern this difference are colour-blind: there are eyes to which all deeper shades of colour are black and all lighter shades white.

The Asura triumphs everywhere for a while because his power is well-built, perfectly organised. Human power is constituted differently and acts differently; it is full of faults and flaws to start with and for a long time. There is no gap anywhere in the power of the Asura, no tear or stitch — it is streamlined, solid, of one piece; it is perfection itself in its own kind once for all. Man's being is made up of conflicts and contradictions; he moves step by step, slowly and laboriously, through gradual purification; he grows through endeavour and struggle. Man triumphs over the Asura only in so far as he moulds himself in the ways of the divine power. But in the world, the Divine and his powers remain behind, because the field of actuality in front is still the domain of the Asura. The outer field, the gross vehicle — body and life and mind — all this is constituted by Ignorance and Falsehood; so the Asura can always establish there his influence and hold sway and has actually done so. Man becomes easily an instrument of the Asura, though often unwittingly; the earth is naturally in the firm grasp of the Asura. For the gods to conquer the earth, to establish their rule in the earth consciousness requires labour and endeavour and time.

No doubt, the violences indulged by men in older times, especially when they acted in groups and packs, were often inflamed and inspired by an Asuric influence. But today it must be clearly seen and recognised that it is the Asura himself with the whole band of his army that has descended upon the earth; they have possessed a powerfully organised human collectivity, shaped it in their mould, using it to complete their conquest of mankind and consolidate their definitive reign upon earth.

As we see it we believe that the whole future of mankind, the entire value of earthly life depends upon the issue of the present deadly combat. The path that man has followed so long tended steadily towards progress and evolution — however slow his steps, however burdened with doubt and faintness his mind and heart in the ascent. But now the crucial parting of the ways looms before him. The question is, will the path of progress be closed to him for ever, will he be compelled to revert to a former unregenerate state or even something worse than that? Or will he remain free to follow that path, rise gradually and infallibly towards perfection, towards a purer, fuller, higher and vaster luminous life? Will man come down to live the life of a blind helpless slave under the clutches of the Asura or even altogether lose his soul

and become the legendary demon who carries no head but only a decapitated trunk ?

We believe that the war of today is a war between the Asura and men, human instruments of the gods. Man certainly is a weaker vessel in comparison with the Asura — on this material plane of ours; but in man dwells the Divine — and against the divine force and might, no asuric power can ultimately prevail. The human being who has stood against the Asura has by that very act sided with the gods and received the support and benediction of the Divine. The more we become conscious about the nature of this war and consciously take the side of the progressive force, of the divine force supporting it, the more will the Asura be driven to retire, his power diminished, his hold relaxed. But if through ignorance and blind passion, through narrow vision and obscurant prejudice we fail to distinguish the right from the wrong side, the dexter from the sinister, surely we shall invite upon mankind utter misery and desolation. It will be nothing less than a betrayal of the Divine Cause.

The fate of India too is being decided in this world-crisis — on the plains of Flanders, on the steppes of Ukraine, on the farthest expanses of the Pacific. The freedom of India will become inevitable and even imminent in proportion as she becomes cognizant of the underlying character and significance of the present struggle, deliberately takes the side of the evolutionary force, works for the gods, in proportion as she grows to be an instrument of the Divine Power. The instrument that the Divine chooses is often, to all appearances, faulty and defective, but since it has this higher and mightier support, it will surely outgrow all its drawbacks and lapses, it will surmount all dangers and obstacles and become unconquerable. This is what the spiritual seeker means by saying that the Divine Grace can make the lame leap across the mountain. India's destiny today hangs in the balance; it lies in the choice of her path.

A great opportunity is offered to India's soul, a mighty auspicious moment is come, if she can choose. If she chooses rightly, then can she arrive at the perfect fulfilment of her age-long endeavour, her life mission. India has preserved and fostered through the immemorial spiritual living of her saints and seers and sages the invaluable treasure, the vitalising, the immortalising power of spirituality, so that it can be placed at the service of terrestrial life for the deliverance of mankind, for the transfiguration of the human type. It is this for which India lives; by losing this India loses all her reason of existence — *raison d'être* — the earth and humanity too lose all significance. Today we are in the midst of an incomparable ordeal. If we know how to take the final and crucial step, we come out of it triumphant, a new soul and a new body, and we make the path straight for the Lord. We have to recognise clearly and unequivocally that victory on one side will mean that the path of the Divine — of progress and evolution and fulfilment — will remain open, become wider and smoother and safer; but if the victory is on the other side, the path will be closed perhaps for ever, at least for many ages and even then the travail will have to be undergone again under the most difficult conditions and circumstances. Not with a political shortsightedness, not out of the considerations of convenience or diplomacy, of narrow parochial

interests, but with the steady vision of the soul that encompasses the supreme welfare of humanity, we have to make our choice, we have to go over to the right side and oppose the wrong one with all the integrity of our life and being. The Allies, as they have been justly called, are really our allies, our friends and comrades, in spite of their thousand faults and defects; they have stood on the side of the Truth whose manifestation and triumph is our goal. Even though they did not know perhaps in the beginning what they stood for, even though perhaps as yet they do not comprehend the full sense and solemnity of the issues, still they have chosen a side which is ours, and we have to stand by them wholeheartedly in an all-round comradeship if we want to be saved from a great perdition.

This war is a great menace; it is also a great opportunity. It can land humanity into a catastrophe; it can also raise it to levels which would not have been within its reach but for the occasion. The Forces of Darkness have precipitated themselves with all their might upon the world, but by their very downrush have called upon the higher Forces of Light also to descend. The true use of the opportunity offered to man would be to bring about a change, better still, a reversal, in his consciousness, that is to say, it will be of highest utility if it forces upon him by the pressure of inexorable circumstances — since normally he is so unwilling and incapable to do it through a spontaneous inner awakening — the inescapable decision that he must change and shall change; and the change is to be for or towards the birth of a spiritual consciousness in earthly life. Indeed the war might be viewed as the birth-pangs of such a spiritual consciousness. Whether the labour would be sublimely fruitful here and now or end in barrenness is the question the Fates and the gods are asking of man — the mortal being — today.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

[The original Bengali article was called 'Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre' with a clearer reference to the Mahabharata war. It was that article that is mentioned in Sri Aurobindo's letter (see p. 949). — Ed. Note]

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 1, pp. 67-76. Published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1970)

THE YOGA OF SELF-PERFECTION AND THE TRIPLE TRANSFORMATION

(Continued from the issue of October 2008)

Self-Perfection and the Triple Transformation

THE “calm inner will of delight”¹ is an attribute of a mysterious psychological entity for which Sri Aurobindo gradually adopted the name “psychic being”. This term occurs mainly in his later writings, especially in letters of the 1930s and 1940s and in portions of his major works that were added or revised during the same period, such as the last chapters of *The Life Divine* and Part One of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. But even in the original versions of these works as published in the *Arya* between 1914 and 1921, the word “psychic” was already used occasionally to refer to the innermost soul or “psyche” concealed deep within us. Later Sri Aurobindo abandoned other uses of “psychic” and placed more and more explicit emphasis on the psychic being as the key to the first of the transformations to be accomplished in the integral Yoga.

In two chapters of *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* as published in the *Arya* in June and July 1916, respectively, we find the expressions “psychic being”, “psychic principle” and “psychic entity”. The twenty-third chapter of *The Life Divine*, entitled “The Double Soul in Man”, was originally preceded by an “Argument” where the chapter’s opening paragraphs were summed up as follows:

The ascent of Life is in its nature the ascent of the divine Delight in things from its dumb conception in Matter to its luminous consummation in Spirit. Like the other original divine principles, this Delight also must be represented in us by a cosmic principle corresponding to it in the apparent existence. It is the soul or psychic being.²

Most of the occurrences of “psychic being” in the final version of this chapter were not present in the original text, but were introduced in Sri Aurobindo’s later revision of the concluding paragraphs. But even the 1916 version included a sentence, only slightly revised in 1939, which defines the psychological entity through which the supreme Bliss or Ananda is manifested in our lives. This entity is described as

something in us which we sometimes call in a special sense the soul, — that is to say, the psychic principle which is not the life or the mind, much less the body, but which holds in itself the opening and flowering of the essence of all these to their own peculiar delight of self, to light, to love, to joy and beauty and to a refined purity of being.³

In July 1916, a month after he wrote about this psychic principle in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo published a chapter in *The Synthesis of Yoga* called “The Release from the Heart and the Mind”. This chapter, which is now the seventh chapter of Part Two, “The Yoga of Integral Knowledge”, was never revised. Here he returned to the nature of the soul and the true meaning of “psychic”. He explained that

the real soul, the real psychic entity which for the most part we see little of and only a small minority in mankind has developed, is an instrument of pure love, joy and the luminous reaching out to fusion and unity with God and our fellow-creatures.

He went on to comment on the normal relation of the psychic to the Prana or vital being:

This psychic entity is covered up by the play of the mentalised Prana or desire-mind which we mistake for the soul; the emotional mind is unable to mirror the real soul in us, the Divine in our hearts, and is obliged instead to mirror the desire-mind.⁴

In the Yoga of self-perfection as described in *The Synthesis* and the *Record of Yoga*, a purification of the Prana enabling the emotional mind to “mirror the real soul in us, the Divine in our hearts”, would be regarded as part of *śuddhi*. In Sri Aurobindo’s later reformulation of the integral Yoga it would come under the heading of psychicisation or psychic transformation. It is clear that there has been a change in terminology reflecting other significant developments. At the same time, there was nothing entirely new in the use of the word “psychic” to designate “the divine element in the individual being”, as Sri Aurobindo put it in a letter in the 1930s, an element whose

characteristic power is to turn everything towards the Divine, to bring a fire of purification, aspiration, devotion, true light of discernment, feeling, will, an action which transforms by degrees the whole nature.⁵

Changes of terminology are also to be found in the more advanced stages of the Yoga. In the Yoga of self-perfection, *śuddhi* or purification is followed by *mukti* or liberation, then by *bhukti*, “a cosmic enjoyment of the power of the Spirit”,⁶ and *siddhi* or perfection. The order of the last two was sometimes reversed, with implications which we will see. But in the subsequent period, instead of four stages of self-perfection we hear of a triple transformation: psychic, spiritual and supramental.⁷ At first sight, the systems appear to be quite different. Yet there are correspondences between them which shed light on the continuity as well as the evolution of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual experience.

Purification is a preparation for liberation. It can even be said that it is itself a kind of liberation:

Śuddhi is the condition for *mukti*. All purification is a release, a delivery; for it is a throwing away of limiting, binding, obscuring imperfections and confusions. . . . But all this is an instrumental liberation. The freedom of the soul, *mukti*, is of a larger and more essential character; it is an opening out of mortal limitation into the illimitable immortality of the Spirit.⁸

The concept of liberation, like that of purification, acquires a more dynamic sense in the integral Yoga than is conventionally associated with it — although this was amply foreshadowed in the Gita and elsewhere, where liberation does not imply cessation from action. Just as he makes a distinction between negative and positive purity, Sri Aurobindo also distinguishes negative from positive freedom, insisting in this case on the necessity of both. The “negative movement of freedom” is defined as “a liberation from the principal bonds, the master-knots of the lower soul-nature”, these bonds being “desire, ego, the dualities and the three gunas of Nature”. The “positive sense of freedom”, on the other hand, “is to be universal in soul, transcendently one in spirit with God, possessed of the highest divine nature”.⁹

What concerns us here is how *mukti* or liberation, as a step towards self-perfection, relates to the spiritual transformation which follows the psychic transformation in Sri Aurobindo’s later accounts of the Yoga. We have seen that the purification of the nature, liberating as it is in itself, is insufficient unless it is completed by a larger freedom which universalises the soul and brings it into union with the transcendent. Likewise the psychic transformation

is not all that is needed for the largest spiritual change. In the first place, since this is the individual soul in Nature, it can open to the hidden diviner ranges of our being and receive and reflect their light and power and experience, but another, a spiritual transformation from above is needed for us to possess our self in its universality and transcendence.¹⁰

But even the freedom that the spiritual transformation brings was not enough for Sri Aurobindo. In almost all traditional systems of Yoga except Tantra, inner liberation was pursued as an end in itself. In the Yoga of self-perfection, on the other hand, not only is the meaning of *mukti* enlarged to include liberation of the nature as well as liberation of the spirit, but even this leads beyond itself to *bhukti* and *siddhi*. We meet a similar situation in the case of the triple transformation, as described by Sri Aurobindo near the end of the revised text of *The Life Divine* and in other writings of the 1930s and 1940s. In a letter of that period, he indicates the liberating and other effects of spiritualisation, the second transformation, but also points out why a still greater transformation is needed to complete it:

Spiritualisation means the descent of the higher peace, force, light, knowledge, purity, Ananda, etc., which belong to any of the higher planes from Higher Mind to overmind, for in any of these the Self can be realised. It brings about a subjective transformation; the instrumental Nature is only so far transformed that it becomes an instrument for the Cosmic Divine to get some work done, but the self within remains calm and free and united with the Divine. But this is an incomplete individual transformation — the full transformation of the instrumental Nature can only come when the supramental change takes place. Till then the nature remains full of many imperfections, but the Self in the higher planes does not mind them, as it is itself free and unaffected.¹¹

The process of spiritualisation occupied Sri Aurobindo for many years. It involved not one, but several transformations by the ever-increasing power of a series of ascending planes. On each of them “the static realisation of Infinity and Eternity and the Timeless One remains the same,” but “the vision of the workings of the One becomes ever wider and is attended with a greater instrumentality of Force”. From the point of view of knowledge, “what is thought-knowledge in the Higher Mind becomes illumination in the Illumined Mind and direct intimate vision in the Intuition”. Still higher is the overmind, which sees not “in flashes”, like the Intuition, but “calmly, steadily, in great masses and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally”. But even here there “is not the absolute supramental harmony and certitude”.¹² Sri Aurobindo saw in the end that nothing short of what he called a supramental transformation could bring about the integral perfection or *siddhi* “which finishes the passage of the soul through the Ignorance and bases its consciousness, its life, its power and form of manifestation on a complete and completely effective self-knowledge”.¹³

We find, then, that there is a broad correspondence between the “triple transformation” and three stages of the earlier Yoga of self-perfection termed *śuddhi*, *mukti* and *siddhi*, or purification, liberation and perfection — we will see in a moment why there is nothing in the later scheme that seems to correspond to *bhukti*. The system presented in the unfinished Part Four of *The Synthesis of Yoga* appears to be superseded by the three transformations — psychic, spiritual and supramental — as the definitive statement of Sri Aurobindo’s distinctive approach to an evolutionary spirituality. But just as the old triple way of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana was surpassed but kept in a new form, so Sri Aurobindo continued to speak of self-perfection as the consummation of the Yoga. In a passage in a letter summarising the Karmayoga as he had “developed it for the integral spiritual life”, he concluded:

Finally, works, bhakti and knowledge go together and self-perfection becomes possible — what we call the transformation of the nature.¹⁴

There seems to be no good reason to regard the Yoga of self-perfection as out of date or irrelevant in the light of later developments, even though Sri Aurobindo's account of it published in his major work on Yoga remained incomplete and unrevised. But because the last part of *The Synthesis* was never revised, its terminology has to be interpreted according to the period when it was written. When "supramental transformation" is mentioned in a chapter written in 1920, for example, it should not be assumed that it means exactly what Sri Aurobindo intended by these words after a decade or two. For his experience was constantly evolving. As a result, not only did he invent new terms such as "overmind", but words he had used previously, including "psychic" and "supramental", have to be understood in a different context.

A comparison of the main terms of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of self-perfection with his later terminology reveals parallels, as we have seen, which show more continuity in the development of his Yoga than is apparent at first glance. This does not mean that the "supramental transformation" of which he spoke in his latest period was the same as his earlier conception of *siddhi*, but that it evolved out of it. A similar evolution may explain what happened to *bhukti* in the transition from the Yoga of self-perfection to the triple transformation. For Sri Aurobindo does speak of a fourth transformation; but ultimately the fullness of this "beatific" transformation became such a distant prospect that he rarely alluded to it. However, the enjoyment of spiritual bliss (*ānanda*) which he had called *bhukti* did not disappear from the Yoga.

Undreamed Ecstasy

Bhukti is literally "enjoyment". In the Yoga of self-perfection it refers, of course, to a more exalted type of enjoyment than what is usually meant by that word. Sri Aurobindo explains:

A really perfect enjoyment of existence can only come when what we enjoy is not the world in itself or for itself, but God in the world, when it is not things, but the Ananda of the spirit in things that forms the real, essential object of our enjoying and things only as form and symbol of the spirit, waves of the ocean of Ananda.¹⁵

It may be objected that this kind of rarefied enjoyment would not satisfy the demand of the vital being for tangible pleasures. Sri Aurobindo maintained, on the contrary, that what we call pleasure is no more than a faint and evanescent shadow of the real thing. Our half-conscious nature cannot fulfil its own seeking for enjoyment unless it undergoes a spiritual transformation:

[Life] seeks for pleasure, happiness, bliss; but the infrarational forms of these things are stricken with imperfection, fragmentariness, impermanence and the impact of their opposites. Moreover infrarational life still bears some stamp of the Inconscient in an underlying insensitiveness, a dullness of fibre, a weakness of vibratory response, — it cannot attain to true happiness or bliss and what it can obtain of pleasure it cannot support for long or bear or keep any extreme intensity of these things. Only the spirit has the secret of an unmixed and abiding happiness or ecstasy, is capable of a firm tenseness of vibrant response to it, can achieve and justify a spiritual pleasure or joy of life as one form of the infinite and universal delight of being.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo added this passage to the chapter entitled “The Suprarational Ultimate of Life” when he revised *The Human Cycle* around 1937. Almost two decades earlier he had dealt with the same question in expounding the Yoga of self-perfection. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he clarified what he meant by the “capacity for enjoyment”, *bhoga-sāmarthya*, that is to be developed by the Prana or vital force:

The enjoyment it will have will be in the essence a spiritual bliss, but one which takes up into itself and transforms the mental, emotional, dynamic, vital and physical joy; it must have therefore an integral capacity for these things and must not by incapacity or fatigue or inability to bear great intensities fail the spirit, mind, heart, will and body.¹⁷

The vital being’s capacity for enjoyment depends on a power that has to be developed in the body “to hold whatever force is brought into it by the spirit and to contain its action without spilling and wasting it or itself getting cracked”. This general “faculty of holding”, termed *dhāraṇa-śakti* or *dhāraṇa-sāmarthya*, is considered “the most important siddhi or perfection of the body”,¹⁸ since it is required for a higher working of all the other parts of the being. It is especially necessary if the *bhoga-sāmarthya* of the life-force is to be imparted to the physical consciousness, creating there a “capacity for bliss” such as is attributed in *Savitri* to Aswapati at a certain stage in his ascension:

His earth, dowered with celestial competence,
Harboured a power that needed now no more
To cross the closed customs-line of mind and flesh
And smuggle godhead into humanity.
It shrank no more from the supreme demand
Of an untired capacity for bliss. . . .¹⁹

Many entries in the *Record of Yoga* show that Sri Aurobindo was systematically perfecting the body's ability to sustain a more and more intense and continuous physical Ananda. What he ascribed to Aswapati was evidently his own experience. In cultivating such experiences, his Yoga of self-perfection seems to part company with almost all spiritual disciplines in the Indian tradition except Tantra. But in its methods it also differs widely from Tantra of either the right-hand or the left-hand path. Sri Aurobindo made his relation to Tantra clear when he affirmed that this Yoga "starts from the method of Vedanta to arrive at the aim of the Tantra."²⁰ It attempts to achieve "a spiritualising and illumination of the whole physical consciousness and a divinising of the law of the body." But "the reliance is on the power of the higher being to change the lower existence" and "a working is chosen mainly from above downward and not the opposite way".²¹ Entries on the subject of physical Ananda in the *Record of Yoga* illustrate this distinction. For instance, Sri Aurobindo writes on 19 June 1920:

An Ananda of a much greater potentiality of continuity, pervasion, largeness and intensity felt on the vijnana summit and descending into the sukshma body. . . .²²

Later the same day, the Ananda which had thus descended from the *viññāna* or "supramental" level — as Sri Aurobindo understood it at that time — into the *sūkṣma* or subtle body is described as "insistent on possession of the sthula [physical] body".²³

Twenty years later when he added several new chapters at the end of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo wrote about the physical manifestation of the delight of the Infinite in terms reminiscent of the experiences he had once recorded in his diary:

In the body it reveals itself as an ecstasy pouring into it from the heights of the spirit and the peace and bliss of a pure and spiritualised physical existence.

This statement in the chapter entitled "The Gnostic Being" follows the observation that even "before the gnostic change there can be a beginning of this fundamental ecstasy of being translated into a manifold beauty and delight." Sri Aurobindo then proceeds to enumerate a few of these "manifold" forms of Ananda as it is felt by different parts of the nature. They include the Ananda of the mind, heart and senses to which he had often referred in the *Record of Yoga*, where he designated them by the Sanskrit terms *ahaituka ānanda*, *premānanda* and *viṣayānanda*:

In the mind, it translates into a calm or intense delight of spiritual perception and vision and knowledge, in the heart into a wide or deep or passionate delight of universal union and love and sympathy and the joy of beings and the joy of things. In the will and vital parts it is felt as the energy of delight of a divine life-power in action or a beatitude of the senses perceiving and meeting the One everywhere, perceiving as their normal aesthesis of things a universal beauty

and a secret harmony of creation of which our mind can catch only imperfect glimpses or a rare supernormal sense.²⁴

Sri Aurobindo himself had begun to experience all these things at a comparatively early stage in his spiritual development. In the *Record of Yoga* he grouped them under the heading *bhukti*, enjoyment. Initially he placed this term after *mukti*, liberation, in the *yogacatuṣṭaya* or *siddhicatuṣṭaya* which summed up in four terms (*catuṣṭaya*) the steps to the *siddhi* of his Yoga.²⁵ This sequence had an experiential basis which he recognised later when he wrote in his revision of *The Life Divine*:

In the liberation of the soul from the Ignorance the first foundation is peace, calm, the silence and quietude of the Eternal and Infinite; but a consummate power and greater formation of the spiritual ascension takes up this peace of liberation into the bliss of a perfect experience and realisation of the eternal beatitude, the bliss of the Eternal and Infinite.²⁶

In the Introduction to *The Synthesis of Yoga*, written in 1914, “integral beatitude” follows directly after “integral purity” and “integral liberty” and precedes “integral perfection” in a paragraph giving a brief synopsis of the integrality of the Yoga. But when in March 1919 he came to the fourth chapter of “The Yoga of Self-Perfection”, Sri Aurobindo reversed the order of the last two items and listed them as “purification, liberation, perfection, delight of being . . . *śuddhi, mukti, siddhi, bhukti*.”²⁷

It could be argued that this reversal of *bhukti* and *siddhi* prepared the way for the omission of a distinct stage of transformation corresponding to *bhukti* when Sri Aurobindo reformulated his Yoga as three transformations, psychic, spiritual and supramental, corresponding to the former *śuddhi, mukti* and *siddhi*. However, the place of Ananda in the Yoga was not diminished, but heightened by regarding its consummation as a consequence of the supramental change. In a sense, Sri Aurobindo recognised a quadruple transformation as the complete aim of the integral Yoga. But he insisted that “one must pass through the supermind to arrive to the highest Ananda”.²⁸ Supramentalisation, the transformation whose accomplishment would constitute the next decisive step in evolution, was his immediate concern. For most of us, the psychic transformation is already enough of a challenge. Yet it is of at least theoretical interest to note that Sri Aurobindo looked beyond even the supramental transformation to what would follow it. He wrote in 1940 in his expansion of *The Life Divine*:

A supramental manifestation in its ascent would have as a next sequence and culmination of self-result a manifestation of the Bliss of the Brahman: the evolution of the being of gnosis would be followed by an evolution of the being of bliss; an embodiment of gnostic existence would have as its consequence an embodiment of the beatific existence.

A central feature of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga is the recognition that an "aspiration, a demand for the supreme and total delight of existence is there secretly in the whole make of our being". This trend, moreover,

is founded in the truth of the being; for Ananda is the very essence of the Brahman, it is the supreme nature of the omnipresent Reality. The supermind itself in the descending degrees of the manifestation emerges from the Ananda and in the evolutionary ascent merges into the Ananda.²⁹

Humankind, as it is now, has a limited capacity to experience Ananda. Even "a diminishing transmission through an inferior consciousness", however, gives "the sense of an ecstasy and an unsurpassable beatitude." Sri Aurobindo asks: "And what will be the bliss nature when it manifests in a new supramental race?" His answer gives a glimpse of what our future evolution may have in store for us:

The fully evolved soul will be one with all beings in the status and dynamic effects of experience of a bliss-consciousness intense and illimitable. And since love is the effective power and soul-symbol of bliss-oneness he will approach and enter into this oneness by the gate of universal love, a sublimation of human love at first, a divine love afterwards, at its summits a thing of beauty, sweetness and splendour now to us inconceivable.³⁰

(Concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 659.
2. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 478.
3. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 233.
4. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 351.
5. *Letters on Yoga: Part Four*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1197.
6. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 612.
7. "The Triple Transformation" is the title of Book Two, Chapter 25 of *The Life Divine*, written in 1940. Otherwise Sri Aurobindo rarely used the expression "triple transformation" itself, which is found neither in *The Synthesis of Yoga* nor in his letters. But in his writings of the 1930s and 1940s he often referred to one or more of the transformations (sometimes as the psychic, spiritual or supramental "change") and occasionally described all three. After his passing, a section of his *Letters on Yoga* was given the title "The Triple Transformation: Psychic — Spiritual — Supramental".
8. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 674.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 674-75.
10. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 240.
11. *Letters on Yoga: Part One*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 106.

12. *Letters on Yoga: Part Four*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1154.
13. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 951-52.
14. *Letters on Yoga: Part Two and Part Three*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 529.
15. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 655.
16. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 171-72.
17. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 735.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 731.
19. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 236.
20. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 612.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 695.
22. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1235.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 1236.
24. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1027.
25. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vols. 10-11, pp. 23, 1478.
26. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1026.
27. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 639.
28. *Letters on Yoga: Part One*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 92.
29. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1025.
30. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 509. This passage occurs in Part Two, Chapter 24, "Gnosis and Ananda", which was extensively revised by Sri Aurobindo in the early 1930s. As first published in the *Arya* in November 1917, the passage read: "And what would be the bliss nature in man? First, to be one with all beings in bliss of being; and since love is the human symbol of bliss-unity, to approach this oneness by the way of universal love, a human love at first, a divine love afterwards."

The realisation of the psychic being, its awakening and the bringing of it in front depend mainly on the extent to which one can develop a personal relation with the Divine, a relation of Bhakti, love, reliance, self-giving, rejection of the insinuations of the separating and self-asserting mental, vital and physical ego.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 341-42)

DORTOIR (A Compilation)

THE house number 3, on Law de Lauriston Street, was also known as “Maison Dubreuil”. It was a double-storeyed house with a hanging balcony over the street. Its ground floor had a few rooms on the eastern side. On the western side there was quite a big open area with arches which looked like a stable for keeping horses or cattle. Its floor was made of compressed clay. Perhaps this area was meant to house cattle, which was a common practice in those days. A staircase could be seen behind the building on its southern side. This building was in a rather dilapidated condition. There were some outlying structures where a door, number 19, opened to St. Louis Street which was to the east of the building complex. The area consisted also of a small garden, a shed, a godown and some vacant place.

This house was sometimes taken on rent by the Mother, for housing visitors. On the 1st of April 1944, this property was purchased in the name of Sri Aurobindo by Sri Surendra Nath Jauhar and offered to the Mother. The building was then thoroughly repaired and modified. The stable-like area was altered and a big kitchen with a washing and dining area were constructed here. This was the Dortoir.

We present here a few articles by people who were associated with it. The first portion is from the book *My Mother* by Surendra Nath Jauhar on whose request the Mother consented to start a hostel.

I — Recollections of Surendra Nath Jauhar

Boarding-House

“Mother, my children are too small and you know there is no proper care, environment or atmosphere at home. Is it not possible that a hostel could be opened for the children to be kept and taken care of?”

The Mother said, “Why not? If you want I can immediately do that.”

She quickly called Chandulal, the Engineer of the Ashram, and asked him by making signs in the sky, “Chandulal, you know that dilapidated building at the back of the Play Ground?”

Chandulal said, “Yes, Mother.”

“In how much time can you clear the debris and raise a double-storeyed building on the spot?”

Chandulal, trembling, said, “Mother, in three months!”

The Mother said in a loud voice, “Three months! I want it within fifteen days!”

Chandulal said, “All right Mother, all right Mother.” And perhaps within a few minutes or an hour the work was started and continued day and night, for fifteen days in three daily shifts. During the night, work was carried on under the dazzling lights

of the gas-lamps.

Poor Chandulal! He was alone all the twenty-four hours there. He never went to his room to sleep. He was supervising the work standing, dozing or sleeping simultaneously, perhaps sometime in the chair. His whole anxiety and concentration was to raise the structure within fifteen days as desired by the Mother.

The structure of the building was of course ready within fifteen days.

Hostel

On my next visit to the Ashram the Mother called me.

She said, "I have very happy news to give you. You see the Boarding-House for your children is now ready, I have made very beautiful and perfect arrangements for your children to be looked after. Suitable persons have been put as Wardens. You can now send your children to the Boarding-House.

"Separate arrangements have been made for the boys and the girls to be lodged in the Hostel. On the ground floor boys will live, and on the first floor the girls."

The Boarding-House was started only with my five children, Snehlata, Tara and Chitra in the Girl's Dormitory and Narendra and Jitendra in the Boy's Dormitory, on the 15th of January, 1945.

Of course, gradually, in about a year or so other children were also admitted and the number became about twenty.

I was happy and felt relieved.

Hostel-Wardens

After a few days the Mother again called me and said: "I have, further, to give you a very happy news. I have been able to find a most suitable person as Warden for your children. She is a local person. She knows Hindi very well. She is M.A. in Hindi. She will be able to confer better with your children. She is good at cooking and she will also be looking after the food arrangements."

My First Visit to the Boarding-House

Next time when I paid a visit to the Ashram I was full of happy anxiety that I will now be able to go frequently to the Hostel to see my children in the Boarding-House.

So, soon after getting into the Ashram, I took the opportunity to go to the Boarding-House. I knocked at the gate and a lady appeared to talk to me, opening the door only two or three inches. With all the confidence and ego, I told her that I wanted to come in to see my children.

She strongly said, "No! You cannot be allowed to come in. It is not permitted."

She just closed the door and went in.

I was shocked, perhaps also for the reason in my subconscious mind that I had paid for the construction of the Hostel and no courtesy or consideration was shown to me. I felt that I would complain to the Mother.

Next day when I went to the Mother for Pranams, she spontaneously said, “You see, I have received a report from the Hostel-Warden that you wanted to go inside and she had to refuse you.

“You see it is a strict rule and discipline that no parents are allowed to go into the Boarding-House to see their children.”

So, I was put in my place.

(From the book *My Mother*, Surendra Nath Jauhar, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram — Delhi Branch, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 19-22)

* * *

The next article is by Lata Jauhar, the eldest and the first boarder of this hostel.

This will be followed by two articles by the two care-takers, the hostel Wardens. The last one in the series will be by Parul Chakraborty, one of the younger boarders. Each one shares with us the experience of the hostel-life at that time.

II — Recollections of Lata Jauhar

DORTOIR, 1945, January 15th

I was 12 when I came in 1944. Dortoir was opened on 15th January 1945. I was the first child of Dortoir as I moved in two days before it was officially opened. This was due to my mother’s insistence that if I did not drink milk for breakfast she would not let me enter the house. I got nervous but as I was obstinate, I did not drink milk but went and told the Mother about this. The Mother sent me to stay in Dortoir immediately. Thus I was already staying in Dortoir before it was opened.

It started with Lata, Tara, Chitra, Aruna, Kokila on the first floor and Narendra, Jyotindra, Arun Kumar, Nirakar on the ground floor. Gul-ben and Sirin-ben were in charge of the girls upstairs. Chellamma was in charge of the boys downstairs and also the kitchen. Ichcha-ben was given charge of the servants. In a few months others from different families joined the group: Urmila, Usha, Arun (their brother) and later Urmila Pandya, her brother and others. I don’t remember exactly the names and the order of joining of other members. There were Babli and Miku and many others. Many came for a short period also. Gradually, as the Dortoir got extended, Anu-ben was given the charge of getting the clothes ironed. Sabita-di was looking after the Sick Room. Ravindra-ji was in charge of the all-round organisation: food and studies etc. After Gul-ben and Sirin-ben left, Anu-ben took up the charge of upstairs work

and Kusum-ben came as her assistant. The Mother explained to them in detail, how the children should be treated with lots of love and patience. They should not be woken up abruptly, as they live in other worlds in their dreams.

We had our school classes and sports activities. During the free periods we were all doing some work and quite a few of us worked with Ravindra-ji. Of course there were also timings for going to the Mother for Pranams etc. After lunch we did our homework which Ravindra-ji used to supervise. He would also give us additional work in arithmetic: calculations like multiplications, divisions and tables etc.

I went to school and in the free periods I went to work in the Ashram with Ravindra-ji. Fruits and vegetables were not available in Pondicherry in those days. Some tomatoes, carrots etc. were coming from Bangalore once a week. These we washed in potassium permanganate, wiped and arranged in trays. Mother and Sri Aurobindo took a glass of carrot juice daily. There were no refrigerators then. The carrots had to be preserved for a whole week before the next lot arrived. For this, flat earthen pots were filled with moist earth and sand and carrots were arranged underneath. The pot had to be watered like plants to keep these carrots fresh. With too much water they would rot inside. I learnt the correct dosages by practice. Even the earth had to be changed from time to time or else it would get putrid. There were no electric gadgets in those days. I used to crush the carrots in a stone mortar and squeeze out the juice from a muslin cloth and would thus fill up two small glasses: one for the Mother and the other for Sri Aurobindo. My father used to bring from Delhi a boxful of seedless grapes of Chaman, Afghanistan. They were brought by air and as they are very delicate did not last long. These I used to peel, cut in two, take out the central thread and prepare two small bowls. Similarly I used to prepare two small bowls with chikus, oranges or other fruits and carry these in a tray directly to the Mother. This is how I could see her all alone in the passage on her way to Sri Aurobindo. She always showed a lot of interest and praised the work. How happy I felt then. On weekends, I used to churn milk on a hand-machine for 40-45 minutes to prepare milk-cream and then butter. I did this work as long as Sri Aurobindo was there. After that, gradually the arrangement changed.

In addition to this work, we used to fill up the fruit bags of sadhaks with tomatoes, musambi or papaya, that is, whatever was available, and keep them ready to give personally into the hands of the sadhaks.

On Darshan days we also worked at the Dining Room Counter serving rice or vegetables and we also helped in the washing and wiping of the dishes and bowls.

After dinner, as the Mother did not like the used vessels to be left overnight without being washed, some Dortoir girls and a few non-Dortoirians like Lilou, Pushpa, Kumud, Mridula used to give a helping hand in washing and wiping and tidying up the whole place. Chandubhai was the only male member of the Ashram who used to work with us and would accompany the other girls to their homes after their work. While washing, we used to play “Antyakshari” regularly. We used to form two teams

and turn by turn each team had to sing a song starting by the last letter of the song sung by the opposite team. This trained our voices and we had a whole repertory of songs in our memory.

The rules for the boarders were formulated by the Mother. We could not go to a friend's house, neither could he come to see us. There were no birthday parties. Birthday was only going to the Mother a number of times. We were all present for Balcony Darshan at 6 a.m. regularly. We had to be home by 8 p.m. On Saturdays we could stay longer in the Ashram, but always working most of the time. Later, every Saturday night we could go to the Mother for Pranam which would sometimes take place even after midnight. Some elderly people used to tell us stories while we were waiting for the Pranam and after that we used to fall asleep in the Ashram courtyard till we were woken up to go for Pranam.

Well, over the years there were constant changes. The Mother would make us write something and she corrected our notebooks. For every little problem we would approach the Mother. As we did not like Dining Room food she got made one special potato vegetable every day only for us. We did not like even that. The Mother's own kitchen was supplying some savouries twice a week and they were just delicious and we used to look forward to that and the quantity was never enough. Of course, gradually we were getting the tasty dishes only once a week and these too were becoming rather infrequent. Sometimes only *Papad*, but even that was so special, so tasty.

On 15th January the anniversary of Dortoir we would put up some programme and could invite a few friends. In the later years, when the Mother started coming out, she came to Dortoir to see our programme. For one of our Dortoir programmes she dramatised her story "Les Vertues" and guided us, teaching us how to present it for the anniversary.

Innumerable are the incidents and innumerable the changes. One can't remember or relate everything. The only thing I can say is that it was just beautiful in those days. All work was fun and learning and everything was centred around our dear Mother who kept us in a paradise on earth. We have been a really lucky lot.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of October 2008)

3. Scouring Turmeric on the Stone

“Have you taken the turmeric root?”

“Yes, a big one.”

“It is okay. But do not waste it.”

“No, I won’t. But I love the scent!”

A familiar enough conversation as I prepare to go to the river for my morning bath. River Tambraparni sixty years ago was a clean stream, not yet polluted by the waste flowing from paper mills and the rest. My natal village was right on the banks of the river and our lives were firmly bound with it. We went to the river for our bath early in the morning, before sunrise but when there was light enough from the opening chords of the dawn. In the distance, one could see the railway bridge and beyond it the Kolundunaga Malai, the hill associated with rich herbs and the Sage Agastya. While the elderly ladies kept chattering of a million domestic problems and exchanging gossip most of which would certainly be conveyed to their menfolk at home, the girls enjoyed washing their clothes by beating them on the stones on the banks. Then it was time for rubbing oneself with a bit of soap and the girl who could always bring a scented Lux toilet soap was the object of our envy. She came from a rich home and had relations in far away Bombay!

In those days, the toilet soaps were advertised with colourful photographs of film stars: Pushpavalli, Suraiya, why, even Vyjayantimala who had become an overnight star with the launching of the Tamil film, *Vazhkkai*. Most of the girls in my group were plebeian and had to be satisfied with the very red-coloured Lifebuoy bars. I guess I was jealous of this girl who had relations gifting her with such heavenly-scented soaps. “Look at father!”, I would whine to myself. “This time also another book as gift. Why could he not give me a nice lavender-scented Lux soap?” But the disappointment was forgotten in a trice for I would be lost in the worlds of Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*. Some of these early gifts have survived in the family. Hard-bound, they have been travelling companions for me and my children and now my grandchildren.

I was introduced to the Bible, Daniel Defoe, Rudyard Kipling and other ‘greats’ in this manner. Sitting in that simple house built by my father in 1947 on the ancestral property and named ‘Aravind’, in that remote Indian village, I ceased to be an Indian for hours together. I would be travelling with Sven Hedin, the famous Swedish traveller in the Takla-Makan Desert, in Chinese Turkestan. I would remain frozen in the ancient chair till Hedin came back to the dying Kasim and restored him to life. Hedin had

actually managed to find the Khotan-daria river and carry water from it in his boots to Kasim who had fallen on the way! How brave of him! There were no televisions or magazines in those days. Our house alone had two shelves full of big English books. And children's books? Whoever had heard of that? But I had them as mine own, perhaps about ten, and returned to them everyday.

I never could understand the atmosphere of lilies and apples and sea shanties and candlesticks (we never had them in the village) but I memorised the verses all right:

Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
 Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
 And you shall wander hand-in-hand with love in summer's wonderland;
 Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

And I wished I could dress in the smart blue frock Marjorie had on and gallop away on the Major's filly. And my hair, cut short, and reddish like the little girl's, being blown about in the breeze. But grandmother's voice would call out: "Dreaming with the book again? Your music master has come. Hurry up!" Reluctantly I would put down *High Adventure* and walk away dragging my heavy skirt, resenting my long plait, bound with red ribbon and decorated with strings of jasmines. Why can't I be Marjorie and ride my own filly?

Age does get the mind wandering away and away from the subject on hand. Let me get back to the quiet stream of Tambraparni. The less favoured amongst us would then set up a high-screech conversation on the health values of Lifebuoy soap, and how its medicinal smell had a healthy aura, and who cares for the sickly smell of lavender or rose which stuck to you momentarily and then vanished in a trice? Then all of us would take out of our soap boxes a piece of turmeric and start rubbing it on the stone, sitting near it in the water, while I would begin: "This Marjorie had come to stay with her uncle Kent. She was ten years old . . ."

On our way back home, the sun would have risen. And our faces, hand and feet would look a golden colour because of the fresh turmeric we had used for the bath. They were indeed golden dawns of my childhood which have persistently returned to me in the passageways of memory whenever I read the opening canto of *Savitri*:

A message from the unknown immortal Light
 Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
 Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
 And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.

We girls would compare the shades of yellow which clung to us. And if one had rubbed too much on her face which had not been washed off completely, the rest of

us would give out a screech: “Look at the Nangiaramman!”¹ This practice of rubbing fresh turmeric root on a piece of stone for the morning bath in a leisurely manner by Tamil women is so imbedded in the Tamil psyche that it is used in a derogatory sense when pulling up unheroic men. “When they attacked you, what were you doing? Grinding turmeric on the stone?”

Since turmeric was a beauty-aid (it prevented the growth of facial hair), its fame spread to foreign countries millennia ago. Rome imported plenty of turmeric along with other spices as the Roman women used it for their make-up. The commonly used roots of this species are *Manjal* (*Curcuma longa*) and *Kasturi Manjal* (*Curcuma aromatica*). The latter has a lovelier scent but gives less of yellow colour and is more expensive and is not used in cooking. The former is used extensively in cooking as well.

Even today giving fresh turmeric pieces to married ladies is considered auspicious for both the giver and the receiver. The ‘*manjal kayiru*’ (turmeric-dipped thread) in South India has become synonymous with a woman whose husband is living. This has also led to its becoming a stranglehold on women’s freedom in the name of tradition. It was dinned into her psyche that if she even accidentally laid it aside, her husband would meet with disaster. She could remove it only to replace it immediately with a new one on an auspicious day. And even if the husband was a womaniser, a rogue and a murderer, the wife should remain faithful to him for he had tied the “turmeric thread” round her neck.

The close association of turmeric with marriage vows takes us to the eternally auspicious goddesses like Lakshmi and Parvati. The Divine is invoked also as Haridra Ganapati, clothed in yellow garments, holding a noose, a goad and a bowl in his three hands while the fourth hand appears to be stroking his trunk. One must go to Kerala to watch how intricate and mystic designs are drawn with turmeric powder for ritualistic purposes in temples dedicated to the Divine Mother or the Snake.

Apparently turmeric had a special place in Indian legends for after all, India is the largest producer (80%) of turmeric in the world. The term ‘haridra’ denoting turmeric crops up in many places. There is the famous Rajagopalaswami temple in Mannargudi which was built in the eleventh century by Kulothunga Chola. A massive spread of halls and pathways over six acres, the temple’s main water source is the tank known as Haridra Nadhi.

The local legend tells us that two rishis, Gopila and Gopralaya wished to watch Krishna sporting with the cowherdesses. He assented and played watersport with the gopis in this tank. The cowherdesses had put on scented turmeric paste and when they bathed, the water turned yellow with all that turmeric. From then on the tank came to be known as Haridra Nadhi. One could spend a long time absorbing its greatness as recorded by devotees and scholars. Also known as Nisha Teertham, water

1. The village goddess. Usually these village deities have their faces smeared with turmeric paste.

for the deity's holy bath is taken to the temple from this tank. At the close of the Brahmotsava, the Lord comes here for a bath. All the devotees take a dip simultaneously as Gopila and Gopralaya are said to have attained moksha by doing so and by reciting the Ashtakshara.² The two rishis had also been told by Narada that residence on the banks of Haridra Nadhi for one year is equal to residing in other holy places for one crore of years. "Bathing in Haridra tank, reciting the Dwadasakshara,³ worshipping the Lord beneath the Swayambhuva Vimana assures one of realisation", is the oft-recited verse by devotees of Sri Rajagopala of Mannargudi.

Turmeric is also closely associated with one of the goddesses of the Tantra. In Krita Yuga, a cosmic storm swept over the spaces and so Vishnu proceeded to perform tapasya on the banks of a lake of turmeric (Haridra). Goddess Bagalamukhi rose from the Haridra lake and restored calm. Bagalamukhi is considered one of the fierce forms of the Supreme Mother. The Stotra invoking her speaks of her as yellow-sheened (*paripithavarna*) and wearing yellow (golden) jewels (*pitāambarābharana*). She is also known as Peetambari Devi. It is said Bagalamukhi, among the goddesses, represents complete silence, which is also the complete stillness of mind. With this significance we draw very close to the name suggested by the Mother.

The Mother has given the significance of turmeric as Peace. She has explained her approach as well: "To will what Thou willest always in all circumstances, is the only way of enjoying an unshakeable peace." Which, of course, means one must cultivate a totally sattwic quality. It is not actually as difficult as it seems to be. If one remembers Mother's words whenever coming in contact with turmeric, one can gain this quality almost unconsciously. For, when are we away from it? We bathe using it, we reach out to the box of turmeric powder when cooking, use it as an insect-repeller and sprinkle the powder around bowls in which sweets are kept, we drop a spoonful of turmeric powder into boiling water for inhalation to fight a cold, we put a paste of turmeric on cuts and burns, we hold on to the hope that it may yet help us fight cancer and we happily draw *rangolis* on the floor to give a prayerful welcome to the auspicious Divine. If each time we also remember that we should act in tune with the Divine's movement, there can be no rebellion within us. It would all be Peace, as we go on with our work. It is peace, the solitary bird chirping outside, swaying on the branch of the solitary gulmohar . . .

The archives of memory have rooms within rooms. I have been writing on turmeric and it has always held a very important place in all that I do. Two ladies come to visit. As they leave, I hold out a plate with betel leaves, nuts, fruits, a small cup of kumkum and a couple of turmeric roots. We smile at the same time while one of them says, "May it be so for us always, giving and taking *manjal kumkumam!*" I see them off and come back to my table to proceed with the essay and marvel at the

2. The eight-syllabled mantric term, "*Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya*" held holy by the followers of Vishnu.

3. The twelve-syllabled mantra, "*Om Namō Bhagavate Vāsudevāya*".

way a small plant has been the cause of so much happiness and peace.

But my fingers now remain paralysed as a shadow has fallen across me and the computer screen. I see my father standing in the central room of our village house, “Aravind”, facing his elder brother who is on the swing, sad, harassed, forlorn. “No Anna! This must not be! I will not allow it!”

I am with the ladies in an inner room and most of them are in tears. Only my grandmother is with her sons, sitting in a corner. She says feebly: “Rajaram, it is the custom and it is my fate. What can anyone do about it?”

Uncle’s voice comes through thinly: “What Rajaram says is right. You should not go through the hateful ceremony.”

“Rajamani! Don’t be childish. We have to go on living in this village. And what will the acharya⁴ say?”

Father’s voice is heard: “So? Let him say what he likes. I don’t care. You come away with me.”

“Don’t speak like that about the acharya. And how can I come with you? We have to go through the rituals for one year for your father. I must stay here.”

“Then you stay here but on my terms. No one dare say anything.” And so it was.

All this happened in 1948. It was years later that I learnt from mother what had transpired on that day. My grandfather had died a few days earlier and it was the custom in Brahmin families to shave the tresses of the widow on the tenth day. The unfortunate women accepted it for who dare protest against the stranglehold of blind custom? My grandmother had been married when she was five years old; now she was sixty-eight. She too must be guillotined by the custom, said the relations and neighbours. When grandmother had called her sons and daughters-in-law to have a ‘last’ look at her wearing the auspicious yellow thread and jewels, father realised what was up. Living amongst his books, and most of the time far away from his native place, he had almost forgotten the existence of this terrible custom. He was livid with rage that one who was verily a flame of self-sacrifice must be subjected to this meaningless indignity. There were lots of murmurs but the sad day passed off without the terrifying scene of shearing my grandmother’s locks being enacted in our backyard.

But “taking away the turmeric thread” ritual was done and we were all warned not to see it. Two old ladies of the village, Lakshmi Athai and Satakopa Athai took grandmother to the well at the backyard. They were both child widows with shorn heads, wearing white saris and good friends of grandmother. One could hear their keening, while my mother and other ladies lamented inside the house. “Oh, Lakshmi, that this should have happened to you! We thought you were lucky to have the turmeric

4. The Vaishnava families are generally connected to a spiritual preceptor for generations. In a ritual-bound way of life, the preceptor would not even agree to a widow to come in front of him and bow to him, if she had not shorn her head and put on a white sari.

thread for such a long time! Oh, the gods could not bear it! Oh, having lived to become a grandmother, yet you should be condemned to live as a widow like us! Oh, gods have no eyes to see! They have made you a stranger to turmeric! O unlucky one that at this advanced age you could not precede your husband!" They poured on her water they had drawn up from the well and brought her inside, warning the ladies loudly: "Come with a piece of turmeric in your hand or tuck a piece of the root in your sari before you see her!"

It was a terrible memory to file away in one's psyche. For our family, father's act was considered a major revolution. The older relations attributed it to his going after 'new acharyas'. Father had not given up his faith in traditions, but blind superstition and obscurantism he abhorred. By now he had come to the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This too may have aided him in revealing his great love for his mother and to stand firm on that day.

Later on, there were a few old people in his community who spoke of him as having gone over to "a foreign acharya" and thus desecrated sublime traditions, but father did not care. Nor did he ever go back to the family acharya to offer pranam, as his own mother was barred from this custom. Grandmother took it in her stride and went on with her chores, nursing a granddaughter who had been stricken by tuberculosis, helping in the confinement of another granddaughter and withdrew from her tired physical frame seven years later while her two sons recited the mantra of surrender in Srivaishnava tradition: "*Srīman Nārāyaṇa caraṇau śaraṇaṃ prapadye, Srīmate Nārāyaṇāya Namaḥ.*" For karma yogis like her, where was the need for the intervention of an acharya? Like Devahuti accepting her son Kapila's teaching, she had accepted the need for a change suggested by her son. She must have borne a cross for that in the village milieu, but I guess she lived bravely as the Mother of Sorrows:

Only to change this great hard world of pain
A patient prayer has risen from my breast;
A pallid resignation lights my brow,
Within me a blind faith and mercy dwell.⁵

Even after her passing, father never went back to the family tradition of going to the acharya. He did not say anything bitter against the old order, but was content henceforth to be the Mother's child. My uncle broached the question of performing 'samasrayana'⁶ for my mother so that she could cook ritual 'prasad' on special days. Father said: "I am my wife's acharya and can lay down the rule. She does not need

5. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 505.

6. On an appointed day, the acharya places the impress of a conch and a discus on the shoulders of the devotee, marking him (her) a servitor of Vishnu. The custom seems to have originated with the noble ideal of making one's surrender attuned to even the physical; but unfortunately it has now become a mere ritual and no more.

this ritual for she is Mother's child." There the matter ended. Uncle did not pursue the subject for he too was well read in Aurobindonian literature and welcomed the new breeze that his brother was bringing into the family traditions.

Turmeric is just a small plant. I grow this upright herb in a pot in my backyard and love to touch the fleshy green leaves now and then. Come *Thai* (January-February) month, I will pull out a couple of plants and tie them along with pieces of sugarcane to a brass pot and cook milk, rice and jaggery to make Sarkarai Pongal. The next day, in the "hour before the gods awake" I will untie the plant (which would be quite wilted by the heat) from the pot and spread the leaves in an open space. I will then place balls of cooked rice coloured variously and call out to the birds to come and have their fill. I will then detach the turmeric root and take it with me for my bath. This ritual known as "*kanu-p-pidi*" is said to be a prayer for the long life of one's brothers. What if one has none or one's brother is no more? Still we are asked to perform the ritual with the turmeric plant to invoke God's blessings on all our brothers in the world. For who is a stranger among Mother's children? If this idea is planted deep in us, there will be global peace. There is no doubt about it.

Ah, turmeric is just a small plant. But gazing at it I shudder with ecstasy to realise how close it has been to me. Glory be to the Divine Mother for gifting man the riches of Haridra, a golden symbol of Peace.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

To cleave to the path means to follow it without leaving it or turning aside. It is a path of self-offering of the whole being in all its parts, the offering of the thinking mind and the heart, the will and actions, the inner and the outer instruments so that one may arrive at the experience of the Divine, the Presence within, the psychic and spiritual change. The more one gives of oneself in all ways, the better for the sadhana. But all cannot do it to the same extent, with the same rapidity, in the same way. How others do it or fail to do it should not be one's concern — how to do it faithfully oneself is the one thing important.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 537)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader, edited by Sachidananda Mohanty. (Routledge, 912, Tolstoy House, 15-17 Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi 110 001, 2008. xix + 235 pages. Rs. 275.)

If there was one single political worker in the early decades of the twentieth century whose eyes were tuned to the future with a rare equanimity, it was Sri Aurobindo. True, he was part of the independence movement at a time when his motherland needed a focus to take the struggle to all parts of the country. But he was never narrowly tied down to the compartmentalised set-up of nationhood. He was spiritual in his approach, insights and conclusions. Spirituality is ever based on the unity of mankind, and the assurance that we live in a boot-strap universe. If you tighten the strap somewhere, the effect is felt elsewhere too! Such was the approach of Sri Aurobindo, the political thinker and sociologist.

This is quite obvious in his writings, but Dr. Sachidananda Mohanty has been nagged by a question. How come “many secularists and left-leaning intellectuals” have not responded to Sri Aurobindo? Obviously these groups confuse spirituality with religion and dogma. And the ‘devotee’ approach to Sri Aurobindo, the Aurobindonian yoga which is deep-rooted in ancient Indian methodology as also the guru-ashram ideal associated with his life and ministry have also, perhaps, made them shy away from the writings of Sri Aurobindo. It is one of those cases where a book is condemned without being read! Dr. Sachidananda Mohanty has taken up the self-appointed task of preparing an anthology to help the hitherto aliens step into the charmed circle of the Aurobindonian world-view. Nay, more. Help them shed their preconceived notions of a Hindutva ideologue when reading Sri Aurobindo.

Actually a good deal of work in this direction has been done by Dr. Kishor Gandhi. And others too. Dr. Mohanty has appended a sumptuous bibliography. His own attempt is to wake up persons who are, perhaps, only pretending to sleep. In the process we do get to have a crisp anthology with a not too obtrusive commentary. After a brief life-sketch, we receive the menu which includes the problems of self-determination, multiculturalism and secular modernity.

Five books of Sri Aurobindo have been showcased by Dr. Mohanty for projecting “Sri Aurobindo’s socio-cultural and international vision”. Fortunately, it does not matter for no work of Sri Aurobindo excludes us from his other writings. With him the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere! Certainly it is sobering to realise that long before the globalisation we are now going through, Sri Aurobindo had assured us in his *Ideal of Human Unity* that mankind is moving towards a unified structure. Of course, it would not be at the cost of diversity. The forces of nature take care of that. External unity imposed by isms and uniforms, arms and money-power will not last. Human unity can be lasting only if it is structured internally. Dr. Mohanty

summarises the views found in the book:

“It is only brotherhood founded on a deeper psycho-spiritual basis that can be ‘the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity’. Only by the simultaneous fulfilment of the individual and the community can true perfection and happiness be ensured in the world.”

The extracts from *Ideal of Human Unity* chosen by Dr. Mohanty are relevant to this point. They include the memorable sentence, so poetic, practical and harmonious:

“A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.”

The Human Cycle yields insights regarding the concepts of social evolution. Dr. Mohanty finds in the argument a synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions in the light of a “creative evolution of the spiritual kind”. Written during the First World War, it is a prophetic document indeed, since it warned against totalitarian ideologies. *War and Self-Determination*, again, belongs to the First World War years. A “mechanical freedom” is no freedom, it always turns out to be a flawed freedom. Reading Sri Aurobindo we realize that from the much-touted Greek democracy down to our own vote-box democracies, there has really been no such organisation as a democracy. It has always been a majority or minority rule, not a rule by all the people! Once again, the move has to come from “within”. As Sri Aurobindo says: “The law of our self-determination has to wed itself to the self-determination of others and to find the way to enact a real union through this mutuality. But its basis can be found only within and not through any mechanical adjustment.” Perhaps this idea was inculcated in man’s consciousness by India’s ancients who always concluded with the prayer: “sarve janah sukhino bhavantu.” If all people become happy and prosperous, it would follow that ‘I’ would be part of the ‘all’.

Like Laski who could transform political economy into unputdownable literature, Sri Aurobindo can keep us riveted to such ideas and concepts for a considerable time by the sheer force of his language. However, when we come to his *Foundations of Indian Culture*, we get to wander in a never-fading experience. There is no attempt to glorify Indian culture for it is there for all to see. The book merely reminds us that here is a treasure-house which can light our paths to the future and if we continue to neglect it, the loser will not be only India. Religion and spirituality, literature, art, architecture, politics . . . take any area, and there the Indian has excelled with supreme self-confidence and why does he find himself lost now, merely aping the West without imbibing its spirit? Nor does Sri Aurobindo turn a blind eye to the weaknesses of India like its treatment of women and keeping apart one-sixth of its population as “untouchables”. A wonderfully balanced study, the volume is rightly recommended as “mandatory reading” by Dr. Mohanty.

A recent (2006) collection, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* brings up the rear of Dr. Mohanty's choice. The extracts begin with the contribution by the Ashram to the Allied War Fund. Earlier than the Battle of Britain, prior to the Operation Barbarossa through which Hitler hoped 'the world will hold its breath', long before we came to know of the genocide of millions that went on in the gas chambers in Germany and Poland, Sri Aurobindo's statement that accompanied the contribution made it all clear:

"We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defense and in defense of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defense of 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."

Attention is also drawn to Sri Aurobindo's stand on the Cripps Mission (history has proved that the failure of the Congress leaders to act upon Sri Aurobindo's suggestion led to the Partition of India). The broadcast on the 15th August, 1947, the message to the Andhra university in December, 1948 are all here. Dr. Mohanty helpfully reviews his own *Reader* in his epilogue. He agrees that the volume is "not perfect and all-comprehensive". But as he concludes we will hope that the book will create "an interest in Sri Aurobindo's writings in confronting the vexing problems of our times."

The jacket design by Yawedo International is eloquent with a splash of orange and yellow waves. Symbolic? Or just contrastive clarity with the inlaid black lines framing the portraits of Sri Aurobindo?

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Sadhana is the practice of yoga. Tapasya is the concentration of the will to get the results of sadhana and to conquer the lower nature. Aradhana is worship of the Divine, love, self-surrender, aspiration to the Divine, calling the name, prayer. Dhyana is inner concentration of the consciousness, meditation, going inside in Samadhi. Dhyana, Tapasya and Aradhana are all parts of sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 541)

A TRUE RISHI

By the Grace of Sri Aurobindo I had my first Darshan of him in 1920 when I was a college student. I heard that he was a great patriot, quite out of the ordinary, one who renounced his all for our country, who saw our country actually as Bharat Mata, a Goddess, and who elevated patriotism to the height of Religion and Spirituality, and kindled the fire of spirit in the nation by his courage, and by his eloquent speeches and writings. I heard also that he was a poet, a scholar, and a Maha Yogi. I was very eager to have Darshan of the great personality, and so I went to Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo kindly granted me an interview.

Before seeing me he stood for a few minutes facing the sea and gazing into the beyond. He stood erect, motionless like a statue. Then he came near and sat in a chair. I made my pranam and sat opposite to him.

My first impression of Sri Aurobindo was that he was a true Rishi. His God-like face radiated profound peace, and serenity. His intent and faraway look indicated to me that he was not of the earth. He was lean, but he was a picture of health and immense, dynamic calm strength. His complexion was dark, but his personality was radiant.

Sri Aurobindo made kind inquiries regarding my studies and interests. Politics inevitably came up for discussion. It was a very informal talk, but extremely stimulating and useful to me.

I had Darshan of Sri Aurobindo every evening for a week afterwards. We used to talk mainly about literature, fine arts, philosophy and politics. In English literature he advised me to begin with Thackeray's *Pendennis* and other novels. He remarked: "Thackeray is more subtle and psychological than any novelist of his time or before him." Other authors recommended by him were George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte [and her] Sisters, Stevenson . . . Among poets he asked me to start with Tennyson, Matthew Arnold (especially his essay on translating Homer), Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and then take up the earlier poets.

Those meetings and many others afterwards were etched in my memory. While taking leave of him I requested his permission to come to see him again, and he kindly granted my request. After leaving Pondicherry I began to read the works of Sri Aurobindo with avidity. In them I found solutions of important problems concerning the nature of man, of the world and of God. The mental pleasure and spiritual satisfaction that I got from reading his works, I had never got from any other thinker or writer. It was not only admiration for the constant incandescence of his intellect; his philosophy of life and living appealed to something deeper, some inmost chord in my being, and moved me to my depths.

So in the beginning of 1926 I decided, "Sri Aurobindo is my Guru". But I asked myself, "Will he accept me as his disciple?" With trepidation I proceeded to Pondicherry and sought an interview with the Master, which he readily granted. I wondered

at the great change in his physical appearance since I had seen him last. His complexion was fair, and his body had filled out. Spiritual fire shone through his eyes. I remembered the epithet in the *Mahābhārata* describing the eyes of the Tapaswins as ‘*durnirīkṣya*’, unseeable. (Later I saw it was not always so. Usually it was a soft and gentle light like the stars.) I told him the purpose of my visit. When he consented to accept me as his disciple, I felt myself blessed.

My brother V. Chandrasekharam and I lived in the house next door to 9 Rue de la Marine, the Master’s residence. There were about a dozen disciples then living in a few houses close by. It was like Gurukul. There used to be informal sittings in the evenings when we used to talk on all kinds of subjects. It was often like table-talk. Sometimes serious subjects also were discussed. At other times the talk was in a lighter vein on men and matters, on politics at home and abroad, etc., but it was all off the cuff.

Sri Aurobindo’s voice was soft and gentle, almost feminine. His words flowed like the cool waters of a perennial spring. Thoughts came to him incessantly. It appeared as if he was in communication with higher levels of inspiration and direct knowledge. His experience in the sphere of Sadhana as well as in other spheres was vast and profound. But he made us feel quite at ease in his august presence. I never saw him solemn or serious. The Master would talk in a relaxed and jovial mood. He had a fine and subtle sense of humour. Even lighthearted jokes and jests used to be there in plenty. His repartee was good humoured and enjoyable. On occasions he would chuckle happily.

We therefore looked forward to the evening sittings with great pleasure. As days passed, it appeared to us, towards November 1926 that Sri Aurobindo was getting more and more indrawn. Evidently he had reached a crucial stage in his Sadhana and was on the verge of achieving a great objective. Finally towards the last week of November the evening sittings came to an end. The evening talks were an intellectual feast. I found them as scintillating and stimulating, as illuminating and edifying as the talks of Socrates and Plato, and in modern times of Goethe and Whitehead. All his original thoughts were precious to me and I used to record most of them faithfully the next day. On many days I could reproduce more than a hundred lines. This I believed then, and looking back now I believe still more, that it was all due to the Grace of Sri Aurobindo. [. . .] There is no continuity in the notes, for the talks were on all kinds of subjects, and they cover different periods of time, but looming above it all in the background is Sri Aurobindo’s personality and the pervading presence of his unique vision.

V. CHIDANANDAM

(*Breath of Grace* edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 2-5)

MY WORLD: THE MOTHER

I ARRIVED by the early morning train by 6 a.m. The Mother was to see me the same evening at about 5 p.m. in the Library room. I was informed and taken there by my father. I still remember the scene vividly. The Mother was clad all in white — sari, blouse and crown. She was sitting on a high chair. When she saw me she was all smiles and a spontaneous recognition arose in my heart that she was my *adhiṣṭhātri*. I told the Mother that I did not want to go back. She replied that she would ask Sri Aurobindo.

On the 24th was the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were seated on the sofa. As I approached them after my father, Sri Aurobindo smiled. He looked simply wonderful — I cannot describe what he looked like. When I made pranam holding his feet he bent down and blessed me. (I must add that each time I did pranam this way he used to bend down to bless me. I add this because I learnt recently that was not Sri Aurobindo's custom with all.)

The day after the Darshan Premanand, the Librarian, came and told me: Mother has sent word that Sri Aurobindo is pleased with you and you can start learning French. Naturally I was overjoyed and started my French lessons with Premanand that very day.

Because of my age I was at first not allowed to participate in the soup function in the evening. But at the instance of my father I was allowed from the Darshan day, 24th November. I was given work with Amrita. My job was to note the meter readings in all the houses in a notebook which I was to present to the Mother on the first of every month. In those days the Mother used to sit in the Pranam hall downstairs every first morning and pay the wages to Ashram servants. Amrita used to hand over the monies to her and the workers would come in a line and receive their salary directly from her. I would go with my book at the end.

After fifteen days of my starting French lessons she spoke to me in French but I was unable to follow! However I came to know that after I had started conversing in French she had expressed appreciation of my accent. It would even appear that Sri Aurobindo hearing me talk to the Mother in French had remarked that my pronunciation was good. I mention this by way of recording my gratitude to them for the minute interest they took in my upbringing.

It was in 1932 on my birthday (22nd of May) that there was a memorable interview with the Mother.

MOTHER: What are your ambitions?

I: I do not know anything.

MOTHER: You have ambition to be a big yogi?

Suddenly I remembered that I did have some such desire though at the moment it was not active in my mind. So I corrected myself and said: Yes Mother.

She then explained to me what it meant to be a big yogi, to have a large number

of disciples around oneself. How one had to have a divine consciousness and a realisation of the Divine for that purpose. As I was listening I realised that I had none of those things and I burst out: I don't want to be a yogi. I want to be your child.

The Mother was pleased and said *Très bien* (very good) and blessed me.

Then I mentioned to Mother my ambition to be a big writer.

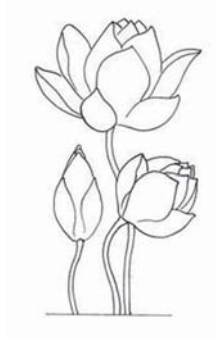
She heard and went on to describe what qualities are necessary to be a writer and how one must have wide knowledge of so many things before one could become a writer. I saw that I had none of those qualifications then.

As I look back I am moved by the considerate way in which Mother helped me to see myself as I was and to give up vain ambitions on my own. I myself was helped to realise the true state of things.

In keeping with the spirit of Sri Aurobindo's injunction to speak and act as one would in the presence of the Mother, I started reporting to Mother in my notebook ...

SHANTI DOSHI

(*Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 208-09)



AS I REMEMBER

I CAME to Pondicherry on the 19th of July in 1923.

I was in contact with Sri Aurobindo through Barin [Sri Aurobindo's younger brother]. Previously on seeing a photograph of mine Sri Aurobindo had written to Barin giving, first, the Mother's (she was called Mira then) reading and then his own comment. The Mother's reading was: An extremely interesting head; highly psychical personality; the danger for this type is in the body which may be consumed by the intensity of the psychic flame.

Sri Aurobindo's comment: Calmness, peace, descending into the body will make it immune from all danger. They are indispensable in this case.

He had added in the letter that he would call me as soon as it was possible. A telegram arrived and I left for Pondicherry. I was 22.

On arrival at the station, I was told by the person who had come to receive me what an unlucky man I was. For Sri Aurobindo had not been well for the previous two or three days and there were no sittings for meditation. However, on reaching the house where Sri Aurobindo was living, I met Amrita who was rushing upstairs with ten daily newspapers. I told him to carry my message to Sri Aurobindo. He nodded but told me, "It won't be possible." Hardly a minute had passed before he returned to say that Sri Aurobindo himself asked whether Kanai had come. Amrita had been asked to send me upstairs. As I went up I was very nervous. I saw him in the present Prosperity verandah on his throne-chair, a majestic personality with his beard. He looked and nodded. I forgot to bow down to him and sat by his side on one of the few chairs that were spread.

SRI AUROBINDO: Have you anything to tell me?

I: Yes. (I answered and kept silent for a minute.)

He repeated the question very sweetly. Still I couldn't talk. Then he looked at the time-piece and said that he had to go by eleven o'clock.

Then I asked:

I: Can I practise this Yoga?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes. Your being has come from a very high plane.

I: My nervous being is very weak.

SRI AUROBINDO: That doesn't matter. My nervous being also was weak, and Mira's nervous being too was weak; but we have become strong now. I think after sometime you too will be all right.

I turned to go.

He cleared his throat and I looked back.

SRI AUROBINDO: You have come for a few days. Come at 4.30 for meditation.

I turned to go. Again he cleared his throat and as I turned, he said to me to come in the morning after Amrita brought him the papers and sit by his side.

I came back at 4.30 in the evening. It was the first time that I saw the Mother.

She looked at me for a second. She was very beautiful, looked much younger than her age. There were two cats on her shoulders; I looked round and saw there were two or three more about her. One of the cats from her shoulder jumped on Sri Aurobindo's throne-chair. Mother called it back.

The Mother had come with a plate containing incense sticks, match box etc. After the Mother left Sri Aurobindo opened the conversation asking me:

SRI AUROBINDO: How is Motilal Roy?

I: I have not heard anything about him for a long time.

The meditation started at 5 and continued till 5.30. I observed that Sri Aurobindo had kept his eyes open. The others around meditated with eyes closed. There were hardly 13 or 14 of them.

Thereafter Sri Aurobindo went in for fifteen minutes for coffee.

The next morning I went up after Amrita came down and sat by the side of Sri Aurobindo who remarked that one or two persons might come but that should not disturb me. I was told to remain till 10.30. During the meditation I had a very good experience.

SRI AUROBINDO: Anything to say?

I told him that I had a grand experience of peace etc.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is your higher mind getting supramentalised.

After two or three days I told him that I was feeling a being, a mighty being behind me. If that being looked at me all difficulties vanished. Sri Aurobindo heard and nodded.

*

Some days thereafter, I told him that I had to leave as I had come prepared only for a few days.

SRI AUROBINDO: Once you have taken up my yoga, I won't leave you so easily.

I understood that he did not wish me to go. I had with me fifty rupees intended for the return fare. I asked whether I could give [the money] to him. He nodded and asked: "But you require some pocket money."

I replied that my friends would give.

SRI AUROBINDO: Are you sure?

He repeated this question twice. On my replying in the affirmative he said it was all right.

KANAILAL GANGULY

(Breath of Grace, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by Dipti Publications, 2002, pp. 34-36)

IT WAS SHE

THE few minutes of waiting, seated on the top steps of the steep stairway, elapsed in an absolute void. All thoughts had departed in an instant, the images also, — it was not so much a silence, as a sort of stupefaction.

At a certain moment, a brahmin with a long white beard, dressed in an immaculate dhoti, the torso bare, signed to us to come in.

I went in after Maggi, and to my vision there appeared unexpectedly, — facing the door through which we had entered, seated on an armchair, looking at us without smiling, — a being impossible to describe.

I did what my companion had done, kneeled before Her. My eyes met Hers, and instantly I was captured by the intensity that emanated from Her eyes.

I cannot say how long I remained thus, how many minutes elapsed under that severe penetrating look, searching in the most hidden corners of my being to see what was in there, to examine the most secret intentions, the truth of my being: who I was, why I was in Pondicherry, what I was in this life and in my previous births, and what my future would be

It seemed to me, at a certain moment, that the severity of expression changed, became gentler, but I cannot be certain.

I was held under that look, transfixed like a bird caught in the glare of headlights. I dared not move.

Unexpectedly, the face was illumined by a smile.

Oh God, what a smile! It had the intensity of a thousand suns, it was sweetness and love bestowed on a human being, on me.

. . .

She gave me a rose and dismissed me.

While coming down the stairs, returning home . . . I felt that that my eyes were moist.

It was She, I had recognised Her, I had found Her again, She had emerged once more from the depths of the consciousness to show Herself to me, Her disciple of all times.

I returned home without a word, with that red rose in my hands, my heart in tumult and profound echoes that, like the waves that perturb a lake, followed one another to a shore I did not know, and which I could not see.

I sat down on a sofa, and then the tears ran freely.

There were hours of silent tears, quiet, full of peace, with a vision that embraced the past, the present and the future, tears that dissolved the last reserves, broke down the ultimate resistances. I knew who I had been, the value of the acts I had committed, the why of so many things that till then had remained in the domain of uncertainty, what it was that awaited me, and what it was that the Mother wanted of me.

I was ready for everything, to undertake everything, to submit myself to the total annulment of what in the West is termed personality, which basically is nothing but a fierce ego, avid and stupid.

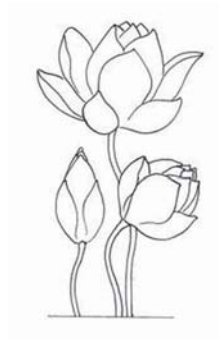
In that moment there surged in me the imperious command never to leave the Ashram.

This did not surprise me because in that place of my being where truth has its seat, the decision had already been taken. My surface being was not conscious of it yet, but everything was consummated.

I no longer belonged to myself, no longer belonged to the world in which I had lived. I belonged to nothing and none that was not the Shakti, the Mother.

NATA

(Translated from the original Italian, *Su Questo Stesso Terreno*, published by Edizione Mediterranee, Rome, 1979, pp. 104-06)



I BOW TO THE MOTHER

THOSE of you who came to the Ashram as children recognised the Mother and called her by that name practically from your birth, that is, from the moment you began to recognise things. We the grown-ups did not have that privilege. It has taken us a long long time to open our eyes and know. We have lost valuable time, almost wasted it. But, as you know, it is never too late to mend and it is possible to recover and even to make amends for lost time; there lies an interesting secret.

But as I was saying, you did not have to be told about the Mother, for you have almost been born and brought up in her lap. In our case somebody had to introduce us to the Mother, for we had been born and brought up in a step-motherly lap, although that too was one of her own forms, her form of Maya.

The first time I heard about the Mother was shortly after our arrival here. It was Sri Aurobindo himself who told us about a French lady from Paris who was a great initiate. She was desirous of establishing personal contact with Sri Aurobindo.

...

When it first came to be bruited about that a Great Lady like this was to come and live close to us, we were faced with a problem: how should we behave? Should there be a change in our manners? For we had been accustomed to a bohemian sort of life, we dressed and talked, slept and ate and moved about in a free unfettered style, in a manner that would not quite pass in civilised society. Nevertheless, it was finally agreed that we should stick as far as possible to our old ways even under the new circumstances, for why should we permit our freedom and ease to be compromised or lost? This indeed is the way in which the arrogance and ignorance of man assert the glory of his individuality!

The Mother arrived. She would meet Sri Aurobindo in company with the rest of us at our afternoon sessions. She spoke very little. We were out most of the time, but also dropped in occasionally. When it was proposed to bring out the *Arya* she took charge of the necessary arrangements. She wrote out in her own hand the list of subscribers, maintained the accounts herself: perhaps those papers might be still available. And afterwards, it was she herself who helped M. Richard in his translation of the writings of Sri Aurobindo into French for the French edition of the *Arya*. The ground floor of Dupleix House was used as the stack-room and the office was on the ground floor of the Guest House. The Mother was the chief executive in sole charge. Once every week all of us used to call at her residence accompanied by Sri Aurobindo and had our dinner together. On those occasions the Mother used to cook one or two dishes with her own hands. Afterwards too, when she came back for good, the same arrangement continued at the Bayoud House; I have told you of that before.

...

As I told you in the beginning, the Mother did not appear to us, the older people, as the Mother at the outset; she came to us first in this garb of Beauty. We received her as a friend and companion, as one very close to ourselves, first, because Sri Aurobindo himself received her like that, and secondly because of her qualities. Now that we are on this subject of her qualities, although it is not necessary for a child to proclaim the virtues of his mother, I cannot here refrain from telling you about another point in her teaching. This concerns something deeper. The first time Sri Aurobindo happened to describe her qualities, he said he had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved. He had added a comment that perhaps it was only women who were capable of giving themselves so entirely and with such sovereign ease: This implies a complete obliteration of the past, erasing it with its virtues and faults. The Mother has referred to this in one of her Prayers and Meditations. When she came here, she gave herself up to the Lord, Sri Aurobindo, with the candid simplicity of a child, after erasing from herself all her past, all her spiritual attainments, all the riches of her consciousness. Like a new-born babe, she felt she possessed nothing, she was to learn everything right from the start, as if she had known or heard about nothing.

Now to come back to a personal experience. The first thing I heard and came to know about the Mother was that she was a great spiritual person. I did not know then that she might have other gifts; these were revealed to me gradually. First I came to know that she was a very fine painter; and afterwards that she was an equally gifted musician. But there were other surprises in store. For instance, she had an intellectual side no less richly endowed, that is to say, she had read and studied enormously, had been engaged in intellectual pursuits even as the learned do.

...

As I was saying, this capacity for an entire rejection of the past has been one of the powers of her spiritual consciousness and realisation. It is not an easy thing for a human being to wash himself clean of all his past acquisitions, be it intellectual knowledge or the habits of the vital, not to speak of the body's needs, and step forth in his nude purity. And yet this is the first and most important step in the spiritual discipline. The Mother has given us a living example of this. That is why she decided to shed all her past, forget all about it and begin anew the a-b-c of her training and initiation with Sri Aurobindo. And it was in fact at the hands of Sri Aurobindo that she received as a token and outward symbol her first lessons in Bengali and Sanskrit, beginning with the alphabet.

But all this is simply an attempt on the part of the small to comprehend something of the Vast; it is as if a particle of sand was trying to reflect a little of the sun's rays, a dwarf trying to catch at the high tree-top with his uplifted arms, a child prattling of his mother's beauty.

In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as

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

Let me now end this story for today with a last word about myself.

I have said that so far the Mother had been to us a friend and companion, a comrade almost, at the most an object of reverence and respect. I was now about to start on my annual trip to Bengal — in those days I used to go there once every year, and that was perhaps my last trip. Before leaving, I felt a desire to see the Mother. The Mother had not yet come out of her seclusion and Sri Aurobindo had not yet retired behind the scenes. I said to him, "I would like to see Her before I go." — Her with a capital H, in place of the Mother, for we had not yet started using that name. Sri Aurobindo informed the Mother. The room now used by Champaklal was the Mother's room in those days. I entered and waited in the Prosperity room, for Sri Aurobindo used to meet people in the verandah in front. The Mother came in from her room and stood near the door. I approached her and said, "I am going," and then lay prostrate at her feet. That was my first Pranam to the Mother. She said, "Come back soon." This "come back soon" meant in the end, "come back for good."

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(*Reminiscences* by Nolini Kanta Gupta and K. Amrita, published by
Mother India, 1969, pp. 75-83)

