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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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CORRECTION

A couple of diacritical marks got left out in the piece “A Note on the Term ‘*Caitya*’ ” on p. 586 of the July 2008 issue.

We give below the correct forms:

Cityā

Kṣetrajñā

Also in the same piece, the title of the book should have been *Essays on the Gita* and not as printed.

THE CHILDREN OF WOTAN

(1940)

“Where is the end of your armoured march, O children of Wotan?
Earth shudders with fear at your tread, and the death-flame laughs in your eyes.”
“We have seen the sign of Thor and the hammer of new creation,
A seed of blood on the soil, a flower of blood in the skies.
We march to make of earth a hell and call it heaven.
The heart of mankind we have smitten with the whip of the sorrows seven;
The Mother of God lies bleeding in our black and gold sunrise.”

“I hear the cry of a broken world, O children of Wotan.”
“Question the volcano when it burns, chide the fire and bitumen!
Suffering is the food of our strength and torture the bliss of our entrails.
We are pitiless, mighty and glad, the gods fear our laughter inhuman.
Our hearts are heroic and hard; we wear the belt of Orion:
Our will has the edge of the thunderbolt, our acts the claws of the lion.
We rejoice in the pain we create as a man in the kiss of a woman.”

“Have you seen your fate in the scales of God, O children of Wotan,
And the tail of the Dragon lashing the foam in far-off seas?”
“We mock at God, we have silenced the mutter of priests at his altar.
Our leader is master of Fate, medium of her mysteries.
We have made the mind a cypher, we have strangled Thought with a cord;
Dead now are pity and honour, strength only is Nature’s lord.
We build a new world-order; our bombs shout Wotan’s peace.

“We are the javelins of Destiny, we are the children of Wotan,
We are the human Titans, the supermen dreamed by the sage.
A cross of the beast and demoniac with the godhead of power and will,
We are born in humanity’s sunset, to the Night is our pilgrimage.
On the bodies of perishing nations, mid the cry of the cataclysm coming,
To a presto of bomb and shell and the aeroplanes’ fatal humming,
We march, lit by Truth’s death-pyre, to the world’s satanic age.”

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 112)

MESSAGE ON WW II

(This letter was addressed to the Governor of Madras covering a contribution to the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund, made as a token of a complete adhesion to the Allied cause. It was written at the time of the collapse of France and the threatened collapse of Britain. It was placed at the disposal of the Governor for publicity in case of need.)

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

19.9.1940

SRI AUROBINDO

(On Himself, SABCL, Vol. 26, pp. 393-94)

‘I TURN TOWARDS THEE . . .’

February 1, 1914

I TURN towards Thee who art everywhere and within all and outside all, intimate essence of all and remote from all, centre of condensation for all energies, creator of conscious individualities: I turn towards Thee and salute Thee, O liberator of the worlds, and, identified with Thy divine love, I contemplate the earth and its creatures, this mass of substance put into forms perpetually destroyed and renewed, this swarming mass of aggregates which are dissolved as soon as constituted, of beings who imagine that they are conscient and permanent individualities and who are as ephemeral as a breath, always alike or almost the same, in their diversity, repeating indefinitely the same desires, the same tendencies, the same appetites, the same ignorant errors.

But from time to time Thy sublime light shines in a being and radiates through him over the world, and then a little wisdom, a little knowledge, a little disinterested faith, heroism and compassion penetrates men’s hearts, transforms their minds and sets free a few elements from that sorrowful and implacable wheel of existence to which their blind ignorance subjects them.

But how much greater a splendour than all that have gone before, how marvellous a glory and light would be needed to draw these beings out of the horrible aberration in which they are plunged by the life of cities and so-called civilisations! What a formidable and, at the same time, divinely sweet puissance would be needed to turn aside all these wills from the bitter struggle for their selfish, mean and foolish satisfactions, to snatch them from this vortex which hides death behind its treacherous glitter, and turn them towards Thy conquering harmony!

O Lord, eternal Master, enlighten us, guide our steps, show us the way towards the realisation of Thy law, towards the accomplishment of Thy work.

I adore Thee in silence and listen to Thee in a religious concentration.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 63-64)

THE WAR BEHIND THE WAR

[Adapted in places and slightly enlarged from a reply – during the Second World War – to a letter by Paul Brunton, this study was first published on the fourth anniversary of the end of that conflict and subsequently reprinted when Totalitarianism was on the rampage from Red China. Paul Brunton twice visited the Ashram at Pondicherry (1930s) and was deeply impressed by Sri Aurobindo and, for all his doctrinal differences, remained a great admirer. He and the writer of this study struck up a friendship which carried on a correspondence for a number of years. Three other letters addressed to Paul Brunton were published as “Sri Aurobindo and the Philosophers” and “Aurobindonian Viewpoints”.]

MAY 7 marked the fourth anniversary of the end of World War II. Now that Hitler is past history and there is the threat of a new war we are liable to forget the true significance of those six years of sweat and tears and blood which were required to beat Nazism to its knees and how the newly threatened calamity may be really of a piece with the nature of that terrible period.

The truth about the last war will not be grasped simply by looking at the material surface of things nor even by examining the ideological forces at work. The New Order of Hitler, in the aid of which his Panzers and Luftwaffe went out to battle and the Gestapo and the Fifth Column of Quislings spread everywhere their tentacles, was not a mere man's conception. Its origin was occult, lying in the mystery that the world has always felt vaguely as the background against which the mundane drama is enacted. The truth, therefore, about the last war will best be grasped if we consider the support given to the Allied cause from the very outset and in its darkest hours by one who stands today as the greatest explorer of the occult background — Sri Aurobindo.

Nazism and Sri Aurobindo

The support was given with an extreme decisiveness that cut down to roots deeper than any difference between one human way of life and another, between even a human civilisation and a human barbarism. That extreme decisiveness coming from a master of spirituality like Sri Aurobindo pointed to a vision of Hitlerism as the arch-enemy not just of Britain's or France's or America's outer dominion and of their type of culture but also of all that Sri Aurobindo himself has made it his mission to accomplish. He saw much more at stake than a political, social or cultural issue. He saw an issue beyond the human, the growth of God in man opposed from regions occult to our normal consciousness. And he saw that secret opposition as the most colossal in history and not confined to a brief outbreak.

Many people believed that Nazism would be a temporary phase and its enormities would pass and the true Germany automatically rise to the fore and there would again

be lovely music and great literature and towering philosophy. Sri Aurobindo never subscribed to this sunny view. On the contrary, he held that Nazism, in the form in which we then saw it, was, in spite of its terrible ugliness, no more than a small and slight beginning of a darkness of which we had no idea! It was to him the spearhead of an all-out offensive from the Pit. Its success would not be a passing phenomenon which would exhaust itself and let human life return to its old way of understandable though serious frailties relieved by admirable strengths. Its success would herald the beginning of an age in which the diabolic would reign over the human, make the advent of divine forces impossible for untold centuries and render the fight for the Spirit, whenever the fight did manage to come, a far more difficult and doubtful Armageddon than anything we could know during those days. Nazism, in Sri Aurobindo's opinion, had to be struck dead: there could be no complacency about it, no sitting on the fence, no comparing it to the savageries of past times and hoping for a swing-back to normal humanity.

From the occult standpoint, Nazism is the exact opposite pole to the Aurobindonian dynamis. It is no brief outbreak touching the superficialities of material life or a few domains of it but an attempt at total supremacy because the Aurobindonian dynamis is also bent on an all-comprehensive integrality of effect on earth. Sri Aurobindo's spirituality is not a grand escape from life's riddle: it is a radical solution of it. If his work were meant to be nothing more than a going inward and upward from the material plane to a hidden soul-status unborn and unmanifest, he would not have bothered about the Hitlerite colossus striding over mankind. Sri Aurobindo is for creating *Lebensraum* for the Spirit here and now. And what is finally determinative of his being the upper pole to Hitler's nether is that he is for divinising the material consciousness and substance and form no less than the subtle parts of our nature — a transformation never clearly envisaged by the saints, sages and prophets of the past despite their intuition that the material world has come originally from the Divine. The Yoga of those saints, sages and prophets, even when not thoroughly escapist, would not be completely baulked if its function of manifesting the Divine on earth were checked or nullified, for its ultimate goal was still a fulfilment in some Beyond at the end of earth-life. But a unique Yoga insisting on fulfilment by an integral divine manifestation in matter itself and not proceeding to an unearthly hereafter, a Yoga aiming to lay hands on every side of us for the creation of a new race, would have its bottom blown clean away by the triumph of Nazism. Conversely, if the Aurobindonian New Order were allowed to make headway, the powers embodying themselves in movements like Nazism would suffer definite defeat and their hold on earth be fundamentally loosened. So, against this divine march upon the terrestrial plane with the purpose of basing there for good the Truth-Consciousness, there is the counter-march from the occult home of Falsehood to gain a permanent grip. Because Sri Aurobindo knew what he himself was luminously labouring at, he perceived in one flash the whole character and menace of Nazism.

Nature's Evolution and its Occult Background

To gauge that character and menace we must look through Sri Aurobindo's eyes at Nature and her evolution towards the Spirit. Nature on earth starts with an involution of the Divine, an immense "Inconscience". Out of this, life and mind and soul emerge, by slow purblind groping through the potentialities of life and mind and soul involved in matter and by a strong guiding pressure of these things from the planes above the material, where they have their organised activities. Spirit and Supermind are the highest terms involved, holding in themselves the key to an entire fulfilment of all the others in a perfected physical frame. The difficulties of evolution lie, in the first place, in the pervading unconsciousness which is our base in Nature and the separative half-consciousness which crystallises out of it. These are undivine factors, posited at the beginning of a special form of manifestation of the Divine, the working out of a particular possibility, the possibility of the Divine's emergence from what seems at the outset the very negation of Him. But there is another factor at work which derives from beyond material Nature. This is not merely undivine: it is also anti-divine. The undivine resists by sheer inertia, the anti-divine by a various strategy of attack. And the attack comes from occult dimensions of being.

Behind the evolutionary earth-scene there are typical worlds fixed in a certain order and harmony of their own. These worlds are of darkness as well as light. There is no progress on their own levels, they are content with their own types, possessing their peculiar nature fully expressed and deploying it in diverse fashions. But that contentment with full self-play does not preclude their desire to extend the play of their satisfaction from the occult to the material. They make the earth-scene their battlefield. And as the earth-scene starts with an involution of the Divine, a concealment of Spirit, the occult worlds of darkness find an easier role than do those of light. "On the black rock of the Inconscience" they build their edifices with greater immediate success. That is why evolution is not only aeonic but chockful of stupendous setbacks, demolitions of half-achieved good, perversions of delicately established beauty. That is why man in spite of his Godward urge makes so little advancement and centuries see him but grandiosely shifting from tweedledum to tweedledee, remaining pitifully the same in his heart under all camouflage of outer form. That is why every truth gets twisted in the long run and becomes actually a species of untruth, religion grows an obscurantist blight and art a decadent saturnalia, philosophy a riot of sophisms and politics a huge machinery for exploiting the many in the interests of the few. O so slow is the journey of the Gods! Always the path is cluttered and broken by jagged masses of influence from mysterious worlds where brutality and blindness are the principles on which existence is founded in a non-evolving immutable mould.

The Titan, the Giant, the Demon

Three kinds of beings dwell in the hideous harmony of those worlds. The Indian terms are: Asura, Rakshasa, Pisacha. In English they may be translated: Titan, Giant,

Demon. Each has a special function. The Asura is a being who comes with great powers of thought, not a beautiful and systematic movement but a formidable vehemence of it. He has also great “moral” powers, he can be self-controlled, ascetic and chaste in his own life, a sort of inverted Yogi, but all his gifts of tapasya he uses for selfish and violent ends. His aim is to pluck civilisation from the roots, destroy all humane and progressive impulse, regiment the spontaneous diversity of life into a ruthless movement of robots, drink the exultation of triumph by breaking with an iron heel the dreaming heart of man. The Rakshasa is a devourer without brains, the ravager who builds nothing except a pyramid of skulls. He ploughs up the world into a myriad graves and leaves it a chaos of corpses. He is naked greed run amok. The Pisacha fouls and pollutes all things, he is the wallower in dirt and the necrophage, the inventor of obscene tortures, the mutilating maniac. The Asura is the General, the Führer of the army of darkness; the Rakshasa is the lieutenant, the henchman; the Pisacha is the private, the storm-trooper.

They are no symbols or imaginary figures by which man visualises his own imperfections and evil instincts. Rather the evil instincts are the signs in him of the subtle presence of powers and personalities that have their habitat in non-human and preternatural spheres. It is because these spheres are of a perverse bliss in which the cruel, the wry and the filthy are hideously harmonised for ever to yield enjoyment, that man feels a pleasure in his own basenesses, an attachment to his crookedness and suffering, a reluctance to give up his blindness and lust in spite of all the misery his higher self sees and feels in them — a reluctance as if blindness and lust were things to be cherished, precious components of the life-drama, indispensable art-elements of the cosmic scheme. But man’s love of the base and the torturesome becomes not just one part of his nature but almost his whole being when the Asura, with his attendant Rakshasa and Pisacha, so clutches human nature that it becomes one with that occult and rigid reality. Then we have an incarnation of adverse forces, the dark deities, and they shape out a collectivity, a nation, a state with the purpose of goose-stepping on the world and smashing the entire fabric of civilisation. Such a catastrophic invasion has taken place in our own times and with a thoroughness proportionate to the thoroughness with which the spiritual Light has sought embodiment and out-flowering.

The War’s Profound Meaning

Hence the last war was not like the other wars and Nazism was not a recrudescence of man’s ignorance but the beginning of a new era of changeless horror and terror, the most monstrous onslaught made from Preternature to found here the empire of Satanism. The human consciousness well-nigh dies in those who embody the preternatural hierarchy — for the simple reason that the human becomes as good as possessed. And because the possession is so extreme, the task of defeating the Asura and his band was both so imperative and arduous. It is no wonder a large number of combatants as well as neutrals kept asking: Can Hitler be defeated? Yet the very

enormity of the invasion called forth the hidden powers of Light from behind the veil. And though it is harder for the human instrument to be a channel of the Divine than to be a medium of the Diabolic, we must remember that the Divine is the infinite while the Diabolic is nothing save the immense. If the Diabolic finds an easier role, the Divine brings a vaster capacity — and slowly, step by step, the forces of Light were mobilised and trained and hurled against the foe. There could be no parleying, no compromise, no appeasement. The Asura cannot be converted: he has got to be broken.

However dimly, this truth was seized by the Allied nations. Churchill gave it the most dynamic push possible, short of the directly occult and spiritual. When France lay prostrate and Hitler announced that on the fifteenth of August that year he would address the world from Buckingham Palace and the endless Luftwaffe over Britain seemed a goddess of winged victory for him, Churchill knew that there could be neither turning back nor knuckling under. Whatever his defects in colonial policy, he was magnificent under that day-to-day rain of high-explosive, and his instinct of the superhuman truth at stake marked him out as an instrument *par excellence* of the Divine in the war. In far-away India was raised a voice guided not by instinct but by a shining insight. Strangely enough, the voice was of one whose day of birth was the fifteenth of August, the exact day on which Hitler hoped to celebrate the death of all that mankind valued. It was the sole clear and clarion-like voice amidst a chaos of political quarrels that was confusing India's mind *vis-à-vis* the occult conflict which had made our world its stage. India, who had known God as no other country in the past, was weak, fumbling and hesitant, obsessed by her political animosity against Britain and oblivious of the wider and deeper call to which Churchillian Britain had responded. Sri Aurobindo stood alone in his sun-bright seeing of the war's inner significance. He declared his unrestricted sympathy, his unconditional support — “whatever may happen,” as his own words had it in his message to the Governor of Madras in connection with the Viceroy's fund. At the back of those words was the whole mystical puissance of an Integral Yoga, a puissance that worked secretly like a dynamo sending out world-currents, driving a vast invisible inspired strength into the armies and navies and air-forces ranged against Hitler.

When history-books are written, these armies and navies and air-forces together with the men at the head of the Allied governments figure large in them. The praise they get is amply deserved by their idealism, courage, perseverance and skill. But whoever understands the profound meaning of the war and senses the incorporeal clash of which it was the outer reverberation will surely recognise, as the active antithesis to the occult evil that threatened utterly to engulf mankind through Hitler, the occult good that promises to lift mankind utterly to the heights through Sri Aurobindo.

Signs for the Future

And whoever understands the war's profound meaning will also realise that Nazism, though defunct in its Hitlerite shape, may yet prepare a new attack and that

it would be an error to regard all enemies of Hitler as having been children of Light. In the world of the Titan, the Giant and the Demon there are many principalities and the wrestle among them is part of the hideous harmony in which evil exists independently behind the earth-scene. Hence, against one principality trying to precipitate itself upon earth, another doing the same may be pitted side by side with the resistance-movement by evolving man. As soon as that principality has been crushed, those who were comrades because of a common enemy may break up and once again evolving man may confront man acting under the spell of the Titan, the Giant and the Demon. Some element of the anti-Nazism of the past may itself be dyed with essentially the same darkness. The future must learn to see behind the masks and identify in spite of deceptive colours the face of evil by a combination of four signs — the denial of God and of the divine spark in the human, the totalitarian freedom-stifling grip on the individual's mind and body, the acceptance of violence as basic to self-expression, the conspiracy to spread by all available means discontent and disorder in every country whose government pursues the ideal of political democracy.

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

(India and the World Scene by K. D. Sethna, published by Sri Aurobindo Society,
Pondicherry, 1997, pp. 217-24)

“The Children of Wotan”¹ catches vividly the perversely religious vision and exultation that was one of the most effective elements in the cult of Nordic race and blood and steely Titanism which Hitler let loose in Germany and swept outward on the war-path.

K. D. Sethna

(Sri Aurobindo – The Poet, 1999, p. 342)

[¹ See p. 737 of this issue]

SRI AUROBINDO'S FAITH IN REBIRTH, PREDESTINATION, INTUITION AND GOD'S GRACE: A STUDY OF *THE PHANTOM HOUR*

SRI AUROBINDO'S letters, speeches, messages, essays, translations and commentaries, philosophical, psychological, sociological, political, critical, poetical and dramatic works have received the attention of scholars and critics, but the four stories that he wrote during the same 'silent yoga' period he wrote the play *Eric* are yet to receive the attention they deserve. Three of these stories, *The Door at Abelard*, *The Devil's Mastiff* and *The Golden Bird* are incomplete, while the remaining one, *The Phantom Hour*, is the only complete story. These four stories that first appeared in journals connected with Sri Aurobindo Ashram are now included in *Collected Plays and Short Stories II*. *The Phantom Hour* was the only story that was also published as a book a couple of months after Sri Aurobindo's passing.

M. K. Naik talked of the neglect Sri Aurobindo's stories have received at the hands of critics and scholars way back in 1979 when he wrote an article on his English stories: "Sri Aurobindo's reputation as a seer, a philosopher, a poet and a dramatist has obscured one interesting aspect of his genius, viz., that at one time he tried his hand at the short story also. Actually, one curious fact about Sri Aurobindo's treatment of this form is that while he made no attempt to write poetry and drama in his mother tongue, he did write short stories in Bengali before tackling the form in English later" (MKN, p. 150). He concludes that though his stories constituted "a very minor element in his impressive total achievement, they yet unmistakably have enough vitality in them to remind us that they are, after all, chips from the same mighty workshop which produced *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*" (MKN, pp. 160-161). Despite his candid admission that the English stories were neglected, he chose, for reasons still unknown, not to include Sri Aurobindo's stories when he wrote on the origin and development of Indian English story in his book *A History of Indian English Literature*. There is no mention of these stories even in C. V. Venugopal's book on the history of the Indian English short story. Even K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar forgets about his stories while lauding his achievements and contributions in his book *Indian Writing in English*. This paper pioneers an approach to critically evaluate Sri Aurobindo's stories. It postulates that his stories should not be read in isolation but as important links in the chain of his evolution. It assigns to *The Phantom Hour* the place it deserves in the history of Indian English short story. It shows how the story, set in London, reflects Sri Aurobindo's faith in rebirth, predestination, intuition, God's Grace, and the *Gita*.

The Phantom Hour reflects Sri Aurobindo's understanding and appreciation of the strange ways of God to man. It reaffirms what he had himself felt when he was taken into custody in connection with the Alipore Bomb case, and his intense faith in the teachings of the *Gita*. It also reflects his views on predestination, and his belief that God visits us, but we do not feel His presence. The story also shows how God

executes His will, and how a rationalist interprets incidents that defy any logical interpretation. Sri Aurobindo's works show that they were slowly but gradually heading for *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*, traces of which are available in all his literary works preceding them, including *The Viziers of Bassora*, his first play that he wrote in Baroda (YAV). His stories thus should not be read in isolation but as important links in the chain of his over-all vision.

The Phantom Hour is the story of Sturge Maynard's reflections on the bizarre that he experienced one day. He used his logic to grasp what he saw, but his logic did not help him in understanding whatever he saw and experienced. There are two Sturge Maynards in *The Phantom Hour*, the one in the beginning is a rationalist, and, the other, from the middle onwards, is a believer. The contrast between the two suggests the contrast between a sceptic and a believer. The story shows how a sceptic turns a staunch believer, how he cultivates intuitive perception, and what are his traits. Though the story does not answer questions like whether God in man is a murderer, and, is the change from a sceptic to a believer always smooth as in the case of Sturge, yet it is an authentic summing up of many of Sri Aurobindo's beliefs. The devil appearing to the protagonist in "The Devil's Mastiff", the inexplicable haunting in "The Door at Abelard", the invitation to explore the world of beauty and terror in "The Golden Bird" vindicate Sri Aurobindo's grouping of these stories under the general heading "Idylls of the Occult". Persons capable of moving successfully in both the worlds, the visible and the hidden, are the central characters in these stories. This requires a certain inborn trait which Sturge Maynard has. He recalls how he used to see violet lights in his childhood and how he stopped seeing them once he grew up. The special gift he was born with did not diminish as he grew older, it simply receded into the background when his too powerful, intense and dominant rational faculty started shaping and dictating his thoughts and actions. This inborn trait of his re-surfaced strongly at the appropriate moment and enabled him to recognise and receive the help that he needed to save someone's life. We can also look at this phenomenon from another angle. Contrary to popular belief, mysticism and rationalism are not two mutually exclusive, hostile and irreconcilable domains. The fact that even the age we live in does not rule out the existence of inner experiences and seeks to explore and master the unknown and the mysterious corroborate what the story suggests.

One day Sturge was reading a book, which "pleased his sense of the curious" but "disgusted his reason" because it is difficult for a rationalist like him to accept whatever saints claim to have experienced during moments of spiritual ecstasy. Sturge symbolises modern sceptics who doubt and rubbish the claims made regarding extra-sensory perceptions. He could not digest what the writer claimed in the book he was reading and dubbed him "prosaist of mysteries" and "trafficker in devious imaginations." The writer of the book Sturge had been reading maintained that it was "a common experience with seers in intense moments of rapid cerebration to see their heads, often their whole surroundings besieged by a brilliant atmosphere coruscating

with violet lightnings” (“The Phantom Hour” in *Collected Plays and Short Stories*, SABCL, Vol. 7, p. 1013). While he was engrossed in dismissing what he had just read, it flashed across his memory that he had himself experienced in his childhood what he now considers absurd. He recalled that he “had been in the habit of seeing precisely such violet coruscations about his head and had indulged his childish fancy with them until maturer years brought wonder, distrust and the rapid waning of the phenomenon” (*PH*, pp. 1013-1014).

He rose from the fireside holding the book that he was reading and just “looked out on the blackish yellow blinding fog that swathed London in the dense folds of its amplitude” (*PH*, p. 1013). He saw something unusual, but it was difficult for him to accept what he had seen. He had seen violet flashes in the fog but he wanted to convince himself that he had really seen something, and hence, “he fixed his eye again on the fog for repetition or disproof of what he had seen” (*PH*, p. 1014). He did not see violet flashes only this time, but something very distinct, bright and round. He was surprised to see that it was a clock. He turned his eyes at once towards his own clock that was on the mantelpiece and compared it with the clock that he had just seen. He stared at the clock that he saw in the fog and found that it was “ebony-faced . . . silver-lettered, solidly pedestalled, not lightly balanced, pointing to the hour eight with the same closeness as the real clock pointed to the hour five” (*PH*, p. 1014). The clock in the fog was so distinctly visible that he could easily make out that “the four of this timepiece was not lettered in the ordinary Roman numerals, but with the four vertical and parallel strokes” (*PH*, p. 1014). The apparition disappeared soon after, leaving him completely baffled.

He wanted to assure himself that what he had seen was a reality and not “an optical hallucination.” He tried to recall where he had seen the clock that looked very familiar to him. He was sanguine that he had seen it somewhere, but he could not recall where: “Surely, he knew it, — had seen it, clearly, insistently, — that ebony face, that silver-lettering, that strong ornamented pedestal, even that figure four! But where was it, when was it? Some curious bar in his memory baffled his mind wandering vainly for the lost details” (*PH*, p. 1015).

The clock on the mantelpiece struck five and immediately after that he heard the sound of another clock striking eight “with a soft, harmonious chime and a musical jangling at the end.” He tried to analyse all that he had seen and heard but could not. He sat down at the table, opened the book at random, and tried to read, but something mysterious happened once again. The book that he was reading was written in Latin, but he found that the page he was reading at that moment was written in Greek and not Latin. The passage that he read spoke of gods and their visit to the earth: “For the gods immortal wander always over the earth and come unguessed to the dwellings of mortals; but rare is the eye that can look on them and rarer the mind that can distinguish the disguise from the deity” (*PH*, p. 1015). That was something very strange, but it was difficult for him to accept that something unusual that he had experienced, and

which the writer of the book highlighted, could really happen. He wanted to convince himself that whatever he read a moment ago was not a hallucination, but a strange reality difficult to believe. He looked at the page, and, once again, he was surprised to find that the passage he was reading at the moment was written in Greek and not Latin: “And men too live disguised in the sunlight and never from their birth to their death shalt thou see the mask uplifted. Nay, thou thyself, O Pelops, hast thou seen even once the daemon within thee?” (*PH*, p. 1016) The moment he finished reading the passage “the physical page reappeared with its native lettering” and he heard, once more, the Phantom clock striking eight.

He had thus strange experiences one after the other. It was now difficult for him to dismiss everything that he had seen and heard as hallucination and hypnotism. He rose “and waited for some more definite sign.” He could now make out that he was going to experience something extraordinary. He was proved right when the chimes rang out once again. He also heard a woman’s voice this time “crying to him passionately under cover of that perfectly familiar melody,” and a shot when the Phantom clock, once again, struck eight: “And then immediately following the eighth stroke, there came as if far off, an unmistakable explosion of sound, the report of a modern revolver” (*PH*, p. 1016).

He left the fireplace and the room, came down the stairs, put on his hat and overcoat, moved towards the door of his house, not knowing where he was heading and why. While coming down the stairs he found out that he had forgotten his revolver, which was lying in the drawer of his wardrobe. He went up, took the revolver, loaded it, put it in his right-hand side-pocket, assured himself that he had his two latchkeys in his pocket, came down the stairs, and moved through the fog to a destination he was not sure of, but certain about one thing that “whatever it might be it had to be done.” He could not decide to which of the two women he should go since both of them were dear to him, and the death of either of them would create a void in him impossible to fill. He was in a dilemma, but “something within it, decided for him”, and he resolved to go to Renée and not to his sister Imogen who was completely safe in her uncle’s well-appointed, well-guarded and comfortable home. This is the intuition Sri Aurobindo believes in and alludes to. As he was moving towards Renée’s house, it flashed across his memory that she had asked him not to visit her that day as someone related to her past was coming to meet her. She did not want that Sturge should meet the man. He was not interested in her past, and, hence, agreed not to visit her that day.

Sri Aurobindo suggests that the unusual we often experience, and which we often ignore, is one of God’s ways of dropping hints, but we do not understand its significance when it happens. What appears unusual later, appears usual and not at all significant when it happens, but it strikes us later that it was not usual, but something different and distinct. Sturge also recalled later, while he was heading towards her house, that when they parted last “her parting clasp had been almost convulsive in its strength and intensity, her speech vibrant with some unexplained emotion” (*PH*, p. 1017). There was something unusual about her parting clasp, but he had ignored it

as we normally do, though “he had been aware of it, without observing it, being preoccupied with his passion. Whatever part of his mind had noted it, had confined its possible cause within the limits of the usual, as men are in the habit of doing, ignoring the unusual until it seizes and surprises them” (*PH*, p. 1017). He reached her house, opened the door with one of the latchkeys in his pocket and moved towards the drawing-room where he saw Renée, calm, pale and tense, but her face flushed when she saw him. He could make out that there was something that seemed to torment her: “But in the invincibly happy flame of the eyes there was at the moment the shadow of a tragic disappointment haunting and disfiguring their natural expression” (*PH*, p. 1018).

She had asked him not to visit her that day, but she was pleased to see him at her home. She asked him to wait for quarter of an hour, go back after that and come again at eight to dine with her. He was surprised to find when she turned to see the clock that the clock he had seen in the fog was the same clock that was there in her room. He “smiled at the curious tricks that his memory had played him.” He left when it was twenty past six. She followed him to the door and before he left she “embraced and kissed him once, not vehemently, but with a strong quietude and as if with some fateful resolution which had at that moment been formed in her heart, and expressed itself in her caress” (*PH*, p. 1019). He left with a promise that he would be back by eight.

He reached his uncle’s house with an intense quiet in his heart. He met Imogen there where “his heart insensibly lost its tension and slipped back into the usual, forgetting the within in the without” (*PH*, p. 1019). His sister rose when it was only ten minutes to eight to dress. He “bid his sister a hasty adieu” and hurried towards Renée’s house, thinking all the while of the phantom clock and the prophecy. The thought — what would happen to Renée if he failed to reach there by eight — tormented him. He wanted to assure himself that the force that made him see things in the fog might save her, but he was not sanguine. He kept on reasoning and reassuring himself about the prophecy and the design behind it: “And the daemon? was he a spirit of prophecy only? Did he not visit to save?” (*PH*, p. 1019) He reached her house and rushed into her drawing-room where he saw Renée “calm, pale, resolute in silence, with the heavy burden of her past in her eyes”, and a stranger, whose back was half turned to Sturge, facing her and waiting for her to reply. A thought — whether this was what he was ordained to do — flashed into his mind. He took out the revolver, put his finger on the trigger, glanced at the clock and found that it was four minutes to eight. The stranger also had a revolver in hand and his finger also rested on the trigger.

The story reflects Sri Aurobindo’s belief in predestination. He suggests that it is God’s will that we execute, but we are so ignorant of His ways that we erroneously think even while performing the act that it is being done by us. The Sturge with a revolver in his hand and ready to shoot was no longer the Sturge that condemned the writer for his beliefs. The rationalist had turned a staunch believer. He understood

that the role he was to play had been assigned to him by God, and he had to play it since it was His will: “It seemed to him that each limb of him gretened and vibrated with the energy of the homicide, with the victorious impulse to slay” (*PH*, pp. 1020-1021). Sturge learnt that the work that he was going to do was not his handiwork but God’s will that was to be executed through him. A changed Sturge reflects Sri Aurobindo’s belief that God chooses one among us to execute His will. He was confident that it was God’s work and he was pre-ordained to do that, but he did not know when God chose him and assigned the job: “Yet somehow he believed it. God’s work, not his. And yet his, too, pre-ordained — since when?” (*PH*, p. 1021) He heard the stranger requesting and threatening her at the same time to forget the past, come with him for the sake of his love, failing which he would be left with no option but to kill her which he considered God’s will and His justice: “You’ve been false to me, false with your body, false with your heart. But I’ll forgive. I forgive your desertion, I’ll forgive this too. Come with me, Idalie. And if not, — Renée Idalie Marviranne, it is going to strike eight, and when the hour has done striking, I strike. It’s God shoots you with this hand of mine, — the God of Justice, the God of Love. It’s both you have offended. Will you come?” (*PH*, p. 1021)

He aimed the pistol but Sturge remained motionless because he had a genuine feeling that “nothing could happen before the hour struck. That was the moment destined, and no one could outrun Fate by a second” (*PH*, p. 1021).

Sturge reflects Sri Aurobindo’s views on God’s will and His justice. The story also reflects the change that occurs in a man before he plays the role assigned to him by God. Sri Aurobindo suggests that a man needs His Grace in order to execute His will. A man is able to perform only when he is Graced by Him. He cannot do something extraordinary if he does not have His Grace. Sri Aurobindo also suggests the traits of a person both before and after he is Graced. Man is in a state of conflict as long as he is without His Grace but the moment he receives it, his doubts disappear and he looks calm and composed. The peace that comes with it is always there on his face. Sturge also gained knowledge through His Grace. He became firm, his doubts disappeared and he acted according to His will. He heard the stranger enumerating how he would kill her and her maid and walk away quietly through the fog, leaving no trace of his being involved in the crime. He was emphasising all through that it was God’s will that she must die: “No one will see, no one will hear. God with his fog has blinded and deafened the world. You see it’s He or it would not have been so perfectly arranged for me” (*PH*, p. 1021). And suddenly Sturge had a glimpse of how the stranger had killed him in his previous birth:

A great blur of green came before his eyes, obscuring the clock. Then it leaped on him — green grass, green trees, green-covered rocks, a green sea, and on the sward a man face downward, stabbed in the back, over him his murderer, the stiletto fresh-stained with blood. A boat rocked on the waters; it had been ar-

ranged for the assassin's escape, and in it there lay a woman, bound. Sturge knew those strange faces very well and remembered how he had lain dead on that sward. It was strange to see it all again in this drawing-room with the fateful modern ebony-faced timepiece seen through the green of Mediterranean trees! But it was going to end very differently this time (*PH*, p. 1022).

Renée told the stranger that she would not go with him. She looked at Sturge whose existence the stranger was unaware of. Sturge could see that there came "a look . . . into her eyes poignant in its appeal, terrible in its suggestion. For it was a cry for life, a command to murder" (*PH*, p. 1022). The stranger was looking at the clock. His finger was pressed on the trigger and as the clock struck eight, the stranger cried, "it is finished", but before he could fire, Sturge fired exactly at eight, killing the stranger on the spot. She asked Sturge to leave the place immediately, but he did not go. They disposed of the body successfully as silence and fog persisted around the house. Sturge had not told her till then what ordained him to reach her house and kill the man, but when she told him that if he had not chanced to come, the man would have killed her, he narrated everything about the chime of the phantom hour and the daemon within. Sturge reflects Sri Aurobindo's beliefs that "there is no such thing in this creation as chance," and that there is God in us. He concluded that it was all predestined and he was simply executing God's will otherwise the turn of events would not have favoured him.

Sturge learnt on his own what Arjun learnt from Lord Krishna on the battle-field. Sturge learnt that it was his duty to protect Renée. This duty was not assigned to him by chance. It was conditioned by what had happened in his previous birth. It was his duty not to save life (the stranger's life), but to destroy it. If he had shown mercy, he would have checked the flow of his development. Sturge's reaction substantiates Sri Aurobindo's belief that our previous birth shapes our present birth and behaviour. He had ostensibly no reason to hate the stranger, whom he had never seen in his life, but the only feeling that he had for him was hatred. He hated him whenever he saw him. He hated him even after his death. This hatred was the result of what he had done to Sturge in his previous birth. When he saw him for the first time when he reached Renée's house, all that he saw of him was his back as he was facing her, but his instant reaction was hatred for him: "The stranger's back was half turned to Sturge and only part of his profile was visible, but the Englishman quivered with his hatred even as he looked at him. Was this what he had to do?" (*PH*, p. 1020) He heard him say that it was dangerous to play with love and he was filled with hatred for him: "Sturge looked at the man. Danger for her there was none, but great danger for this rigid, thin-voiced assassin, this man whom Sturge Maynard hated with every muscle in his body, with every cell of his brain" (*PH*, p. 1020). He had the same feeling when he analysed the whole incident: "And then there returned to his memory those fierce emotions, the hatred that had surged in him, the impulse and delight of

slaughter, the song of exultation that his blood yet sang in his veins, because a man that had lived was dead and could not return to life again" (*PH*, p. 1024). The sceptic-turned-believer was now sanguine that everything was perfectly arranged for the execution of God's will otherwise things would not have happened the way they happened: "But then who had given him that mystic warning? Who had put the revolver in his hand? or sent him on a mission of slaughter? Who had made Imogen rise just in time? Who had fired that shot in the drawing-room? The God within? The God without? The Easterns spoke of God in a man. This might well be He" (*PH*, p. 1024).

The question whether God in man is a murderer remained unanswered but that did not stop him from appreciating the strange ways of God to man: "He remembered, too, the command in Renée's eyes. God in a man? Was God in a man a murderer then? In him? and in her?"

"It is to enquire too curiously to think so," he concluded, "but very strangely indeed has He made His world" (*PH*, p. 1024).

Sturge's reflections on 'the God within' should be seen in the light of what Sri Aurobindo had himself experienced when he was sent to Lal Bazar prison following his arrest in the Alipore Bomb case:

When I was arrested and hurried to the Lal Bazar *hajat*, I was shaken in faith for a while, for I could not look into the Heart of His intention. Therefore I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to Him, "What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until the work was done I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?" A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, "wait and see". Then I grew calm and waited; I was taken from Lal Bazar to Alipore and was placed for one month in a solitary cell apart from other men. There I waited day and night for the voice of God within me, to know what he had to say to me, to learn what I had to do. In this seclusion the earliest realisation, the first lesson came to me. I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into close communion with Him (*Speeches*, pp. 88-89).

Sri Aurobindo has described the same mystic experience that Sturge had in *Revelation* also. That makes the experience of Sturge the experience of Sri Aurobindo himself:

Someone leaping from the rocks
 Past me ran with wind-blown locks
 Like a startled bright surmise
 Visible to mortal eyes, —

Just a cheek of frightened rose
 That with sudden beauty glows,
 Just a footstep like the wind
 And a hurried glance behind,
 And then nothing, — as a thought
 Escapes the mind ere it is caught.
 Someone of the heavenly rout
 From behind the veil ran out.

(*Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 47)

Sturge Maynard's mystic experience reflects Sri Aurobindo's belief that God drops subtle hints to guide us. If we consider the rational and the positivist approach as the only basis of our actions, and if we love to be cooped up in our ignorance, we drive away the help that is offered by the Grace. If we are haughty and dismissive, we fail to recognise and appreciate the help that comes to us in different forms and ways. God helps us, but a rationalist cannot understand His design because he doubts and rubbishes. A rationalist justifies his arrogance and refuses the help, but a believer recognises and accepts it because he understands and appreciates God's ways to man.

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THE YOGA OF SELF-PERFECTION AND THE TRIPLE TRANSFORMATION

Introduction: Yoga and Evolution

A REMARKABLE result of the meeting of the “timeless” East with the progressive West is the idea of Yoga as a process related to evolution. The origins of this idea can be traced back at least to Swami Vivekananda. But it was left to Sri Aurobindo to arrive at a synthesis of the principles and methods of Yoga that is profoundly evolutionary in its spirit.

As early as 1909, Sri Aurobindo declared: “Yoga must be revealed to mankind because without it mankind cannot take the next step in the human evolution.”¹ It was soon after his release from Alipore jail that he wrote this sentence in an essay entitled “Man — Slave or Free?” A year’s enforced withdrawal from the Indian freedom struggle had given him an unexpected opportunity for concentration and spiritual realisation. The sentence in his essay foreshadowed the view of the evolutionary significance of Yoga on which his future work would be based.

But “Yoga” has meant many things in India’s long history. In all its forms, it has aimed at some kind of surpassing of the ordinary human condition through the development of supernormal capacities or states of consciousness. In the Indian tradition, however, the recognition of the limitless inner potential of the individual human being was not accompanied by an equally dynamic ideal of outward, collective progress. Nor was there an explicit idea of evolution in anything like the modern sense, in spite of some tantalising hints.² It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that, under the stimulus of Western thought, a Vedantic conception of evolution arose and provided a framework for reinterpreting Yoga in an evolutionary context.

The theory of evolution provoked heated controversy in the West due to its perceived conflict with Christian doctrines. But it was readily assimilated by Indian thinkers, who adapted it to their philosophy by seeing it as a kind of cosmic Yoga. In both evolution and Yoga, there is an unfolding of higher and higher grades of consciousness. Consciousness is a puzzling anomaly to Western science. In contrast, it is central to the neo-Vedantic theory which posits a prior involution of Spirit in Matter as a precondition for evolution.³ A major problem of materialistic reductionism is thus avoided. Moreover, the involution hypothesis suggests the possibility that mind is only an intermediate outcome of the evolutionary process. Yoga, which attempts to go beyond the rational mind, can therefore be redefined as a deliberate means of accelerating our further evolution. As Swami Vivekananda put it:

Now . . . take the whole of the animal creation, man and the lower animals, as one whole. There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection. Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress

of mankind. Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole human race has attained to that perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in a few short years of their life.⁴

No culture has had a monopoly on these forerunners, among whom Vivekananda included all the great incarnations and prophets. But he went on to speak of methods by which even those not born with extraordinary gifts can hasten their progress. The Indian subcontinent has long been the scene of particularly intensive, systematic and many-sided efforts to work out such methods. These are the various forms of Yoga as it has been transmitted and elaborated from ancient times. Yoga in this sense remains largely unknown to the world in spite of the popularity of the postures and breathing exercises of Hathayoga, which recently have all but usurped the name “yoga”.

Yoga means literally “joining”.⁵ Its basic aim is, as Sri Aurobindo phrased it, “the union of that which has become separated in the play of the universe with its own true self, origin and universality.”⁶ But there are two possible views of the results of this union. The choice between them is crucial for the connection between Yoga and evolution.

One view holds that the soul’s return to its origin brings its participation in the life of this transient world to an end. For centuries this is what most systems of Yoga and related spiritual traditions have assumed in one way or another. Whatever positive life-values they affirm are means of loosening the knot of the ego that is the cause of ignorance and bondage. But the untying of that knot leads, we are told, to a permanent exit from this world of separative existence once the momentum of life in the present body is exhausted.

Conceivably, this is the nature of the final “perfection” towards which we are moving: an exclusive liberation of each soul, not only from its egoistic limitations, but from cosmic existence itself, seen as a prison of divided being from which all must try to escape sooner or later. If so, many disciplines for accomplishing this end have long been known. There would seem to be no need for any fundamentally new developments in spirituality and little reason to talk about evolution when speaking of Yoga. Even so, much progress could surely be made by the revival and restatement of ancient spiritual knowledge, its harmonisation with modern discoveries and the creation of a more enlightened global civilisation on that basis. This by itself, if it happens, might seem momentous enough to call it an evolutionary advance for the human race. It is evidently what Vivekananda meant by “the evolution of spiritual humanity”.⁷ It is perhaps what Sri Aurobindo had in mind in 1909 when he wrote of “the next step in the human evolution”. But he would soon go on to conceive of a more radical leap forward in evolution and explore the means to achieve it.

Swami Vivekananda, as we have seen, seemed to suggest that the end-point of evolution has already been reached by a few, however distant it may be for most of

humankind. But he added: “Continuously, we are growing as a race. . . . Where do you fix the limit?”⁸ The intrepid spirit of Vivekananda was an inspiration for Sri Aurobindo’s evolutionary audacity. Speaking of the past “messengers of God”, the Swami once exclaimed:

I fall down and worship them; I take the dust of their feet. But they are dead! . . . And we are alive. We must go ahead! . . . Religion is not an imitation of Jesus or Mohammed. Even if an imitation is good, it is never genuine. . . . The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves! . . . These [great souls] are signposts on the way. That is all they are. They say, “Onward, brothers!” We cling to them; we never want to move. We do not want to think; we want others to think for us. The messengers fulfil their mission. . . . A hundred years later we cling to the message and go to sleep.⁹

One unintended result of the modernising of the Indian mind by British education was that the newly imported idea of collective progress became spiritualised. Certain movements in Indian spirituality became as progressive as any form of rationalism — if not more so, since rationalism by definition restricts its notion of progress to what can be done without exceeding our normal mental consciousness. This forward-looking spirituality is seen in Sri Aurobindo, who saw the material world as “a progressive manifestation of the Divine” and maintained:

It is possible for the spiritual life in the world, and it is its real mission, to change the material life into its own image, the image of the Divine.¹⁰

This affirmation, published by Sri Aurobindo in 1914 in his Introduction to *The Synthesis of Yoga*, challenges traditional views regarding the aim of spiritual life and departs from age-old assumptions about the purpose of Yoga. Yet Sri Aurobindo held that Indian spirituality in its “total movement” has all along, without fully acknowledging it, been trying to find the way to “transmute all the instruments of the human into instruments of a divine living”.¹¹ More broadly, throughout history the Spirit has pressed for manifestation and has not merely called world-weary souls to flee from the afflictions of mortal life:

Therefore, besides the great solitaries who have sought and attained their self-liberation, we have the great spiritual teachers who have also liberated others and, supreme of all, the great dynamic souls who, feeling themselves stronger in the might of the Spirit than all the forces of the material life banded together, have thrown themselves upon the world, grappled with it in a loving wrestle and striven to compel its consent to its own transfiguration.¹²

Despite the tremendous resistance they have encountered, these indomitable spirits have shaped whole civilisations and their influence has persisted through millenniums:

These attempts have been the supreme landmarks in the progressive development of human ideals and the divine preparation of the race. Every one of them, whatever its outward results, has left Earth more capable of Heaven and quickened in its tardy movements the evolutionary Yoga of Nature.¹³

History presents us, then, with mixed evidence to support or refute the hypothesis that spirituality is the key to the next step in evolution. On the one hand, past spiritual outbursts have shown the Spirit to be the most powerful force that can act upon human life. The effects of its intervention have spread over continents and outlasted empires. In most cultures, extraordinary faculties of various kinds have been attested in individuals with a high degree of spiritual development. And all this can be said to have happened although humanity is spiritually still in its infancy. If the spiritual consciousness is that which is beyond the rational intelligence, it would seem natural and inevitable that evolution, unless cut short by a catastrophe, will proceed onward to this higher level whose possibilities we have barely begun to glimpse.

On the other hand, skeptics might reject the high claims made for spirituality and point to the dubious history of the world's religions. They would say it is the revolt of reason against the irrationality of religion that has brought about progress. Even if spirituality aspires to the suprarational, it has lent its authority to religions which are bastions of obscurantism. In short, religion and spirituality have worked at cross-purposes with progress and evolution. They have looked backward instead of forward and have promised escape from earthly life, not its transformation — except perhaps by an improbable apocalypse abruptly and unaccountably ushering in the millennium.

The element of truth in this cannot be denied. But we are not concerned here with the record of ordinary religion, but with the evolutionary potential of spirituality, specifically in its Indian form called Yoga. That potential need not be undermined by the world-negating tendency that Yoga contracted under past conditions and the influence of an archaic worldview. The value of Yoga for the future depends on what it can become under new circumstances, especially if spirituality becomes allied with the progressive mind at its highest and begins to see itself as a means of conscious evolution and the transformation of life.

Since the premodern world had no clear concept of evolution, Yoga could not have been knowingly developed for an evolutionary purpose. But let us remember that, according to scientists, the wings of birds cannot have originally evolved for the purpose of flying. Partial wings would have been useless for flight during the hundreds of thousands of years it would have taken for wings to evolve. Therefore it is supposed

that during that long period they must have had some other function. It is speculated that the precursors of wings were used for gliding or as aids to running, making them advantageous for survival even in a rudimentary form.

Human evolution obeys its own laws which are not those of natural selection. But if spirituality acquires a radically new meaning, its previous cultivation for purposes relevant to the concerns of former ages could be compared to the evolution of wings for uses other than flying. In that case, if humanity is going to take flight into a luminous future, it will have to learn to use in a new way the wings of spirituality or Yoga — of union with a higher reality — which it has been evolving for centuries without realising their full potential. Sri Aurobindo poetically envisioned our collective destiny as such a flight:

Ascending from the soil where creep our days,
Earth's consciousness may marry with the Sun,
Our mortal life ride on the spirit's wings,
Our finite thoughts commune with the Infinite.¹⁴

The Triple Path and the Yoga of Self-Perfection

The distinctive ideas of Indian culture, Sri Aurobindo observed, were such as to “exalt the life of man and make something like godhead its logical outcome.”¹⁵ Yoga was the means by which this godhead was to be realised. But it was an inner divinity that was realised, leaving the life of this world untransformed. India's initially disastrous contact with the West exposed the weakening effects of a one-sided emphasis on the inner life to the neglect of outer progress. At the same time, there has been a danger that India could swing to the other extreme, discarding her spiritual heritage just when the knowledge it contains is most necessary for the future. Conservative efforts to revive the tradition as it was are unlikely to succeed in halting the forward surge of the time-spirit. A creative synthesis such as Sri Aurobindo undertook in his integral Yoga offers a more promising way of revitalising Indian spirituality to meet today's challenges.

During his last forty years on earth, Sri Aurobindo explored possibilities of the further evolution of consciousness that had rarely, if ever, been contemplated. But his starting-point was to renew in himself spiritual experiences that had been cultivated in India from ancient times. His first major breakthrough came in January 1908. Meditating with a Yogi who instructed him on silencing the mind, within three days he reached a state of consciousness he would later describe as one of Nirvana or extinction of the sense of separate self. In the months that followed, he continued his outward life as before, giving speeches and playing his part as a national leader. But inwardly he now lived in the awareness of a spaceless and timeless Reality,

featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. . . pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial.¹⁶

To our ordinary consciousness, the material world is solid and tangible, while the spirit is a tenuous abstraction. Plunged into Nirvana, Sri Aurobindo experienced an extreme reversal of this relation between matter and spirit. Such an experience had led others before him to reject the world as an illusion. But Sri Aurobindo did not succumb to that temptation. Soon his spiritual experience itself began to develop in a manner that no longer seemed in any way to support a negation of life. As “realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience”, the sense of the unreality of things disappeared. It was replaced by the perception of a world in which illusion was

only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow.

All the subsequent developments of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga and the philosophy founded on it would follow from this more integral realisation. He emphasised that

this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.¹⁷

One who has attained spiritual liberation and continues to participate in the life of this world is known in India as a Jivanmukta. Maintaining his “freedom in Infinity” as he led a revolutionary movement, Sri Aurobindo was a Jivanmukta with a difference. Traditionally it is assumed that the Jivanmukta has achieved the highest realisation and only has to keep it intact while living with complete detachment as long as he remains in the body. But for Sri Aurobindo, the liberation of Nirvana was a stepping-stone to further realisations. His work in the world also took on a deeper significance as part of the terrestrial unfolding of the Divine and was not just a prolongation of his former activity. A “constant heightening and widening”, with no end in sight, became the character of the Yoga he practised and taught during the remainder of his life on earth.

Sri Aurobindo was an explorer of the realms of consciousness. Like Aswapati in his epic *Savitri*, he was a “voyager upon uncharted routes”,¹⁸ an untiring and

undaunted discoverer and experimenter. The vision of this pioneer of a higher evolution was continually evolving. In his writings, he was capable of building massive structures of thought. But as he was more intent on forging ahead than on consolidating and publicising what he had already done, he left many of his works unfinished or incompletely revised. Not only did his terminology vary from one book to another and change in the course of time, but even within a single book he sometimes left us with layers of writing and revision belonging to different stages of his development.

This is particularly true of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which cannot be accurately understood without knowing something about the history of the text. The incompleteness of this book reflects the exigencies of the attempt to refashion Yoga into a means of further evolution. A transition of the magnitude Sri Aurobindo envisaged could not be accomplished in one lifetime. By leaving *The Synthesis* unfinished he emphasised, as it were, the point made in the book itself that one who sets out on the adventure of this Yoga “is not the sadhaka of a book or of many books; he is a sadhaka of the Infinite.”¹⁹

Of the works Sri Aurobindo published in monthly instalments in the *Arya*, there was only one that continued from beginning to end of the six and a half years of the journal’s existence — from August 1914 to January 1921. This was *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Years later, after he had substantially reformulated some aspects of his Yoga, Sri Aurobindo returned to this book. In the 1930s and 1940s, he thoroughly revised Part One, “The Yoga of Divine Works”, which was published as a separate volume in 1948. He partially revised Part Two, “The Yoga of Integral Knowledge”, but did not publish the revised version.²⁰ The Introduction remained almost untouched. Part Three, “The Yoga of Divine Love”, was left as it was written in 1918. The half-finished Part Four, “The Yoga of Self-Perfection”, also remained unrevised. Thus its terminology is that of the *Arya* period, unlike Part One and some chapters of Part Two which reflect later developments.

Part Four of *The Synthesis* contained, when it was first published, Sri Aurobindo’s most original contribution to the theory and practice of Yoga. This is not said with the intent of minimising the significance of the other parts of the book. The Introduction placed Yoga in an evolutionary context and gave a new meaning to the word “integral”. Today more than ever, these chapters deserve the attention of all who are concerned with the future of spirituality, even if they read no further. “The Yoga of Divine Works”, in the form in which Sri Aurobindo eventually expanded it, was to become his definitive account of the most dynamic aspect of his teaching. As for “The Yoga of Integral Knowledge”, it is a monumental treatment of a subject on which he could write with unrivalled depth and insight. The beautiful part that follows, “The Yoga of Divine Love”, has an importance out of proportion to its comparative brevity.

But the paths of selfless action, transcendent knowledge and ecstatic love — Karmayoga, Jnanayoga and Bhaktiyoga — are ancient disciplines, however new the light Sri Aurobindo shed on them. The idea of harmonising them in a single synthesis

also had the support of no less a scripture than the Gita. Most of the experiential knowledge needed to speak with authority on the “triple path” of Indian spirituality came to Sri Aurobindo with astonishing ease in the first few years of his practice of Yoga. It was after this that he began to break new ground and faced challenges for which the knowledge received from the past provided relatively little guidance.

The real difficulty, he explained, “was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation”. It was this that “took decades of spiritual effort to work out towards completeness”.²¹ This effort proceeded for many years along certain lines that were revealed to Sri Aurobindo from within. When he wrote *The Synthesis of Yoga* and needed a name for this discipline of life-transformation, he called it the Yoga of self-perfection.

His exposition of the triple path in Parts One to Three of *The Synthesis* anticipates several elements of the Yoga of self-perfection. But the latter as a whole is presented as belonging to a more advanced stage of spiritual practice. It begins in its own right only when there has been a “growth out of the separative human ego into the unity of the spirit”. For only then can the “liberated individual being, united with the Divine in self and spirit,” begin to become “in his natural being a self-perfecting instrument for the perfect outflowing of the Divine in humanity.” Until that time, the first need is for the mental being “to enlarge itself into the oneness of the Divine”. As Sri Aurobindo pointed out, explaining the large place given in *The Synthesis of Yoga* to his restatement of the main spiritual approaches of the Indian tradition:

That is the reason why the triple way of knowledge, works and love becomes the key-note of the whole Yoga, for that is the direct means for the soul in mind to rise to its highest intensities where it passes upward into the divine oneness.²²

(To be continued)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 14.
2. In some passages in the Upanishads and other Sanskrit texts one can find insights into the processes of Nature that seem to prefigure elements of evolutionary theory. Sri Aurobindo noted a few of these in *The Karmayogin: A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad*, written around 1905-6. (See *Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, p. 228.) He also discerned “a parable of evolution” in the traditional series of Avatars beginning with Vishnu’s incarnations as a fish and a tortoise. (See *Letters on Yoga: Part One*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 402.)
3. See Richard Hartz, “India and Evolution”, *Mother India*, March 2005, pp. 249-55.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 2, p. 18.

5. Sri Aurobindo uses the word “joining” to describe the culmination of the spiritual search in *Savitri* (CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 307):
- Transcending every perishable support
And joining at last its mighty origin,
The separate self must melt or be reborn
Into a Truth beyond the mind’s appeal.
6. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 32.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 4, p. 332.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 19.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 483-84.
10. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 27.
11. *The Renaissance in India with A Defence of Indian Culture*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 198.
12. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 27.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
14. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 256.
15. *The Renaissance in India with A Defence of Indian Culture*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 156.
16. *Letters on Yoga: Part One*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 49.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
18. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 91.
19. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 55-56.
20. Most of Sri Aurobindo’s revision of Part Two was incorporated in the first complete edition of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, published five years after his passing. Some minor revision of the Introduction and more substantial alterations in Chapters 15-17 of Part Two were discovered later and first appeared in print in 1999.
21. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 86.
22. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 614.

I meant that one can feel the divine consciousness as an impersonal spiritual state, a state of peace, light, joy, wideness without feeling in it the Divine Presence. The Divine Presence is felt as that of one who is the living source and essence of that light etc., a Being therefore, not merely a spiritual state. The Mother’s Presence is still more concrete, definite, personal — it is not that of Someone unknown, of a Power or Being, but of one who is known, intimate, loved, to whom one can offer all the being in a living concrete way. The image is not indispensable, though it helps — the presence can be inwardly felt without it.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 779)

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

Introduction

“What is this life if full of care
We have no time to stand and stare
No time to turn at Beauty’s glance
And watch her feet, how they can dance . . .”

I CAME to love these lines of W. H. Davies early in my life. As I grew older, now and then I just stopped what I was doing and recited Thomas Hood’s poem which begins, “I remember, I remember the house where I was born.” Beautiful and meaningful memories and the leisure to get lost in them for a while is a luxury few can afford in this age of speed and consumerism. Seen from this angle, I must be among the top rich in this world. Yet, it has been a self-folded, almost obscure life, one of day-to-day mundane activities like cleaning the household altar and cooking the day’s food. I have not even pursued a career! No earth-shaking events have happened in my life, nor have the events of the outside world affected me in any way. I can only compare my days to the quiet Tambraparni river, murmuring steadily as it flows beside the tiny village where I was born seventy years ago.

But then, my life has been lively because I have been drawn into the world of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo by my parents. The importance given by the Mother to flowers has been a natural anchor for me, since I belong to the Tamil culture which has enjoyed the multi-coloured flowers that adorn its countryside and even used them for expressing the aspirations of the god-ward soul. Being a daughter-and-disciple of K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and Padmasani has led me to the practice of the Mahasaraswati Yoga. The written word is holy for me; reading a book has been my meditation; even the mere touching of a great book thrills me. As I spend my time increasingly in my personal library, almost talking to the books, many of which have been handled by me for sixty years and more, looking at my notes and files (archival material!) and jotting down an idea here or a quote there, I cover myself in the folds of grey reverie and invite you to join me in this adventure into the Known-yet-Unknown!

1. Garlands of Parijatha

I am always delighted to see a parijatha (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) flower. It is actually a tiny blossom and cannot withstand the heat of sun. So gentle that we cannot even wear it. When the tree is in bloom, to stand close to it is heaven. Indeed so, for

it spreads a heavenly scent around, as the buds open slowly. Even “before the gods awake” the delicate blossoms start falling on the ground. Its bark is rough, sometimes ungainly; the leaves are almost hard, dark green in colour. Yet the flower is so gentle. What a contrast! And so lovely, white petals on an orange tube, like a pinwheel. Perhaps Mother Nature’s symbol for purity and renunciation!

As far as I can peer down in memory, I find that I have associated the parijatha flowers with my parents, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I remember dutifully gathering the flowers in a tiny basket to ‘help’ my amma who would first tug at the tree gently. There would be a shower of the flowers still attached to the tree along with some dried up leaves and seeds. Even as she gathered the flowers in a big basket, amma would be speaking to me: “We are sure to make a really big garland today!” The garlands were for the portraits of Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the house. In the ‘God’s Room’, above appa’s working table, in the front room. The whole day a gentle scent would be swirling around in these rooms, none of which had any furniture as such. Appa who was a Professor of English had no turn for cluttering the house with sofas and divans but it was books, books everywhere.

On the days it rained at night, I have heard my parents¹ speaking of the parijatha tree. “Tomorrow there is no chance of gathering flowers, they must all have been lost in the mud.” And yet, if there was a let-up in the rain at dawn, they would go to gather at least a few, wash them gently and place them in bowls with water. But because of the rain and later the washing to remove particles of mud, the flowers gave out no scent. All the same, the sight of the flowers was a joy. Perhaps this was a spiritual tonic that would help me in the future.

It was in those days that amma told me a good deal about the significance of the parijatha tree. To the child’s consciousness, it was absolutely rational that there were gods who were good and demons who were bad. That once the two groups actually churned the sea for getting nectar. (“Amma, how does nectar taste?” “Just like the payasam I make for the Mother’s birthday.” “Really, will you make some tomorrow?” “But it is not Her birthday. Does not matter. Tomorrow is a Darshan Day. I shall make some.” “Will you put in lots and lots of sultanas?” Memory can be very clear at times despite the passage of sixty-five years!) First came out the Halahala Poison. Amma would enumerate one by one. There! The parijatha tree has risen now!

It was great to be told that this tree (also known as Kalpaka-vriksha) had been planted in Indra’s garden. And thrilling for a child to be told that a branch of that tree had been planted in our backyard. The tree would fulfil all our desires if we managed to be good, never shout, do the homework, think of God and bow to the portraits of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. As I grew older there were more stories from amma and also from the books I read. No two of them (including amma’s version) tallied

1. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and Padmasani who were drawn to Sri Aurobindo in 1942 thanks to Shankar Gowda Patil and considered themselves children of the Divine Mother all their lives.

but then so it is with Indian legends. They have been retold to generations of eager-eyed children through millennia and surely 'colouring' is something to be expected. For the parijatha flower, the most famous episode is the carrying away of the tree from Indra's garden by Krishna to please his wife Satyabhama. As I grew up I learnt to study works on the theme in several languages. Whatever the version, the fascination remains.

Part of the charm may be due to the very word, 'parijatha' which is for me linked with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I have often wondered at the mystique of the Two who had transformed the generational mind-set of traditional households with ease. And yet, when one read their lives, there were no miracles, no occult surprises. The question must have been posed by appa also, albeit to himself. Why did people come to Sri Aurobindo? His answer can be traced in his reactions when he had his first *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. That was in August, 1943 and he wrote of his reactions in the November issue of the journal *Human Affairs* (Udupi). The article was subsequently reprinted in *Mother India* (August, 1969). As appa stands in the queue, he is amazed at the faith writ large on the faces of the visitors:

They had come braving the hundred and one annoyances minor and major that our imperfect society engenders in its midst; they had come — these princes and paupers, these financiers and politicians, these landlords and merchants, these poets and philosophers, these students and teachers, these sinners and saints, these seeming scoffers and these half-hearted believers — they had all converged towards the *sanctum sanctorum*, desiring to have *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. Did they know — did *all* of them know — what *darshan* meant?

Appa feels that there have been various impulsions to seek a *darshan*. Indian tradition has always considered it a blessing to have *darshan* of a spiritually evolved person. So some had come seeking a blessing; some had, perhaps, seeking a glance of grace to cure their immediate or long-term problems; some may have been impelled by mere curiosity; and some may have been enthused by their friends; some, may have read a few writings of Sri Aurobindo and "had been swept off their feet, the spark thus enkindled had, day by day, hour by hour, blazed into a bonfire of adoration"; and of course some, perhaps like him, had admiration tinged with skepticism:

(They) had learned by slow degrees to follow and admire the career of Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist, as a poet, as a philosopher, and yet had failed to go further, had in fact nurtured a giant skepticism about the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, had even — once or twice — dubbed it all mysticism and moonshine, and had accordingly, come to satisfy themselves whether their own views were not, after all, the correct views, whether Sri Aurobindo was not, essentially, a poet and an apostle of nationalism rather than a saint and a *mahayogin*.

It is a fine record of the thoughts that buzz through our mind when we stand ready to meet someone for the first time. Some are silent, some keep up a conversation in a low voice. Some look here and there, some sit with eyes closed. Now the time is upon them, and a queue gets formed. The long queue starts moving, “upwards towards the library and reading room, and curved downwards, emerging into the garden, followed for a little while a straight course, soon turning sharply towards the meditation hall. It moved on, like an impossibly long centipede . . .”

The last turn! One’s eyes are held in hypnotic spell at the sight of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo:

. . . the presence was a flood of Light and Truth . . . and the mere mind staggered under the blow, the mere human frame lurched forward mechanically, but the eyes were held irretrievably in a hypnotic spell. Thought was impossible then . . . the mind had abdicated its sovereignty for the nonce . . . and one (dare one say it) had become almost a living soul.

All this for just a couple of seconds and already one is out of the room! Back in his room, a feeling of abnormal calm overwhelms him but he also feels “radiantly, almost divinely, happy!”

A divinising stream possessed his veins,
His body’s cells awoke to spirit sense,
Each nerve became a burning thread of joy:
Tissue and flesh partook beatitude.²

Appa was thirty-five at this time, and in that moment of serenity mingled with an upwelling joy, he begins to think. This face, where had he seen it before? The face of Zeus that had enraptured him from a book of Greek mythology? Or, was the face that of Aeschylus? Suddenly mind leaps back to someone nearer, closer: “Perhaps, Vasishta looked even like this when he blessed Dasaratha’s son; and it was thus, perhaps, that Valmiki sat when the whole of *Ramayana*, even to the minutest particularity, shaped itself before his wise and lustrous eyes!”

What greater comfort can be in one’s life than a glance which assures of paternal guardianship! The essay is peppered with “perhaps” which shows that the usually staid writer who was a master of elegant variation has been “bowled over” and is unable to pinpoint the personality of the Two: “. . . the vision of the Mother and of the Master — were they in very truth the cosmic Mahashakti and the all-highest Ishwara? — the vision remained, the experience persisted, the memory of the smile eased yet the multitudinous pricks of the work-a-day world . . .”

2. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 334.

This account of the first *darshan* which he would repeat to the family often with absolutely no variation in detail, drew my attention to such first “contacts” by other people too, as recorded by them. When I look back upon sixty years of living with books, I remember avidly reading about such “first encounters” with great fascination. Paul Brunton readily comes to my mind.

A successful English journalist, Paul Brunton came to India in search of a guru, and was directed to Tiruvannamalai by the Paramacharya of Kanchi. Brunton says that his mind was questioning the idea of Ramana as a spiritual luminary, but the moment he saw the Maharishi he grew aware of a change taking place in his mind. He realised that the mind was the problem! Soon he was to write *A Search in Secret India* on this encounter and that when he met Ramana Maharshi for the first time, the mind was automatically silenced. There was no need for words and the quiverful of questions which he had no doubt prepared with care were not asked. That is the very essence of the term *darshan*. The gazing is all.

Yet, what a complete transformation is effected by such a ‘seeing’! We have the recordation of another transformational *darshan* in Surendranath Jauhar’s *My Supreme Discovery*.³ A prosperous businessman who had worked very hard to achieve success and an intrepid revolutionary, he happened to be on a Bharat Yatra with his friend Indra Sen in 1939. They had travelled all over India and found themselves in Madras one fine morning. The essay proceeds with a rainbow shower of wit and humour. On being told about an Ashram in nearby Pondicherry, they proceed but find no Ashram in the sea-side town. What is pointed out to them as an Ashram is just like any other building in the street.

When we got into the building, we saw a number of people, all in simple and neat dresses, and some even in pants, coats and neckties, but no saints or *sannyasis*, no monks or *mahants*, no shaven heads or *jatadharies*, no bare-bodied *bhaktas* or saffron-robed *sadhus*, no *tilak dharis* or *kan-phatas*. Neither did we spot any temple, *moortis* or *granths* (scriptures).

However, it was some comfort to know that the Guru, Sri Aurobindo was in the Ashram. Well, meeting him would be a great thing, a holy experience. But what is this! They were told that they could meet the Guru only four times in a year, on the days known as *darshan* days. “And seeing meant just having a fleeting glimpse from a distance; no *pranams*, no talks, discussions or conversation.”

Presently they were informed that they could meet the Mother of the Ashram. They learnt that she was a French lady. They were advised that there was no possibility of holding any conversation with her also. How then to receive a spiritual teaching?

3. Surendranath Jauhar “Faquir” founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Branch at New Delhi in 1957 and dedicated his family also to the service of the Mother.

Ah, they could have her *darshan* in the Meditation Hall at 7 p.m. To one who was used to the traditional appurtenances of religion and spirituality, all this was extremely bewildering.

“What for had we gone there? We could not see the sage, we could not interview the Mother, there was no *kirtan* or *katha*, no preaching or prayers, no *shiksha* or sermons, no *bhajans* or *aartis*, no discourse or discussion, no *havans* or *yajnas*, no *asanas* or *pranayams*, no mantras, no meetings!”

Putting on hold their extreme puzzlement, Sri Jauhar and Dr. Indra Sen sat in the Meditation Hall at the appointed time. There was a holy hush around the place and absolute silence. Suddenly there is a vision before them. Sri Jauhar writes:

A slender lady, draped in light and wearing a gold *mukut* on her forehead, was coming down, stepping lightly on the heavily carpeted curved staircase. In her gait there was a majesty, on her face glowing grace and her eyes flashed gleams that pierced the darkness below and around. My gaze was fixed on that fairy-like figure whose calm and beautiful face was radiating light and making the whole atmosphere so supernatural that she looked every inch an angel descending from Heaven.

Sri Jauhar says that her wide eyes surveyed the scene almost in a trance, and then smiled. As he tried to sleep that night, he knew he was a changed man. When he left the town he was sad but also happy, “happy over my luck because the fleeting glance of a few moments had brought to me a light which the toil of a whole life often fails to achieve.” He had lost his heart, of course; but then, “won the soul and the real life.”

That a *darshan* of the Mother had the power of compressing the time one takes to achieve success in yoga was the experience of the renowned Sanskrit scholar, T.V. Kapali Sastri. The power of a spiritual personality is like that of Beatrice in Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*: in her company, without one’s effort one can ascend to higher planes of consciousness. As Sri Kapali Sastri once told M. P. Pandit:

What has been done in me by the Mother’s Force during the last six months would have taken for me at least ten years of exclusive Sadhana to achieve.

Hence this constant desire for *darshan* and at-one-ment with Divine personalities. All literature on religion and spirituality that has risen in India constantly speaks of this thirst for *darshan* and for *sat sanga*. The latter is important for gaining the former. The Gopis of Brindavan searching for Krishna in the forests. Calling out to the flowers whether they had seen Him. The Telugu poet, Pothana has written about this search of the gopis in sublime terms. O Punnaga! O Lavanga (clove)! O Lunga (pomegranate)! O Naranga (citrus)! O Ashoka! O Kuravaka! O trees! O creepers! O jasmine bushes!

He is glowing dark; has lotus-like eyes.
 He keeps sprinkling compassionate glances;
 Has a peacock feather on his crown;
 Has an ever-smiling face; has he stolen
 Our pride and brought it to you,
 O jasmines! Is he hid in your bush?
 Please tell us!⁴

As the years went by, and I read more and gathered my own basket of experiences, bitter and sweet, I have come to realise that *darshan* of the Deity is possible. But we have to wait and make ourselves part of a sat-sanga. And be as close as is possible with flowers. Real flowers. That is the message of yesterday's scriptures. That is the message of the Mother today. That is why as I gather and string parijatha flowers at home, I know this array of flowers will never be in vain. I watch the sadhikas near the Samadhi preparing the flowers for decoration. I realise that this too is yoga. So the *darshan* will be a reality, at the appointed time. It will come definitely at some point in the endless flow of Time. Then we would understand Aswapati's *darshan* of the Divine Mother and ourselves come face to face with the vision:

A being of wisdom, power and delight,
 Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,
 Took to her breast Nature and world and soul.
 Abolishing the signless emptiness,
 Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
 Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
 Into the liberty of the motionless depths
 A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.
 The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
 Imaged itself in a surprising beam
 And built a golden passage to his heart
 Touching through him all longing sentient things.⁵

For the present the “surprising beam” would be the gentle parijatha (pavazhamalli, Night Jasmine, Shefali, Harsingar) in our hands. I gather the blossoms in the morning with my granddaughter. We sing songs, “Darshan do Ghanashyam . . .” and even compose a haiku on this white carpet:

4. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

5. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 312.

The night was all stars twinkling high above.
 Morning came.
 Ah! They fell down.

Hundreds of stars. So aptly named Aspiration by the Mother. This is the base of the Aurobindonian yoga:

There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.⁶

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 1.

Each flower has its special significance, hasn't it?

Not as we understand it mentally. There is a mental projection when one gives a precise meaning to a flower. It may answer, vibrate to the touch of this projection, accept the meaning, but a flower has no equivalent of the mental consciousness. In the vegetable kingdom there is a beginning of the psychic, but there is no beginning of the mental consciousness. In animals it is different; mental life begins to form and for them things have a meaning. But in flowers it is rather like the movement of a little baby — it is neither a sensation nor a feeling, but something of both; it is a spontaneous movement, a very special vibration. So, if one is in contact with it, if one feels it, one gets an impression which may be translated by a thought. That is how I have given a meaning to flowers and plants — there is a kind of identification with the vibration, a perception of the quality it represents and, little by little, through a kind of approximation (sometimes this comes suddenly, occasionally it takes time), there is a coming together of these vibrations (which are of a vital-emotional order) and the vibration of the mental thought, and if there is a sufficient harmony, one has a direct perception of what the plant may signify.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers 1950-51*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, p. 167)

UDAR, ONE OF MOTHER'S CHILDREN

(Continued from the issue of July 2008)

Press

In the early days when any urgent work had to be done, students and inmates always came forward to help without disturbing their department work. So mostly they worked at night, as we did at the Press.

Once Mother called Udar and told him that no books were coming from the Press. The printing had been done and stacked but the material was not collated, cut, stitched and bound into book-form. There was so much backlog that the printed material was stacked right to the ceiling. Udar took up the job and organised with the Press workers and volunteers to work at night. They cleared the complete backlog in 6 months and brought into book-form all that was printed. The Press was then running day and night.

Lilou

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Udar was often organising extra work whenever it was needed because often there were either not enough paid workers or the workers would go on strike. I remember how we have worked almost through the night on a Saturday at the Press in different sections, for instance, binding. It used to be so much fun, and also, the work was done at a good speed. We were children, so we enjoyed a night out and we could have tea — which we normally did not take.

I can say that we really enjoyed our life in those days. Fun was work and work was fun. I can mention that Udar was the organiser always for such occasions. He was the Divine Worker.

Lata

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School

Inaugural Message for the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention — 24 April 1951

Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the élite of today into a new race manifesting

upon earth the new light and force and life.

In his name I open today this convention meeting here with the purpose of realising one of his most cherished ideals.

The Mother
(CWM 12:112)

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There were so many things Udar did that it would make a long list of enumeration. He loved to start an activity and when things were established he moved on to other things. But, what is important for us to remember is that he was a teacher, too. For a number of years he taught engineering in the School. He was always in touch with the activities of the School since he wrote about all the cultural events, and in general about anything that happened in the Ashram, in the quarterly reports of the *Bulletin*.

The Golden Chain

*

Sri Aurobindo has shown us that knowledge exists within us and has only to be awakened. That is the main approach of our whole system of education. The teacher is there not to put knowledge into the students but to help awaken that which is already there in each of them. The teacher is really the guide rather than the instructor. Our present Course of Engineering is envisaged as of six years' duration after the equivalent of pre-university course. . . . Above all, it must be remembered that the science of engineering deals with material objects and material forces which are not really automata following inexorable laws but which have their own secret consciousness. It is our endeavour to discover these inner mystic recesses and sources of action and by identifying our own consciousness with theirs to serve and be served by them.

Udar

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This bringing down of a new consciousness into the world and the awakening of even the consciousness of Matter is one of the high aims of our Yoga. It is the greatest adventure and experiment the human race has ever attempted. Is not this an object worthy of the support and encouragement of all men of vision? Our country has not lacked in such men. The great technical achievements of our Rishis in the past were possible because of the benign conditions which surrounded them. That inheritance cannot wither and our sacred land will blossom into a new richness and the

realisation that Matter and Spirit are not divided but act together for the fulfilment of Man.

Udar

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Astronomy

In the evenings there were no programmes or television in the houses. I became interested in star-gazing. Udar started helping me to know and recognise the stars and the constellations. This turned into regular classes. I bought some elementary books and Udar ordered some books to gain a deeper knowledge in astronomy. Sometimes he would fix a telescope on the Ashram terrace to study the galaxies. Later, the telescope was shifted to the Library terrace and everybody could go to see the solar or lunar eclipse whenever there was one.

Lata

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Playground

Udar played a great role as an organiser and administrator in the formative years of our Department of Physical Education in the Ashram. He started our office, regular filing system, regular record keeping system and all the paper work necessary for an organisation.

Pranab

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Log-lifting

We received a consignment of huge logs from the Andamans and they were unloaded near Parc-à-Charbon. They had to be shifted to Coco Garden. There was no local transport available to shift such huge logs. The Government was pressing us to clear their space. Udar told Mother about it. She asked Mona (Captain) to go with his group (he was at that time captain of what was then called 'C' group) to help shift the logs. They used to work from 4.30 p.m. in the afternoon till about 10 at night and sometimes even later than that. Some other volunteers also joined them sometimes to help. Mother used to send them groundnuts daily.

It took about 2 to 3 months to shift all the logs to Coco Garden, as the logs were huge and heavy and only one could be put on the trolley. The boys pushed the trolley

right from Parc-à-Charbon to Coco Garden. It was a very strenuous work. Udar was very much there. He used to choose the logs and help with a crane to lift the logs and put them onto the trolleys. Millie with her jeep and trailer was also a big help. Udar was there throughout, helping Mona and his group.

Lilou

*

Auroville Inauguration

Mother asked me to be the Master of Ceremonies for the Inauguration because she wanted somebody there through whom her Force could act. One day, prior to this, she called me. She wanted every country to accept the Charter of Auroville and to send a representative to the Inauguration ceremony. But all the communist countries, led by Russia, refused to participate, because they could not accept the line in the Charter about "willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness."

She told me, "I want you to go to the Consul-General of Russia and speak to him about this."

"What shall I say?" I asked.

"I'll put in your mouth what you have to say."

So I went to meet him and he told me, "We like the idea of Auroville very much, but can't accept that line because we don't believe in God."

So I said, "Let's see what you can accept. Do you believe in progress?"

"Yes, of course."

"But progress towards what?"

"Just progress."

"What about progress toward Perfection?" I asked.

He liked that one very much: "This could be a new slogan for the Communist Party!"

So then I said, "What about progress towards Ultimate Perfection?"

"These are just big empty words," he answered.

"Well, what is the meaning of zero or infinity? They have no meaning, but they are essential for mathematics."

"All right," he said, "I'll accept Ultimate Perfection."

"But that is the Divine," I said.

"Is that so?" he answered. "Then we'll accept it."

That is how the two Russian children came to the Inauguration ceremony.

Udar

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Matrimandir

One morning Mother came down and told me, “Udar, I had a wonderful vision last night.” She told me to take notes and then she described it: She called it the “Temple of the Soul.” Then she told me to go away and make a drawing of it. When I brought it back, she told me, “You’ve got it exactly.” Then she gave it to Roger Anger to work upon. This was the beginning of Matrimandir.

Udar

*

Sri Aurobindo’s Action

On the 29th February 1956 Mother announced the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and light and force. Later Mother said that it was an event forerunner of the birth of a new world. I recommend that all should read what Mother has said on this, “The Great Adventure”. This can be found in part in *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, November 1957, page 93 and another part in *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, pages 129-131. It is after reading this that you will realise what an exciting and important moment is now on us.

Then on the 1st January 1970 this force came into a definite phase of action, the first step, as it were, the force to create the Superman. The descent of this force was felt by me and others at the Ashram and it was then that Mother explained what it was and said that Sri Aurobindo had himself come into Action in the world. The movement of Sri Aurobindo’s Action started from that day.

Udar

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In 1970, he [Udar] had been speaking to Mother about the degeneration of India. Sri Aurobindo’s Action was founded in June that year with Mother as its Permanent President and Udar as the Secretary. Mother gave him the Mantra for the country:

Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth
Let us obey Thee alone
And live according to Truth.

A man of action, he toured various parts of the country with others to give talks on Sri Aurobindo’s Action.

Sri Aurobindo’s Action, Jan 2002

*

Udar-ji and I travelled together all over India and shared our aspirations and work together. And as my elder brother, he extended loving care and guidance to me at every step of our joint work. During our tour he delivered nearly 250 lectures — all extempore — with force of inspiration and leonine courage.

His devotion to the Mother was . . . exemplary, and whenever I think of him, I feel as though he is imparting to me this sincerity and delight of that devotion.

Kireet Joshi

*

Udar came the other day to explain the genesis and aims of Sri Aurobindo's Action Society. He quoted Mother as saying: Conditions in India are critical and a foreign conquest and domination is possible. No amount of military and other preparations can avert the danger. That is because these difficult conditions have been deliberately created — to force a change. . .

The change has to be in individuals. Leaders also have to change, but as individuals. . . Sri Aurobindo's teachings show the way. His word is to be reached to the people. Its Power is active and it will work. The aim of this Movement is to carry this Word of Power to the country.

Thus the work of this Society is totally different from that of other units so far. They aim to bring people here; this works to take Sri Aurobindo to them.

M. P. Pandit

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In India we know that souls are not equal. From the ancient times we have known that there are very highly evolved souls, but the largest number of souls are those just emerging out of the animal consciousness. So if you go by majority you will take the lowest consciousness of the people. That is why this democracy for India is completely false.

Udar

*

Udar says that Mother told him this morning that the situation in India was grave. A great calamity threatens the country. He asked if we could do anything. Mother answered that the time for doing had gone. She was concentrating upon it all the 24 hours. Then Udar asked Mother to give a Mantra with which we could pray. She went into trance and then gave the Prayer:

Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth
 Let us obey Thee alone
 And live according to Truth.

Udar wants it in Sanskrit before he leaves for Delhi tomorrow. I am taking it to Jagannath to express it in Sanskrit verse. Mother said she wanted to hear it. I read it. She nodded. . . . Udar met me again. He said Champaklal has asked Mother what was the difference between mantra and prayer. Almost the same, — but with the difference: prayer is from the psychic, mantra in the mind.

It struck me how close she is to the derivation: “mananotrayate mantrah” . . . She told me that there is a vibration in the mantra, mental understanding and stability are brought upon it. In prayer there is intensity of aspiration, canalisation of emotions. If both are combined, the results are wonderful.

M. P. Pandit
 (Diary notes: 6.6.1971)

*

Mother told me on another occasion what would be a spiritually guided government and what it would do. The first thing this government would do is to declare India a free country. No passport, no visa; anybody can come, anybody can go. No import/export restriction; anything can come in and go out.

Let things move in and out freely. All these duty restrictions are hampering the trade. People are afraid of such freedom but it will be a marvellous thing and people will benefit from it. Even if wrong people come in, what does it matter? Such a spiritually guided government will stamp out the wrong movements automatically.

Udar

*

During the Bangladesh war, Mother told me India is in great difficulty, so I asked her for a Mantra; she gave me a Mantra: “Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth, let us obey Thee alone and live according to Truth.”

When you say God is Truth, it does not matter whichever God you believe in! Nobody can say that God is false.

She gave a message, which can be accepted by anybody: “Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth, let us obey Thee alone and live according to Truth.” You see again it makes it a question of the single God of Truth. And “live”!

I feel it is a very, very significant message she gave us.

Udar

*

Youth Camp

At the present moment we are busy with the arrangements of the First Youth Camp being organised by us in co-operation with the Government of India in connection with the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Celebration programme.

This scheme is briefly as follows. It is proposed to have one camp every month for fifteen days. Twenty selected youths will participate in each camp, drawn generally from one particular zone of the country in each camp. This is to give some cohesiveness and yet to make the camps broad based.

The youth will generally be selected from colleges, but there will also be a proportion for non-student youth. It is suggested that the selection will be made from chosen high schools and colleges by the principals as a result of oratorical or essay contests on the five works of Sri Aurobindo connected with this movement, i.e. *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *A System of National Education* and the first three chapters of *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*.

Udar

*

An Appeal to the Youth:

Let us get together and work together for a new world. It is now pressing to be born so let us together see how we can bring about the most favourable conditions for the new life which, after all, you yourselves are going to inherit and then pass on to future generations.

Let us first see what each of us has to offer in this dialogue which we now propose. On your side you have energy, vitality, zest, a deep dissatisfaction with the existing state of things and a burning wish for a change — for a revolution. On our side we bring a sense of direction and a great inspiration and guidance combined with the drive of a great force for realisation. If these can be put to work together there is nothing that can stop us. Please let us try to do this — for our country and for the world, for the present and for the future.

The great force for realisation, which we have mentioned, is that given to us by Sri Aurobindo. That is why we call this movement as His Action.

Udar

(Address to the Youth Camp)

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Vinoba Bhave was known for his great moral qualities and his selflessness in the Bhoodan movement but his spiritual qualities were not appreciated. This was seen by us when he visited us here, and when he went to the Mother. She also confirmed it. He made a significant remark to her which shows his spiritual understanding. He himself being an ascetic type with a very simple living could well have been shocked by an apparent luxurious living in our Ashram. The Mother's expression of beauty and harmony in our material surroundings is mistaken for luxury.

But Vinoba said to Mother that to do Yoga in bare simple surroundings is difficult enough but to do the great Yoga of Sri Aurobindo in such surroundings as are in his Ashram, surroundings of beauty and material comforts, is much more difficult, and he appreciated the Mother's great endeavour in this.

Udar

(To be continued)

P. AND G.

I appreciate your feelings about what a sadhak ought to be and from that point of view, what you say is quite true. But it is well understood that the Ashram is not exclusively composed of sadhaks. The Ashram is a reduced image of life where those who practise yoga are a minority, and if I were to keep here only those who are quite sincere in their sadhana, very few indeed would remain.

Sri Aurobindo always reminds us of the fact that the Divine is everywhere and in everything, and asks us to practise a true compassion, as is so beautifully expressed in this aphorism which I am just commenting upon, "Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others."

And in this light, I must ask you to let X come and see his mother who loves him dearly and would be very miserable if she were deprived of his visits. . . .

26 January 1962

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 144)

THE BHAKTA AS THE BIOGRAPHER: K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR'S BIOGRAPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO¹

[Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1908-1999), whose birth centenary is being celebrated this year by several institutions including the Sahitya Akademi, was a savant renowned for his unique role as the doyen of the critical studies on Indian writing in English and as the celebrated biographer of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Born in a village in Tamil Nadu he began his career as a teacher in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), but through his perseverance became the Professor of English in Belgaum College. He obtained his Ph. D. from the University of Madras and his distinguished career as an educationist culminated in appointment as the Vice Chancellor of the Andhra University. His biography of the Mother brought him India's national literary laurel, the Sahitya Akademi Award. Later the Akademi bestowed on him its highest honour, the Fellowship.]

The famous author Allan Tate describes him as "One of the last surviving humanistic critics . . . who so gracefully combines penetrating literary insight with a sure sense of human values."

BIOGRAPHIES form one of the most simple and yet most complex genres of literature. Abiding, transcultural and universal in appeal, they defy easy categorisation and critical comprehension. They tempt us to espouse commonplace truisms of human nature, the vanity of life and the futility of all endeavours. And yet, these very generalisations are defeated by our realisation of the essential enigma of the human person at the centre of the biographer's attention.

Not surprisingly therefore, biographies and autobiographies have continued to enjoy an unflinching mass appeal. Always high on the publication and sales graph, they reveal truths of the human condition that go beyond our desire for curiosity, at a prurient level, our fascination for the page three personalities, the inside story. From the life of Socrates, to that of Samuel Johnson, from *Eminent Victorians* of Lytton Strachey to the lives of Eliot, Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, and Tagore our hunger for the man who suffers and the mind that creates remains insatiated. Undeterred by Eliot's theory of depersonalised art or the post-modern distrust of the authorial self and the death of the author, readers are drawn to this elusive category. Clearly biographies are hard to define.

Is Valmiki's *Ramayana* the biography of Ramachandra, the *Maryada Purusha* or is the *Mahabharata*, the life of Sri Krishna, the Avatar? For countless people, the answer is an affirmative one. For the key discourses in these narratives go beyond the story of fatherly betrayal or property disputes in the kingdom of Ayodhya or that of Hastinapur.

Srinivasa Iyengar's biography of Sri Aurobindo is informed by such a deeper understanding. That is why perhaps the subtitle of the study refers to it as 'a biography and a history'.

In his preface to the third edition, Professor Iyengar says that he started work on it late in 1942. The first edition, according to the publisher's note was published in 1945. It "contained corrections and revisions made by Sri Aurobindo himself." "The third edition issued in 1972, was entirely recast by the author and largely rewritten in order to include much newly published material. The enlarged biography was carefully revised for publication in 1985. The present (2006) edition is textually the same as the one of 1985, apart from the correction of a few minor errors."

Indeed, Iyengar's preface reveals his approach to the study. He is aware of Sri Aurobindo's caution to a disciple as evidenced in the following two extracts:

But why write my biography at all? Is it really necessary? In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns, or his position or fame or what he does, but what he is and invariably becomes

and more significantly

It would be only myself who could speak of things in my past, giving them their true form and significance.

Sri Aurobindo²

Further, Iyengar is actually aware that "the biographer of Sri Aurobindo had himself to be a poet and a prophet, a philosopher and a yogi; and being fully conscious of my limitations, I knew that the task I had undertaken greatly exceeded my abilities."

The biographer here is not being unduly modest. He has been a critic and litterateur of a great stature. In terms of the quality of his creative and critical output, he stands as a colossus as a Professor of English and Indian Studies. While many of his colleagues remained anglicised and held on to the literary fashions of the day, Iyengar remained loyal to the Indian standpoint, even while he championed an eclectic, integrated and global approach to the study of literature and culture.

Iyengar began his biography in the thick of a world conflagration. 1942 perhaps represented the gravest crisis that humanity has ever faced. It also marked the turning point in the fortune of the Allies in World War II. The biographer is aware that it is the Mother's War and it is Sri Aurobindo who fights against the Asuric forces. Thus like the Gita that emerges from the din and clash of the battle of Kurukshetra, Iyengar's account of the spiritual life of Sri Aurobindo is inseparable from the question of the destiny of Man that is perilously hung on the edge of disaster.

Given these two cardinal facts, the occasion of War and its links to the fate of humanity, Iyengar endeavours to unveil a narrative that is truly heroic and brings in

an epic sweep. While a lesser mortal would have abandoned the project at the initial stage itself, our biographer persists, firmly anchored to the faith in his mission. Nor would the crucial part of revision would become possible without the right ambience. As he recalls in his preface:

Having at last — towards the end of 1968 — divested myself of the Vice-Chancellorship of Andhra University, I found a place of retreat and an harbour of peace in the Delhi branch of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. And there, after some more delays caused by the pressure of other literary work, I started hopefully and resolutely on 15 August 1970. (p. xiv)

Srinivasa Iyengar's life of Sri Aurobindo of the latest 2006 edition represents a formidable tome of 846 pages complete with an index. Comprising four crucial sections aside from the Introduction and Epilogue, the book in its structure and chapter headings suggests a chronological, narrative approach to unfolding the story. The Introduction "Renaissance India and Sri Aurobindo" provides the overall context. Part one entitled "Humanist and Poet" contains six sections, part two has seven, part three an equal number while part four contains six. The Epilogue, aptly entitled "Sri Aurobindo's Action", brings the story of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Ministry up-to-date, right up to the founding of Auroville, Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary, Sri Aurobindo's action, the Mother's passing and finally the goals ahead.

It is not my purpose here to make an exhaustive review of this biography. Instead, I shall try to share what I believe are the most salient and outstanding features of this study.

First, it is clear that Iyengar's biography is essentially a spiritual account and falls within this literary sub-genre.³ It is clearly not the account of a devotee like Mahendranath Gupta (M) who records the conversation with his Master in the classic, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.⁴ "To read through these conversations," Aldous Huxley says, in the preface to the book, "in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of the Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgment."

For such accounts we must turn inevitably to Nirodbaran's *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* or A. B. Purani's *Evening Talks* or the former's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*.

And yet, Iyengar too had a supreme privilege. "It was my good fortune," he notes in the preface, "that Sri Aurobindo himself was magnanimous enough to go through my first and second drafts of February 1943 and November 1943 respectively, rectifying many errors whether of fact or interpretation. In the result, the book was received warmly as a reliable first introduction to Sri Aurobindo's life and work."

However, the biographer knows that the “Adhar” or the instrument has to be worthy of the efforts. And therefore he leaves nothing to chance. Books, monographs, letters, pertaining to history, politics, literature, education, international relations, newspaper accounts, oral accounts and conversations are all painstakingly gathered and judiciously used. Each statement is carefully documented with examples and evidence. The references encompass minute and ground details and bring in an eclectic frame of mind. The biographer taps many sources. The attempt is to constantly upgrade one’s research and thinking. He shows wide reading and concern for the reader. Therefore the biography eschews jargon and avoids parading knowledge for the sake of mere scholarship or self-conscious pedantry.

To the skeptical modern minds, Iyengar’s approach would appear hagiographic. They would be unhappy that he goes beyond sympathy to adulation and often celebration. However, that is Iyengar’s prerogative. We are in this sense reminded of Sister Nivedita’s biography of Swami Vivekananda, *The Master as I Saw Him or Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Enchanting and Uplifting Reminiscences of 160 Persons*, Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, 2005, or nearer home in the Aurobindonean context, the accounts by Dilip Kumar Roy, Anilbaran, A. B. Purani, Rishabhchand and others.⁵

Iyengar’s tone and approach make him a unique biographer. Throughout poetic, he chronicles the life of Sri Aurobindo in a spirit of humility and ardour of a deeply spiritual kind. At times, passages get elevated through uplift in the biographer’s consciousness and cascading words acquire the quality of mystical poetry. The spiritual minded reader becomes an insider and is blessed to share the deep devotion and *shraddha* of the author for his Master.

The biographer thus becomes essentially a Bhakta. It is this turn in his spirit, that results in great illuminations. As Iyengar aptly observes in the opening:

In Sri Aurobindo’s life, his writing was not a thing apart; it was (in the Miltonic phrase, but in an even true sense) “the precious life-blood of a master spirit.” The inner man was the real man, and the inner man is best revealed for us in his writing. Poetry, drama, philosophy, yoga exegesis, political comment, sociological inquiry, literary and art criticism, educational theory — everywhere there is the signature of the inner man, the light from the inner sun, the tremor of the unique sensibility. If it be true, as Keats said that “Shakespeare led a life of allegory, his works are a comment on it,” might it not be said of Sri Aurobindo that his was a life of progressive Divine manifestation, and his writings are but its radiation and recordings.” (p. xv)

One would be hard pressed to get a more moving account of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram during the earlier period than the following:

The Ashram was the Ashram, a place selected by divine intention and sanctified for a great sacrificial work; and Sri Aurobindo's work, as Nolini explained, was still of the nature of experiment and trial in very restricted limits, something in the nature of what is done in a laboratory when a new power has been discovered, but has to be perfectly formulated in its process. But although inaccessible to most, Sri Aurobindo's influence was unmistakable, and even visitors felt that the very atmosphere of the place was charged with something ineluctable to which they could give no name. Whether one loitered among trees and flowers in the Ashram, or sat by oneself in the cool and restful hours of the evening, or attended Anil Baran's, Purani's, Naren Banerji's, Dikshit's or Rishabhchand's instructive readings from Sri Aurobindo's works, visited Dilip's house to catch the strains of Mira Bhajan, or exchanged words and smiles with Nolini, Amrita, Rishabhchand, Pavitra, Prithwi Singh, Chandradip, Premanand, Gangadharan, or even if one merely watched the Sadhaks at work — perhaps the rolling up or unrolling of mats at meditation time, or culling and sorting of flowers, or the washing and piling up of plates and cups, or conscientiously doing gate duty — one was apt to say echoing Horace, "And seek for Truth in the Ashram at Pondicherry." (p. 726)

Srinivasa Iyengar's study of Sri Aurobindo suggests that for a literary minded sadhak of the inner world, biographies of a Master can help us enter the life of the spirit. He shows us by his example that the mind and the heart are not doomed to remain for ever warring partners but can serve the common goal of uplifting our ordinary selves to greater heights. Biographies of the deeper kind thus become the prayer of the Bhakta for a divine communion. There the artificial man-made boundaries disappear and true understanding comes forth about the Master and ourselves. That is the ultimate tribute we can pay to Srinivasa Iyengar's biography of Sri Aurobindo.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

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Notes and References

1. *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, first edition, 1945; rpt. 1950; revised and enlarged edition, 1972; fourth revised edition, 1985; fifth edition 2006. All references in the text pertain to the 2006 edition and are parenthetically given in the text.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972; rpt 2001.

3. See, for instance, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* by Romain Rolland, Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1931; rpt. 2002; also see: *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, compiled from various sources, Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, fifteenth Impression 2002; *With Aurobindo in Baroda* by Dinendra Kumar Roy, translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2006.
4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, by (M) Mahendranath (translated into English with an introduction by Swami Nikhilananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math 1942; rpt. 1996).
5. Nirodbaran's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972; rpt. 2000 is an excellent example of this genre.

The principle of Adhyatmayoga is, in knowledge, the realisation of all things that we see or do not see but are aware of, — men, things, ourselves, events, gods, titans, angels, — as one divine Brahman, and in action and attitude, an absolute self-surrender to the Paratpara Purusha, the transcendent, infinite and universal Personality who is at once personal and impersonal, finite and infinite, self-limiting and illimitable, one and many, and informs with his being not only the Gods above, but man and the worm and the clod below. The surrender must be complete. Nothing must be reserved, no desire, no demand, no opinion, no idea that this must be, that cannot be, that this should be and that should not be; — all must be given. The heart must be purified of all desire, the intellect of all self-will, every duality must be renounced, the whole world seen and unseen must be recognised as one supreme expression of concealed Wisdom, Power and Bliss, and the entire being given up, as an engine is passive in the hands of the driver, for the divine Love, Might and perfect Intelligence to do its work and fulfil its divine Lila. Ahañkāra must be blotted out in order that we may have, as God intends us ultimately to have, the perfect bliss, the perfect calm and knowledge and the perfect activity of the divine existence. If this attitude of perfect self-surrender can be even imperfectly established, all necessity of Yogic kriyā inevitably ceases.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 73-74)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Revisiting the Pancha Kanyas: Proceedings of the National Seminar, Kolkata, 2003. Edited by Pradip Bhattacharya. (Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, 'Aikatan'. IA 290, Sector 3, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700 097. 2007. 230 pages. Rs. 325.)

PANCHA KANYAS: Pratibha, Ratna, Chitra, Saoli and Archana. Five brilliant women speaking of the five traditional 'Five Ladies': Ahalya, Kunti, Tara, Draupadi and Mandodari. Why so? Perhaps the organisers of the seminar felt that women are the best expounders of the glory and the good, the terror and the pity of womanhood. The result is an arresting document that has also an afterword by Saroj Thakur and some paintings on the subject, executed during the seminar.

The editor, Pradip Bhattacharya has been possessed by the legendary 'Panchakanya stotra' for quite sometime now. His earlier 'visit' to the Pancha Kanya conundrum in his book, *Pancha-Kanya: The Five Virgins of Indian Epics*, was marked by charm and passion and is republished here with a few changes. The same gallant approach marked his initiating a seminar on the subject by the Government of India's Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre at Kolkata in 2003. After Nrisimha Prasad Bhaduri's scholarly introduction which is unable not to speak of Rama's wanderings as the Aryanisation-subjugation of India's non-Aryan races, we settle down to the five scholarly ladies who detail essentially a personal voyage within, anxious and defiant by turns. Which, of course, makes them eminently readable.

Pratibha Roy gives a summation of her novel on Ahalya, *Mahamoha*, though she hastens to introduce it as a conglomeration of symbols. Accordingly Ahalya is a symbol of beauty, Indra of lust, Gautama of dry scholarship and Rama is the symbol of recognising the element of Beauty. Pratibha's Rama reminds one of Prince Rajakumvara in the sixteenth century Sufi poem, *Mrigavati* by Kutuban. The heroine Mrigavati represents divine beauty on earth, like Pratibha's Ahalya. Pratibha's conclusion is predictable:

In all time and space there is an Ahalya in every human being, also an Indra and a Gautam: but Rama is one in a billion. As Rama is not common, he is godly. In the gross view of the society Ahalya is unchaste but in the subtle vision of Rama she is chaste. Therefore she is one of the five great women to be remembered each day: Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari.

Ratna Roy begins with a touching biography of Guru Pankaj Charan Das and his conception of the Pancha Kanya dance. Perhaps his being brought up in a Mahari set-up which was looked down upon by the society had its effect in the choice of the five kanyas. Fallen, yes. But who shall cast the first stone at them? As Sita said: *Na kaschid na aparadhyati!*

There are other elaborations. The five kanyas represent the five elements: water, fire, earth, wind and ether. Without these basic elements, how can creation be? Ratna feels that the Guru has set forward Tara and Mandodari as the indigenous races subjugated by the Aryan conqueror, just as the Maharis have been marginalised by a patriarchal society. Oh, the Aryan invasion theory again! In any case there is confusion in the proof-reading of page 52, so one does not really understand the progress of the argument. The conclusion is evident enough. After making a brief stand, both Tara and Mandodari give in to the power of patriarchy, accepting Rama as the Supreme.

Chitra Chaturvedi comes closest to recording a reason for hailing the Five as capable of destroying great sins. According to her, Kanya is a “free spirit” who can think and act on her own, without being dependent on others. Our strength is within ourselves. Her quick recapitulation of Kunti’s life is all clarity and critical acumen. Kunti is seen as a true Vaishnava. Rightly said, for where is a prayer to rival hers in the *Mahabharata*?

When Saoli Mitra says she is “a mere performer” in self-deprecation, we can only sigh. Would any of these kanyas have reached the height of popularity and serious thought but for the performers down the generations? Even Tara and Mandodari have drawn close to the Tamil psyche thanks to Arunachalakavi’s opera. And have we not Vempati Chinna Sathyam’s radiant Kuchipudi dance, “Manduka Sabdham” that remains unrivalled in recreating Mandodari a million times? Saoli’s paper is a fine, interactive “performance” even in the printed book.

Our fifth lady-scholar Archana Sahni goes in search of fundamental definitions. Virginity can be seen as chastity, as expediency, as a goddess-state and as an impulsion. Bringing in significant Draupadi literature of our times (*Yajnaseni*, *Pandavapuram*, *Ini Njan Urangatte*), she finds that conclusions on the Five as ‘kanyas’ can be elusive. So she votes for another *Mahabharata* heroine:

Amba, to my mind exemplifies *par excellence* the esoteric or spiritual meaning of *kanya*. Women cannot entirely do away with patriarchy; what is significant is that their brush with it puts them on the path to self-discovery and self-realisation.

Going by the arguments presented in *Revisiting the Pancha Kanyas*, it is obvious that the five legends indicate the displacing of Indra by Vishnu in the Vedic pantheon. The pro-changers may have used the familiar device of character-assassination by playing on the term, ‘Ahalya jaara’. Perhaps yet another instance of Cinna the poet paying for the scheming of Cinna the conspirator! After reading so many imaginative recreations in this book, the reviewer may be pardoned for her own two paise worth of criticism.

But the sobering point is that none of the classical heroines committed suicide. Sri Aurobindo has said that these heroines of the secular legends of India remain

unparalleled in world culture. For them, life itself became tapasya, a constant ‘burning’ in the fires of everyday living, strong women who did not turn away from earthly life but were triumphantly intimate with heaven. They continue to be an inspiration for the suffering millions even today. Unfortunately, in the name of secularism and scientific temperament we have been removing these great tales from the schoolrooms during the last five decades. The rising graph of statistics about suicides by educated young men and women is there for us to draw our own conclusions.

We do need to recite this sloka daily; we need the Pancha Kanyas; we need these explicators to project not only these five but all our classical heroines, each a flame of courage and tapasya. Pradip, thank you!

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

...the Indian ideal of the relation between man and woman has always been governed by the symbolism of the relation between the Purusha and Prakriti (in the Veda Nri and Gna), the male and female divine Principles in the universe. Even, there is to some degree a practical correlation between the position of the female sex and this idea. In the earlier Vedic times when the female principle stood on a sort of equality with the male in the symbolic cult, though with a certain predominance for the latter, woman was as much the mate as the adjunct of man; in later times when the Prakriti has become subject in idea to the Purusha, the woman also depends entirely on the man, exists only for him and has hardly even a separate spiritual existence. In the Tantrik Shakta religion which puts the female principle highest, there is an attempt which could not get itself translated into social practice, — even as this Tantrik cult could never entirely shake off the subjugation of the Vedantic idea, — to elevate woman and make her an object of profound respect and even of worship.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 8)

A RADIANT PERSONALITY

(Continued from the issue of August 2008)

THIS decided me: I wanted to draw him out further.

“I would ask you to bear with me a little,” I made bold to say, “and give me a patient hearing. My difficulty is that I have lived and loved life amply and I believe, intensely. But in my boyhood I came under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna’s mysticism. As a result this certitude germinated in my mind that he had touched the bedrock of Truth with the categorical assertion that ‘the object of human living is to achieve Divine union.’ Then, I went on to say, “I fell within the orbit of the Western this-worldiness with all its spell and glamour and romance, luxuriating in living and in making the most of life and nature. I did not stop to think that the wealth of sunshine might have a worthier message for us than that of goading us to make a few paltry pleasures of hay. I made haste to snatch what I could before the shadows closed in. In my own case, however, they crept in even before sunset, for my vital enthusiasm waned quickly and the old starry perception of my boyhood re-emerged. It said in clear accents: it isn’t any of these — wealth or youth, fame or family, action or art — no, not even service to the community or country, but only the Divine, nothing but His unique touch that can impart significance to it all, since He is the sole reality, all the rest is a mimicry, a shadow-dance.”

“On my return from Europe,” I continued, “I became popular and made friends, numerous friends — thanks to my patrimony, musical gifts, social qualities and lastly the pathetic awe and esteem that people feel when you can talk glibly about continental culture in continental languages. But strangely enough, among my numerous friends I met none interested in God or things of the spirit unless diluted with big doses of coloured art and popular humanism, with the sole exception of Ronald Nixon, an English Professor of Lucknow. Thus it was a foreigner who discussed with me the wisdom of our authentic spirituality. It was he who first told me about your great yogic stature and made me read your books. Since meeting him my old nostalgia for the spiritual life has reasserted itself with redoubled force and I cannot rest in peace without the inner harmony which only the Spirit can give. In other words, I want to practise yoga. But then here I have the deepest misgivings as to my capacity. And I have had this persistent feeling that I can never succeed without a Guru and that Guru must be no other than yourself, even though I don’t know whether *you* will accept me. That is *my* position. But the trouble is that Life, too, calls me with her coloured lanterns as you must have inferred yourself from my questions regarding social give-and-take, sympathy, love, friendship, etc., with all their attendant obligations and responsibilities. To stake all that for something that has not yet crystallised in my consciousness — or maybe that the dilemma lies in this that the satisfaction that these social pleasures give, though fast dwindling, are yet too tangible to be dismissed, out

of hand? Anyhow the prospect of having to do without my chains causes a strange malaise. I say strange, because I can't quite account for the tug-o-war that is going on within me — a conflict which is quite concrete even when the forces seem so imponderable. But I don't know if I have been able to put it all clearly before you?"

I paused as he smiled kindly, his deep glance spraying a kind of peace upon me . . . giving me a feeling of his compassion . . . not a mere human compassion but something far more pervasive and soothing.

"I quite understand," he said reassuringly. "It is like this ((Human society, human friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling are mostly and usually — not entirely or in all cases — founded on a vital basis and are ego-held at their centre. It is because of the pleasure of being loved, the pleasure of enlarging the ego by contact and penetration with another, the exhilaration of the vital interchange which feeds their personality, that men usually love and there are also other and still more selfish motives that mix with this essential movement. There are of course higher spiritual, psychic, mental, vital elements that can come in; but the whole thing is very mixed even at its best. This is the reason why at a certain stage with or without apparent reason the world and life and human society and philanthropy — which is as ego-ridden as the rest — begin to pall.

"There is sometimes," he continued, "an ostensible reason — a disappointment of the surface-vital, the withdrawal of affection by others, the perception that those loved, or men generally, are not what one thought them to be and a host of other causes. But often the cause is a secret disappointment of some part of the inner being, not translated or not well translated into the mind, because it expected from these things something they cannot give. For some it takes the form of a *vairagya*, which drives them towards ascetic indifference and gives the urge towards *moksha*. For us what we hold to be necessary is that the mixture should disappear and that the consciousness should be established on a purer level.))"

"Till then," he went on after a pause, "love and affection and sympathy and friendship could not yield to us their full quota in significance and joy, because for that their basis has to be spiritual, their foundation pure. But for such a consummation there must be a transmutation of the very substance of our human nature. It is only then that the rhythm and mode of its self-expression can change when the lead will have been taken by the psychic self in us. When this self of ours comes to the forefront, it will express in the truest way the authentic movements of the deeper emotions which are of the psychic. This is, in a nutshell, the inner message of my yoga."¹

1. Sri Aurobindo wrote to me later explaining the action of the psychic: "The psychic is the soul, the Divine spark animating matter and life and mind and as it grows, it takes form and expresses itself through these, touching them to beauty and fineness — it works even before humanity, in the lower creation leading it up towards the human, in humanity it works more freely though still under a mass of ignorance and weakness and coarseness and hardness leading it up towards the Divine. In yoga it becomes conscious of its aim and turns inward to the Divine. It sees behind and above it — that is the difference. . . . Affection, love, tenderness, are in their nature

“Consequently,” he added, “this must be the ideal, your ideal, that is, if you would practise yoga, bearing in mind that you mustn’t be bound by anything that is irrelevant to your aspiration for the Divine. Nothing — no attachment however laudable — must be a rival to your aspiration for the Divine.”

“But is that possible — I mean feasible, for me?”

“Not at the start: if it were, you would be a liberated being already. You can’t achieve liberation overnight. What I wanted to stress was that if you cared for yoga you must always hold on to your vision, your ideal of inner liberation, so that you may be ready to comply whenever you are called upon to forego anything that militates against this ideal.”

“But must I necessarily be called upon to forego — everything?”

“You may not be — outwardly, that is,” he said. “But that won’t make any very material difference, since your inner attitude has to be that of complete freedom all the same — the ideal must be *nirliptata*, non-attachment. If you can be truly non-attached within, you need not have to tear off the outward strappings of bondage. But remember that you must always be ready to shove aside anything that is incompatible with yoga, for that surely is one of its major conditions.”

“Does that apply to things that do not, properly speaking, belong to the material plane, say music which I love so dearly? Must I renounce that too?”

“I haven’t said you *must*,” he smiled again indulgently, “only, if yoga were the central thing in your life you would not be so nervous at the prospect of having to give up music for its sake, would you?”

I hung my head discountenanced.

“I would not have you infer,” I pleaded, “that I couldn’t possibly give up music. Only I am not yet persuaded that yoga will make it up to me. My problem may be somewhat naive but it is a problem nonetheless. It is like this: I don’t find it hard to give up a lower thing for a higher one provided I have some foretaste of the latter. But so long as I have no clear idea of what yoga has to give, why must I gamble away the tangible for the elusive? Before I burn my boats can’t I legitimately claim even a glimpse of what the deep has in store for me?”

“Didn’t I tell you just now that you need not *necessarily* give up your music or something just as tangible for that matter: what is obligatory is that should any activity or idea or habit or attachment or preconception prove an impediment on the way, you have to discard it when so required.”

psychic — the vital has them because the psychic is trying to express itself through the vital. It is through the emotional being that the psychic most easily expresses itself, it stands just behind it in the heart-centre. But it wants these things to be pure. Not that it rejects the outward expression through the vital and the physical, but as the psychic being is from the soul, it naturally feels the attraction of soul to soul, the nearness of soul to soul, the union of soul with soul as the things that are to it most abiding and concrete. Mind, vital, body are means of expression and very precious means of expression but the inner life is for it the first thing, the deepest reality and these have to be subordinated to it and conditioned by it — its expression, its instrument and channel.”

“But you haven’t answered my question about the compensation. Or perhaps it is taboo to have such an intellectual curiosity or scepticism, if you will?”

“Not quite, only yoga, you must know, is not a matter of intellectual appraisal or recognition: it is essentially a matter of realisation through self-dedication. As for your other question, surely the compensations of yoga are deep as well as abiding. Only, you can’t summon them to prove their validity before your mental dock. But let me tell you here that your difficulties aren’t what you presume them to be: I mean they are not mental at bottom. The truth of the matter is this: so long as the joys which belong to the lower planes continue to be too vividly real and covetable you will find ready enough reasons why you shouldn’t decline them. You can forego them only when you have had a call of the higher joys, when the lower ones begin to pall, sound hollow. The Promised Land of the Spirit begins from the frontier of worldly enjoyments, to start with.”

“But why is it,” I asked after a pause, “that one can’t expect to have even a glimpse beforehand of this Land? Because of the thick walls of our worldly desires?”

“Your premise here is not quite correct,” he objected. “For even when we live in the world of these desires the glimpse, the call, comes to us through chinks and rifts of dissatisfaction and surfeit. Only, it doesn’t last long until you are somewhat purified, for then only do you really begin to be open to it. The darkness returns intermittently after the light because it takes long to get our whole being open to the light. That is why yoga pushes us urgently upwards to altitudes where the light can be shut out no more by clouds. And it is just because yoga is such an ascent of consciousness, that any attachment to or desire for lures and prizes on the lower planes, material, intellectual or aesthetic, must eventually prove a shackle.”

“Why then do you write so appreciatively of materialism as also of the intellectual and aesthetic delights? And why are your own writings so illuminating intellectually? Why have you praised art? Why write at all: ‘The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through Beauty?’”²

“Why not? Intellect, art, poetry, knowledge of matter, etc., can all help our progress appreciably provided you direct them properly. It is at bottom, a case of

2. Cf. “But first, it is well that we should recognise the enormous, the indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing. For that vast field of evidence and experience which now begins to reopen its gates to us, can only be safely entered when the intellect has been severely trained to a clear austerity; seized on by unripe minds, it lends itself to the most perilous distortions and misleading imaginations and actually in the past encrusted a real nucleus of truth with such an accretion of perverting superstitions and irrationalising dogmas that all advance in true knowledge was rendered impossible. It became necessary for a time to make a clean sweep at once of the truth and its disguise in order that the road might be clear for a new departure and a surer advance. The rationalistic tendency of Materialism has done mankind this great service. . . . If modern Materialism were simply an unintelligent acquiescence in the material life, the advance might be indefinitely delayed. But since its very soul is the search for Knowledge, it will be unable to cry a halt; as it reaches the barriers of sense-knowledge and of the reasoning from sense-knowledge, its very rush will carry it beyond . . .”

evolution. That is why I once wrote: ‘Reason was the helper, Reason is the bar’; which means simply that our intellect can be a help in our evolution only a part of the way. But when it presumes to judge what is beyond its domain, it must be put in its place. Besides, different recipients are differently constituted for different disciplines — seeking different fulfilments, each approaching truth in the way of his nature, *swabhava*. To put it in other words, those who are best recipients for the light of the intellect are *mentally* more evolved than those who are not so gifted intellectually. But that doesn’t mean that there are no realisations higher than the mental ones. Assuredly there are, as we can concretely verify as we open ourselves to the realisations of the Spirit, when we find the mental joys inadequate, the aesthetic joys no longer satisfying. With this opening we glimpse worlds higher than those we have been used to. Do you follow?”

“You mean that yoga enlarges our consciousness more and more?”

“That is my view of evolution,” he nodded, “this gradual unfolding of the consciousness ascending to its higher reaches ((And it is yoga which is to bring down further light and power in the next step of human evolution — the next stage of the evolution of human consciousness.))”

I reverted to my difficulty: “But what about my taking to yoga?”

“Everybody can practise some yoga or other, suited to his nature,” he replied non-committally.

“But my question was about your Integral yoga — of self-surrender.”

“Ah!” he said slowly as though weighing his words. “About that I can’t pronounce here and now.”

“But why?”

“Because the yoga that I have been pursuing of late — whose aim is the entire and radical transformation of the stuff and fabric of our consciousness and being including our physical nature — is a very arduous one, fraught with grave perils at every step. ((In fact so great are these dangers that I would not advise anybody to run them unless his call is so urgent that he is prepared to stake everything.)) In other words, I can accept only those with whom yoga has become such a necessity that nothing else seems worthwhile. In your case it hasn’t yet become so urgent. Your seeking is for some sort of partial elucidation of life’s mysteries. This is at best an intellectual seeking — not an urgent need of the central being.”

“Allow me to explain a little further,” I said with a keen sense of disappointment, “for I am afraid you haven’t quite seen where the shoe pinches. I can assure you that mine is not merely a mental curiosity — ”

“I said *seeking*, not *curiosity*,” he corrected. “And I referred to the present only: I did not mean this could not develop later on into a real need of your central being.”

“Let me make it more explicit all the same,” I insisted. “From 1919 till 1922 I was in Europe meeting many thoughtful people including a few notable thinkers. Each of these I prodded with the one test-query: ‘What is the truth of truths?’ I have

all along felt, with the Gita, that the truth-seeker must approach the Wise — the *Tatwa-darshi* — with ‘*homage, enquiry and service*’. I have indeed gained a great deal through contacts of men like Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Duhamel, and many others who are less celebrated but highly evolved personalities. To all of them I owe a debt of deep gratitude. But I have reached no solution of life’s master problem — none could point me the way to it. I continued to be tormented by life’s endless tragedies and sorrows and disharmonies; I was pained by the senseless wastefulness of Nature’s ways and what chiefly troubled me was the persistent fact that mankind in the mass should go on preferring evil to good, falsehood to truth, darkness to light. Time and again have I asked myself if we must go on for ever groping in vain for a panacea to it all, if there was no real remedy to the ‘ills our flesh is heir to’. If there was, how was it that we, the children of Immortality should never chance upon it through centuries of striving? And why should we still be clamouring and scrambling for the ephemeral — often, alas, even the infernal — instead of the everlasting good? Besides, I used to ask myself —” I pulled up suddenly, somewhat abashed for my effusion.

“Go on,” he said in a very kind tone, “I am listening.”

“I well remember,” I resumed, encouraged, “how, whenever I came in contact with somebody out of the ordinary, I used to hear a distinct voice deep down within me: ‘But has he achieved his poise in the ultimate Truth? Has he realised lasting peace?’ And an answering voice returned with equal distinctness: ‘No.’ There was but one exception. I have told you I came early under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever I used to meditate before his picture I used to have a deep certitude that *he* had attained ‘*yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ*’ — ‘the boon of boons beside which all others look like baubles.’ And this certitude came again with the same rhythm of deep joy when I saw you just now — but I’m afraid I am getting too autobiographical —”

“It is all right, go on.”

“I used often to probe my soul with the questioning: how to attain that poise — *yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate* — which made one impervious to life’s hardest blows — and gave one the unshakable foundation of eternal peace and bliss? Music gave me a brief foretaste — though even there by snatches — of such felicity, that is why I have loved music passionately since my childhood. With age this love grew; yet I was continually visited by an anxious questioning whether it was justifiable to seek refuge in the delightful retreats of art in a world where suffering was so widespread and tragically persistent? At times a sob came up: was there really no way of changing this — no way of release from these dark underworlds of pain and misery into radiant spheres of joy and happiness? If not, then what sense can there be in any human endeavour? Have we to accept, after all, the findings of the *mayavadis* as the ultimate verdict of human experience that no stable haven of fulfilment is attainable in the conditions to which we are born?” I stopped suddenly

dead, somewhat abashed by my crescendo of rhetoric of which I had suddenly become conscious.

Sri Aurobindo fixed on me a long gaze. An ineffable radiance of compassionate sympathy suffused his face . . . his eyes gleamed like jewels shedding light without heat. I knew he had understood. Hasn't he written in a poem about his own yearning in face of human sorrows:

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
 Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!
 Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
 Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name.

Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
 Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
 Live in the mind of our earthhood; O golden Mystery, flower,
 Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous Hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity, red icon of might,
 Rose of power with thy diamond halo piercing the night!
 Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design the wonder of thy plan,
 Image of Immortality, outbreak of the Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate divine Desire,
 Rose of Life, crowded with petals, colour's lyre!
 Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical rhyme;
 Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless the children of Time.

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
 Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
 Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:
 Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude's kiss.

"I quite see your difficulty," he said softly. "For I too wanted at one time to transform through my yoga the face of the world. My aim was to change the fundamental nature and movements of humanity, to exile all the evils which afflict helpless mortality."

I felt a heave within — in my very blood. For one like him to talk so intimately to a stranger! Gratitude surged within me and I hung upon his words, eager to imbibe the sweet cadences of his liquid voice.

"It was with this aspiration that I turned to yoga in the beginning," he added, "and I came to Pondicherry because I had been directed by the Voice to pursue my

yoga here.”

“I read in the famous letters you wrote to your wife that you had turned to yoga to save our country.”

“That’s right. I told Lele when agreeing to follow his instructions that I would do his yoga only on condition that it didn’t interfere with my poetry and service to the country.”

“And then?”

“Lele agreed and gave me initiation. But soon afterwards he left, bidding me turn solely to my inner guidance.

“Since then,” he went on, “I have followed only this inner Voice which has led me to develop what I named the Integral yoga. It was then that my outlook changed with the knowledge born of my new yogic consciousness. But then I found, to my utter disillusionment, that it was only my ignorance which had led me to believe that the impossible was feasible here and now.”

“Ignorance?”

He nodded. “Because I didn’t realise then that in order to help humanity out it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually: humanity has to be ripe for it too. For the crux of the difficulty is that even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay until the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent.”

I was reminded of what he had written in his *Essays on the Gita*: “No real peace can be till the heart of man deserves peace; the law of Vishnu cannot prevail till the debt to Rudra is paid . . . Teachers of the land of love and Oneness there must be, for by that way must come the ultimate salvation, but not till the Time-Spirit in man is ready, can the inner and the ultimate prevail over the outer and immediate reality. Christ and Buddha have come and gone but it is Rudra who still holds the world in the hollow of his hand.”

“Consequently,” he went on, “the utmost you can do, here and now is to communicate only partially the light of your realisations in proportion as people are receptive. Even this is not very easy, mind you; for the fact of your having received something does not necessarily make you capable of making a free gift of it to others. You see, capacity to receive is one kind of aptitude, capacity to give — quite another. Indeed, the latter is a very special kind of gift. Some there are who can only imbibe but not communicate, because, for one thing, what you communicate, everybody cannot receive, even when they earnestly want to. To sum up, the number of those is very limited who are capable both of giving and receiving. So you can understand the problem is by no means a simple one. What is one to do? Everybody does not want bliss or enlightenment: men are at different stages of development and this makes any universal panacea for life’s evils an impossibility as the history of human experience has proved again and again.”

I was reminded of the story of the sceptic who asked the Buddha why he did not

confer his gift of *nirvana* on all and sundry here and now if he was really convinced of its efficacy in this sorrow-ridden world. Buddha simply asked him to go round from door to door enquiring what they severally wanted. He came back and reported that the boons coveted were endless: money, power, fame, children, women, health, beauty, long life and so on. “But what about *nirvana*?” asked Buddha. “Did anybody want it?” — “Not one,” he replied. “Well,” Buddha smiled, “how can I force a boon on people who won’t have it?”

“But what about the widespread misery and fear and suffering?” I said after a pause.

“How can you help that so long as men choose as they do to hug ignorance which is at the root of all suffering? As long as they cherish the darkness of attachment rather than the light of liberation and knowledge, how can they expect to see? How would you evade the inexorable law of *karma*?”

“What are you then striving for through your yoga? I asked. “For your own liberation or fulfilment?”

“No,” he said, “that wouldn’t have taken so long. But,” he added, “it is not possible to answer you more convincingly just now, for if I were to tell you why I am doing yoga, you would either not understand or misunderstand. Suffice it to say that I want to invoke here on earth the light of a higher world, to manifest a new power which will continue to exist as a new influence in the physical world and will be a direct manifestation of the Divine in our entire being and daily life.”

“Is this what you have named the Supramental Divine?”

“That’s right — though the name is immaterial. What matters is to remember that for a variety of reasons the direct action of the Supramental has never yet been brought to bear on our earth-nature and consciousness.”

“Because the time was not favourable for such a descent?”

“Partly; but there were other reasons also which I can’t go into as they cannot be communicated through mental language, and so, if attempted, may only lead to fresh mystification.”

He wrote to me later, in 1933 about the functioning of the Supramental: “What the Supramental will do, the mind cannot foresee or lay down. The mind is Ignorance seeking for the Truth, the Supramental by its very definition is the Truth-consciousness: Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power. In a Supramental world imperfection and disharmony are bound to disappear. But what we propose just now is not to make the earth a Supramental world but to bring down the Supramental as a Power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest — to let it work there and fulfil itself as Mind descended into life and matter has worked as a Power there to fulfil itself in the midst of the rest. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits. But what, how, by what degrees it will do it is a thing that ought not to be said now — when the Light is there, the Light itself will do its work — when the Supramental Will stands on earth, that Will will decide.”

“But tell me at least if the yogis of yore knew of this Power.”

“Some did.³ But — how can I put the truth of the matter to you? — what happened was that they used to rise individually to this plane and stay there in union: they didn’t bring it down to act upon our terrestrial consciousness. Perhaps they did not even attempt to. But I would rather not tell you more about this because, as I said, the mind cannot even glimpse the Supramental Truth, to say nothing of understanding it.”

“But, forgive me, isn’t the world going from bad to worse daily — nay, hourly? I am an unrepentant rationalist — realist — I hope you will pardon me for saying this?”

“I will,” he said smiling. “For I myself have stressed repeatedly this desperate plight of the earth. And the conditions will become more desperate still. ((The usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are the more probable is the coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know: it has either to believe or disbelieve — wait and see.))”

I was reminded of the Gita’s message that whenever there is in this world a shipwreck of the spiritual values through the upsurge of rebel Darkness, the Divine incarnates himself again to restore the reign of victorious Light.

“But on whom and what will this Supramental work?” I asked.

“Why, on our life-material of course — down to matter and the physical.”

“Didn’t the ancient yogis attempt this either?”

“Not with the Supramental instrumentation. Their preoccupation was not so much with our basic material physical, because to transform it with the spiritual force is the most difficult of all achievements. But that is precisely why it must be achieved.”

“But does the Divine seriously want some such big thing to be achieved?”

“Unquestionably. ((As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen, I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the Supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid rather a grim clash of conflicting forces.))”

“Forgive me, I don’t quite follow this.”

“I know,” he intervened. “For it is somewhat abstruse. It is like this. ((In the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from human eyes. This is however certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are all for the now. I am speaking of course on the level of human intelligence — mystically — rationally, as one might put it.))”

“Please be a little more explicit.”

“To say more would be going beyond the line.”

3. “There is a Permanent, a Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun unyokes his horses. The ten hundreds (of his rays) came together — That One. I saw the most glorious of the Forms of the Gods.”

(Sri Aurobindo’s translation from the Rig-Veda V. 62-1.)

“But tell me at least when the miracle will happen.”

“You don’t want me to start prophesying. As a rationalist, you can’t.”

So I pursued another line. “You have written in your *Synthesis of Yoga*,” I said, “that we mustn’t turn our back on the material world because it is so incurably recalcitrant to the light of the spirit.”

I quote the passage below: “The obstacle which the physical presents to the spiritual is no argument for the rejection of the physical; for in the unseen providence of things our greatest difficulties are our best opportunities. A supreme difficulty is Nature’s indication to us of a supreme conquest to be won and an ultimate problem to be solved; it is not a warning of an inexplicable snare to be shunned or of an enemy too strong for us from whom we must flee.”

He smiled and nodded.

“But tell me one thing,” I said, flying off at another tangent, “didn’t any of your predecessors make this attempt — I mean what you call the integral transformation of the physical consciousness?”

“The attempt might have been made, it is not certain. But what is certain is that nothing decisive was achieved on the physical plane.”

“How do you infer that?”

“Because all achievements leave some legacy of traces for posterity to follow up. A spiritual realisation once completely achieved could never be wholly obliterated afterwards.”

“You must then realise it yourself first?”

“Obviously. Be it a new realisation or light or idea — it must first descend in one person from whom it radiates out in widening circles to others. Hasn’t the Gita too said that the ways of the best of men act as models to the rest? In the Integral yoga, however, the work starts after the realisation, whereas in most other yogas it ends with the realisation. The reason is that I aim primarily at manifestation for which I must, obviously, reach the Supramental myself before I can bring it to bear on our earth-consciousness. For this, ascent has to be the first step — descent is the next.”

“How will the descent work, to start with?”

“When the Supramental touches our being, our consciousness will overpass its twilit stage of the mental (where the divine Truth is distorted) into the upper regions where light has free play — that is, where there are no such distortions. This will in its turn bring about the transformation of mind, life and body as that will be one of the functions of the Force at its inception in the world of matter, generally, to usher in subsequently the new era in man’s living.⁴ You must not misunderstand me. What I want to achieve is the bringing down of the Supramental to bear on this being of ours

4. He said in a later message (5-5-30): “Our yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into the mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it ends, is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth-consciousness.”

so as to raise it to a level higher than the mental and from there change and sublimate the workings of mind, life and body. But this is not to say that the Supramentalisation will be effectuated overnight so that all will be completely transformed. That is hardly feasible.”

“Because we are not mature for such a transformation?”

“Not only that — there are other obstinate impediments and hostile forces to reckon with. This world of matter has been for ages the bulwark of darkness, falsehood’s most redoubtable citadel where, hitherto, inertia has reigned supreme. To carry there the message of Truth, to make it responsive to the shock of Light is far from easy. Yet the Supramental power can work its way if once it can descend there, that is to say if once the earth-consciousness can bear it to start with.”

“Suppose it does, on whom will the Force be dynamic in its inception?”

“On those who have acquired the power to be its medium or vehicle. Each of these will serve as an indicator of what humanity is potentially capable of becoming, once it is transformed.⁵ Do you follow?”

“After a fashion I suppose,” I said. “But tell me please, if this power or influence will benefit many or only a handful of isolated individuals here and there.”

“Many, certainly. My Integral yoga would be of little use if it were meant for one or two individuals. For you must remember that my object is not the abandonment of the physical-material life to drift by itself but to transform it fundamentally by the power of this higher light and seeing.”⁶

“But I hope your followers and successors won’t have to emulate you in your superhuman sadhana, if they are to arrive?”

“No,” Sri Aurobindo smiled, “and that was what I really meant when I said some time back that my yoga was meant for humanity. The first that hews his way through a trackless jungle acts necessarily as the pathfinder clearing the way for his followers. He faces much to make it easier for the others.”

I was reminded of a saying of the great yogi Sri Ramakrishna: “The man who makes a fire has to take a lot of trouble but, once lit, all who come near may safely reap the benefit of its warmth.” As I pondered the significance of this simile, a deep sense of reverence pervaded my being in the ensuing silence. What I had heard had slowly infiltrated into the depths of my being. I wondered how few among us even

5. “The error of the practical reason is an excessive subjection to the apparent fact which it can immediately feel as real and an insufficient courage in carrying profounder facts of potentiality to their logical conclusion. What is, is the realisation of an anterior potentiality; present potentiality is a clue to future realisation.”

The Life Divine, Chapter 7

6. “Nor would the integrality to which we aspire be real or even possible, if it were confined to the individual. Since our divine perfection embraces the realisation of ourselves in being, in life and in love through others as well as through ourselves, the extension of our liberty and of its results in others would be the inevitable outcome as well as the broadest utility of our liberation and perfection.”

The Synthesis of Yoga

imagined that such a man was living in our midst! But then hasn't it always been so from time immemorial? How many of us had truly appreciated the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna in his life-time? I felt suddenly a strong impulse to make him my *pranam* once more. I restrained myself with effort.

Sri Aurobindo's gaze was on me, unwaveringly. Suddenly I felt a curious upsurge of scepticism so utterly out of tune with my nascent adoration.

"But are you convinced it will be possible — really feasible?" I said.

"For a single individual I have *seen* it to be possible," he put an emphasis on 'seen'. "For I have *seen* the working of this tremendous victorious force annihilating at a sweep the force of darkness and inertia which conspire to keep the spirit under the thrall of matter and flesh. To give a concrete instance: a yogi could here and now achieve complete immunity from the forces of disease if he could isolate himself completely from his surroundings."

"But why does he fail when he reverts to the world?"

"Because of the universal suggestion of disease when he comes out of his seclusion."

My scepticism took yet another line. "But do you think this to be such a great achievement after all, seeing that even the great Buddha attached so little importance to the physical aspect of our suffering?"

"You forget Buddha had a different outlook on life, a different object. He wanted through *nirvana* a final exit from this phenomenal world of the senses. It may be that, at that stage of our human evolution man was not mature yet for a greater realisation. But whatever the reason, you cannot get away from the fact that Buddha wanted fulfilment by turning away from all play of expression which is Life's mode of self-manifestation, whereas I want its transformation, complete transformation. My aim is not to disown life but to transmute it through the alchemy of the light of the Spirit. ((In other words my aim is not to cast off the material life, but to conquer Matter for the Spirit: to make the body a conscious and perfect instrument instead of a limitation and an obstacle must therefore be an essential part of this aim.))"

For some time I did not know what to say next. Then a sort of curiosity — or shall I say eagerness — got the better of me in spite of my misgivings.

"But what about my yoga?" I brought myself to say apropos of nothing. The next moment I felt a strange self-questioning: was I really calling for an answer? I could not quite decide.

His glance cut into me like a knife. "Yours is still a mental seeking," he said. "For my yoga something more is needed. Why not wait till the time comes?"

"When it does, may I count on your help?" I asked anxiously.

He nodded and smiled.

At that time he had only about a dozen disciples in his Ashram. In point of fact, it had not yet grown into a proper Ashram. It was very different from the Ashram today with more than seven hundred initiates of both sexes within it. But even at that

time the Guru gave the disciples all the help they needed. The few who were there spoke enthusiastically about his yoga, his elevating personal contact and loving help and wisdom born of his great realisation. Some of his beautiful letters were lent to me and I copied them out with eagerness. Among these there was his famous letter, written in November 1922, to the late Deshbhandu Chitta Ranjan Das, beloved of Bengal. I must quote a few lines:

Dear Chitta,

I think you know my present idea and the attitude towards life and work to which it has brought me. I see more and more manifestly that man cannot get out of the futile cycle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself on to a new foundation. I have become confirmed in a perception which I had always, less clearly and dynamically then, but which has now become more and more evident to me, that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual: that is to say, a new consciousness to be developed only by yoga. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic power of this greater consciousness? What was the condition of its effective truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments — intellect, life, mind, body — be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and some mastery of the secret . . . I have still to remain in retirement. For I am determined not to work in the external field till I have the sure and complete possession of this new power of action — not to build except on a perfect foundation.

I shall never forget the cumulative effect of our first meeting nor the avidity with which I read those letters again and again that night. And the thrill, almost of romance! Sri Aurobindo's yoga and its message at first hand! I could not sleep that night — for sheer joy. How could one sleep after having seen his radiant face with eyes like stars!

DILIP KUMAR ROY

(*Among the Great* by Dilip Kumar Roy, Jaico Books, 1950, pp. 208-30)

SRI AUROBINDO

The earth is holy ground since thou art born
 And walk'st her clay.
At thy angel tread a new-lit sun at morn
 Wakes every day.

All pathways at thy footfall break to flowers
 Of harmony
And the winds repeat thy hallowed name for hours
 In ecstasy.

The evening-star met in thy eyes of flame
 Her love's own fire,
And greeting thee the silent moon became
 Transformed to a lyre.

Rainbows descend below, thy robes to dye,
 O ageless Gleam!
A-heave with hue and vision the poets cry:
 "Comes true, our Dream!"

NISHIKANTO

(Translated by Dilip Kumar Roy from the author's original in Bengali)

*(Poems on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry, 1951, p. 42)*

MEETING SRI AUROBINDO

VISITORS to Savitri Bhavan quite often ask me whether I met Sri Aurobindo. As I came to Auroville in 1970 at the age of 28, I have to tell them that I was never blessed with his physical Darshan. Nevertheless, I count the day on which I first came to know about him as the turning-point in my life. It was a Sunday afternoon in April 1969. I think the date was April 23rd, but have never been able to verify it.

The spring of 1969 was the nadir of my life. All the things I had placed my hopes in seemed to have failed. I seemed to be caught in a long dark tunnel, with no gleam of light in front, no way out to be seen or felt. Seeking for guidance, I had turned to the Chinese Book of Changes, the *I Ching*, a great oracle which had given light in the past. The message I received was “It is advisable to meet a great man.” This advice only deepened my sense of despair. I felt that I had searched everywhere, and had come to the conclusion that there were no more great men left in the world. In this state of mind, I went to visit someone I knew only slightly — and met Sri Aurobindo!

When I reached my friend’s flat I was surprised to find it packed with young people. They were all sitting on the floor, while on the only sofa, at one end of the room, sat two men who seemed much older than any of us. One of them was giving a talk, in clear and understandable English, but with a strong German accent. As he spoke, I had a remarkable experience. As he touched on various topics which interested me a lot, or which had interested me earlier, I had the feeling that all these topics corresponded to rooms inside my head — rooms which had been closed, shut off from each other, but which, as he spoke, suddenly opened up and interconnected . . . and showed a clear way ahead, a way to go on living.

Since I had come into the middle of the talk, I did not know who or what was being spoken about. At the end, as people stood up and began to move away, I rushed up to the man who had been speaking and said “Who was that? Who were you talking about?” — “Sri Aurobindo.” I was amazed. For at least 10 years I had been on the look-out, searching for answers. Over the previous three years that search had become intense, a real quest. I thought I had heard of everyone, read everything. How was it possible that in all that time I had never even heard the name of this man who held the key?

Later on, as I began to read Sri Aurobindo’s books and learn more about him, I realised that in fact I had heard his name before, and that on several occasions I had been touched by his influence without recognising it. I had even been given opportunities to meet him earlier — but had not been ready. It had been necessary to go down into that blackness, in order to become ready to meet the Great Man who could save me. In fact what the *I Ching* means by ‘a great man’ is a realised soul, or more: a vibhuti or an avatar.

So what was the key that I was looking for? Since my teens, in fact since the

spring of 1956, when I first began to grow aware of the larger world around my home, my family and school at the time of the Hungarian Uprising, I had felt distinctly that the world could be better, should be better, and that there must be a way to help it become better for everyone, that in fact finding and living that way would be the only worthwhile thing to do with one's life. I had been searching and experimenting, and — as I said before — felt that I had come to a dead end, with no way out, nothing worth living for.

The key that was given on that momentous Sunday afternoon — and how obvious it seemed, once it had been shown! — was that although our present state of consciousness is very evidently unable to cope with all the problems that are confronting it, higher states of consciousness are possible: evolution is not finished, it is on-going; future evolutionary developments will be developments of consciousness; and even now there already exist psychological self-disciplines that can be practised to arrive at higher states of consciousness that are not yet normal to humanity, that are closer to that future consciousness that will command the wisdom and power to fulfil all our dreams and aspirations of a nobler, truer, happier, richer life on earth for all beings. Sri Aurobindo is the Great Man who has shown us this possibility, given us this key to a more meaningful and worthwhile life.

The two men who brought that message to myself and my friends were Dick Batstone, who at that time was looking after the Sri Aurobindo Centre in Bell Street, near to Regent's Park, and the speaker with the German accent, Jobst Muehling. Over the next six months Jobst became a friend and mentor to that motley group of young people. He was in London trying to find a publisher for a very comprehensive compilation he had prepared, drawing on all the then available published writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, entitled "The Psychology of Integral Yoga". So far as I know, that book has never been published. But over the weeks and months after that first occasion, Jobst used to come to that same basement flat in Earls Court and read passages from it to 15 or 20 young people assembled there. It very often happened that quite a number of them fell asleep in the course of the evening. Jobst said it didn't matter, subconsciously they would be absorbing the vibrations. But I did not fall asleep — I was soaking up the precious words like a sponge. To this day I feel the benefits of that early initiation into Sri Aurobindo's unique revelation of the planes and parts of our being, and our connection with the unfolding universe.

Outwardly there was no change in my life at first. I continued my work at the Library Association, near Russell Square and the British Museum. This entailed about an hour's journey back and forth on the Underground, during which I read one or another of the books lent to me by Jobst. I remember too reading *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga* in my lunch hour. There was a quiet lounge upstairs at the Association, which always seemed to be deserted at lunchtime. There I gazed at the small photo of the Mother printed at the front of the book, and tried to open myself to her. One evening on my homeward journey, I was reading *The Bases of Yoga*. And suddenly,

one of Sri Aurobindo's letters seemed to reveal to me the very reason why I had taken birth this time. It was another overwhelming experience, on a deeper level from that first meeting. Instead of going home as usual, I went to Jobst's place and told him what I had understood. "In that case," he said "Take *The Synthesis of Yoga* and make it your bible."

At that time there was no bookshop in London where one could buy Sri Aurobindo's books. Instead we sent an order to Carlo Schuller in Zurich. When he sent the book, he also sent a photo of the Mother, and some information about Auroville — a project we knew nothing about at the time but which was to become my home from 1970 onwards.

Of course, in my youthful enthusiasm, I was quite over-optimistic about what I might be able to achieve by following Sri Aurobindo. Now, almost 40 years later, I look back, amazed at how much time has passed since that moment of meeting, and how very little, really, I have been able to change in myself in all that time. But the journey from there to here, under his protection and guidance, has been so rich and meaningful, has brought such hope, even the certitude of a better future, of a certain Victory: although the length of the journey is unsure, the Goal is assured. On this path, no effort is wasted . . .

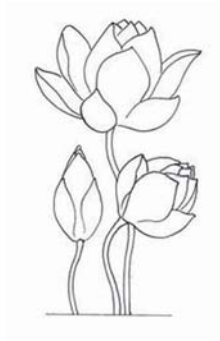
All gratitude to Sri Aurobindo!

SHRADDHAVAN

When you have once set out on this path, you will find that no step is lost; every least movement will be a gain; you will find there no obstacle that can baulk you of your advance.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 95)



MEETING THE MASTER AT PONDICHERRY

I

I WENT out from Pondicherry in 1947 when India was on the eve of securing her partitioned freedom. On my return-journey in the month of July 1947, I became conscious of the fact that it was my return to a place where I had passed nearly twenty-five years at a stretch. The memory of my first visit in 1918 awoke in me all the old impressions vividly. I saw then that even at that early period Sri Aurobindo had been for me the embodiment of the Supreme Consciousness. I began to search mentally for the exact time-moment when I had come to know him. Travelling far into the past I found it was in 1914 when I read a notice in the *Bombay Chronicle* about the publication of a monthly magazine — the *Arya* — from Pondicherry by Sri Aurobindo. I hastened to register my name in advance. In those days of political storms, to avoid the suspicion of the college authorities and the police, I had ordered the magazine to be delivered to an address outside the college. Sri Aurobindo then appeared to me to be the personification of the ideal of the life divine which he so ably put before humanity in the *Arya*.

But the question: “Why did I order the *Arya*?” remained. On trying to find an answer I found that I had known him before the appearance of the *Arya*.

The Congress broke up at Surat in 1907. Sri Aurobindo had played a prominent part in that historical session. From Surat he came to Baroda, and at Vankaner Theatre and at Prof. Manik Rao’s old gymnasium in Dandia Bazar he delivered several speeches which not only took the audience by storm but changed entirely the course of many lives. I also heard him without understanding everything that was spoken. But ever since I had seen him I had got the constant feeling that he was one known to me, and so my mind could not fix the exact time-moment when I knew him. It is certain that the connection seemed to begin with the great tidal wave of the national movement in the political life of India; but I think it was only the apparent beginning. The years between 1903 and 1910 were those of unprecedented awakening and revolution. The generations that followed also witnessed two or three powerful floods of the national movement. But the very first onrush of the newly awakened national consciousness of India was unique. That tidal wave in its initial onrush defined the goal of India’s political ideal — an independent republic. Alternating movements of ebb and flow in the national movement followed till in 1947 the goal was reached. The lives of leaders and workers, who rode, willingly and with delight on the dangerous crest of the tidal wave, underwent great transformations. Our small group in Gujerat got its goal fixed — the winning of undiluted freedom for India.

All the energies of the leaders were taken up by the freedom movement. Only a few among them attempted to see beyond the horizon of political freedom some ideal of human perfection for, after all, freedom is not the ultimate goal but a condition

for the expression of the cultural Spirit of India. In Swami Shraddhananda, Pandit Madanmohan Malavia, Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi — to name some leaders — we see the double aspect of the inspiration. Among all the visions of perfection of the human spirit on earth, I found the synthetic and integral vision of Sri Aurobindo the most rational and the most satisfying. It meets the need of the individual and collective life of man of today. It is the international form of the fundamental elements of Indian culture. It is, Dr. S. K. Maitra says, the message which holds out a hope in a world of despair.

This aspect of Sri Aurobindo's vision attracted me as much as the natural affinity which I had felt on seeing him. I found on making a serious study of the *Arya* that it led me to very rational conclusions with regard to the solutions of the deepest problems of life. I opened correspondence with him and in 1916, with his permission, began to translate the *Arya* into Gujarati.

But, though I had seen him from a distance and felt an unaccountable familiarity with him, still I had not yet met him personally. When the question of putting into execution the revolutionary plan, which Sri Aurobindo had given to my brother, — the late C. B. Purani — at Baroda in 1907, arose, I thought it better to obtain Sri Aurobindo's consent to it. Barindra, his brother, had given the formula for preparing bombs to my brother and I was also very impatient to begin the work. But still we thought it necessary to consult the great leader who had given us the inspiration, as the lives of many young men were involved in the plan.

I had an introduction to S. V. V. S. Aiyar who was then staying at Pondicherry. It was in December 1918 that I reached Pondicherry. I did not stay long with Mr. Aiyar. I took up my bundle of books — mainly the *Arya* — and went to No. 41 Rue François Martin, the *Arya* office, which was also Sri Aurobindo's residence. The house looked a little queer; on the right side as one entered were a few plantain trees and by their side a heap of broken tiles. On the left at the edge of the open courtyard four doors giving entrance to four rooms were seen. The verandah outside was wide. It was about 8 in the morning. The time for meeting Sri Aurobindo was fixed at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I waited all the time in the house, occasionally chatting with the two inmates who were there.

*

Sri Aurobindo was sitting in a wooden chair behind a small table covered with an indigo-blue cloth in the verandah upstairs when I went up to meet him. I felt a spiritual light surrounding his face. His look was penetrating. He had known me by my correspondence. I reminded him about my brother having met him at Baroda; he had not forgotten him. Then I informed him that our group was now ready to start revolutionary activity. It had taken us about eleven years to get organised.

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for some time. Then he put me questions about

my sadhana — spiritual practice. I described my efforts and added: “Sadhana is all right, but it is difficult to concentrate on it so long as India is not free.”

“Perhaps it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity to free India,” he said.

“But without that how is the British Government to go from India?” I asked him.

“That is another question; but if India can be free without revolutionary activity, why should you execute the plan? It is better to concentrate on yoga — the spiritual practice,” he replied.

“But India is a land that has sadhana in its blood. When India is free, I believe, thousands will devote themselves to yoga. But in the world of to-day who will listen to the truth from, or spirituality of, slaves?” I asked him.

He replied: “India has already decided to win freedom and so there will certainly be found leaders and men to work for that goal. But all are not called to yoga. So, when you have the call, is it not better to concentrate upon it? If you want to carry out the revolutionary programme you are free to do it, but I cannot give my consent to it.”

“But it was you who gave us the inspiration and the start for revolutionary activity. Why do you now refuse to give your consent to its execution?” I asked.

“Because I have done the work and I know its difficulties. Young men come forward to join the movement, driven by idealism and enthusiasm. But these elements do not last long. It becomes very difficult to observe and extract discipline. Small groups begin to form within the organisation, rivalries grow between groups and even between individuals. There is competition for leadership. The agents of the Government generally manage to join these organisations from the very beginning. And so the organisations are unable to act effectively. Sometimes they sink so low as to quarrel even for money,” he said calmly.

“But even supposing that I grant sadhana to be of greater importance, and even intellectually understand that I should concentrate upon it, — my difficulty is that I feel intensely that I must do something for the freedom of India. I have been unable to sleep soundly for the last two years and a half. I can remain quiet if I make a very strong effort. But the concentration of my whole being turns towards India’s freedom. It is difficult for me to sleep till that is secured.”

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for two or three minutes. It was a long pause. Then he said: “Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?”

“Who can give such an assurance?” I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question.

Again he remained silent for three or four minutes. Then he looked at me and added: “Suppose I give you the assurance?”

I paused for a moment, considered the question with myself and said: “If you give the assurance, I can accept it.”

“Then I give you the assurance that India will be free,” he said in a serious tone.

My work was over — the purpose of my visit to Pondicherry was served. My personal question and the problem of our group was solved! I then conveyed to him the message of S. J. K. G. Deshpande from Baroda. I told him that financial help could be arranged from Baroda, if necessary, to which he replied, “At present what is required comes from Bengal, especially from Chandernagore. So there is no need.”

When the talk turned to Prof. D. L. Purohit of Baroda Sri Aurobindo recounted the incident of his visit to Pondicherry where he had come to inquire into the relation between the Church and the State. He had paid a courtesy call on Sri Aurobindo as he had known him at Baroda. This had resulted in his resignation from Baroda State service on account of the pressure of the British Residency. I conveyed to Sri Aurobindo the good news that after his resignation Mr. Purohit had started practice as a lawyer and had been quite successful, earning more than the pay he had been getting as a professor.

It was time for me to leave. The question of Indian freedom again arose in my mind, and at the time of taking leave, after I had got up to depart, I could not repress the question — it was a question of very life for me: “Are you quite sure that India will be free?”

I did not, at that time, realise the full import of my query. I wanted a guarantee, and though the assurance had been given my doubts had not completely disappeared.

Sri Aurobindo became very serious. The yogi in him came forward, his gaze was fixed at the sky that could be seen beyond the window. Then he looked at me and putting his fist on the table he said:

“You can take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow. The decree has already gone forth — it may not be long in coming.”

I bowed down to him. That day I was able to sleep soundly in the train after more than two years. And in my mind was fixed for ever the picture of that scene: two of us standing near the small table, my earnest question, that upward gaze, and that quiet and firm voice with power in it to shake the world, that firm fist planted on the table — the symbol of self-confidence of the divine Truth. There may be rank Kaliyuga, the Iron Age, in the whole world but it is the great good fortune of India that she has sons who know the Truth and have the unshakable faith in it, and can risk their lives for its sake. In this significant fact is contained the divine destiny of India and of the world.

*

After meeting Sri Aurobindo I was quite relieved of the great strain that was upon me. Now that I felt Indian freedom to be a certainty, I could participate in public movements with equanimity and with a truer spiritual attitude. I got some experiences also which confirmed my faith in Sri Aurobindo's path. I got the confident faith in a divine Power that is beyond time and space and that can and does work in

the world. I came to know that any man with a sincere aspiration for it can come in contact with that Power.

There were people who thought that Sri Aurobindo had retired from life, that he did not take any interest in the world and its affairs. These ideas never troubled me. On the contrary, I felt that his work was of tremendous significance for humanity and its future. In fact, the dynamic aspect of his spirituality, his insistence on life as a field for the manifestation of the Spirit, and his great synthesis added to the attraction I had already felt. To me he appeared as the spiritual Sun in modern times shedding his light on mankind from the height of his consciousness, and Pondicherry where he lived was a place of pilgrimage.

II

The second time I met Sri Aurobindo was in 1921, when there was a greater familiarity. Having come for a short stay, I remained eleven days on Sri Aurobindo's asking me to prolong my stay. During my journey from Madras to Pondicherry I was enchanted by the natural scenery — the vast stretches of green paddy fields. But Pondicherry as a city was lethargic, with a colonial atmosphere — an exhibition of the worst elements of European and Indian culture. The market was dirty and stinking and the people had no idea of sanitation. The sea-beach was made filthy by them. Smuggling was the main business.

*

But the greatest surprise of my visit in 1921 was the “darshan” of Sri Aurobindo. During the interval of two years his body had undergone a transformation which could only be described as miraculous. In 1918 the colour of the body was like that of an ordinary Bengali — rather dark — though there was a lustre on the face and the gaze was penetrating. On going upstairs to see him (in the same house) I found his cheeks wore an apple-pink colour and the whole body glowed with a soft creamy white light. So great and unexpected was the change that I could not help exclaiming:

“What has happened to you?”

Instead of giving a direct reply he parried the question, as I had grown a beard: “And what has happened to you?”

But afterwards in the course of talk he explained to me that when the Higher Consciousness, after descending to the mental level, comes down to the vital and even below the vital, then a transformation takes place in the nervous and even in the physical being. He asked me to join the meditation in the afternoon and also the evening sittings.

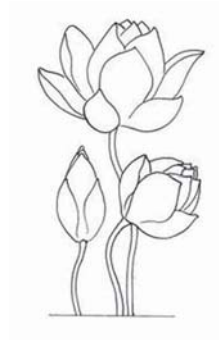
This time I saw the Mother for the first time. She was standing near the staircase

when Sri Aurobindo was going upstairs after lunch. Such unearthly beauty I had never seen — she appeared to be about 20 whereas she was more than 37 years old.

I found the atmosphere of the Ashram tense. The Mother and Datta, *i.e.* Miss Hodgson, had come to stay in No. 41 Rue François Martin. The house had undergone a great change. There was a clean garden in the open courtyard, every room had simple and decent furniture, — a mat, a chair and a small table. There was an air of tidiness and order. This was, no doubt, the effect of Mother's presence. But yet the atmosphere was tense because Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were engaged in fighting with forces of the vital plane.

A. B. PURANI

(*Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani, published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 1982, pp. 14-21)



DARSHAN

The far voices of the earth die:
And in the vast lone hush of Being, Thou
Foldest Thy love around my cry . . .

The worlds dissolve to darkness now,
And in the gaps of emptiness we fly
Beyond the farthest star-hill's brow . . .

Aeons of memoried night unroll
Their cycles of chained karmic griefs and mirths
Across the winging of my soul;

Thou bearest me past myriad births,
Fire-wheels of death and destiny's control,
To silent fashionings of new earths . . .

A white day dawns upon the deep,
The frozen rocks of Space divide and free
The warm gold mystery they keep.

O power-winged Love, Thou bearest me
O'er storm-black gulfs and endless mires of sleep,
To sunlit heavens of purity.

21.2.1948

THÉMIS

*(Poems on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry, 1951, p. 50)*

MY SUPREME DISCOVERY

SOME of the greatest and most important discoveries have been made through sheer accident, for example Columbus's discovery of America and Newton's discovery of the Law of Gravitation. The Supreme Discovery of my life has also been the result of a mere chance.

It so happened that in December 1939, my esteemed and valued friend, Dr. Indra Sen and myself decided to undertake Bharat Yatra, not so much to see the different provinces and places but mainly to make a study of the diverse cultures of our peoples. Our combination was rather curious — Dr. Indra Sen, a man of great learning and erudition (he was then the Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the Hindu College, Delhi) and I, a businessman with a flair for politics.

When my wife came to know of our conspiracy, she insisted on our taking our son Anil, who was then only nine and also a servant to look after Anil.

So we made all the necessary arrangements and purchased zonal tickets which with the route map printed in colour looked more like passports describing in detail and with great beauty the whole route — Delhi, Mathura, Agra, Aligarh, Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, Benaras, Patna, Calcutta, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Vishakapatnam, Bezwada, Madras, Bangalore, Mysore, Hyderabad, Sholapur, Poona, Bombay, Surat, Baroda, Ahmedabad, Ajmer, Jaipur and back to Delhi. Believe it or not, the ticket cost Rs. 36/8 as.

The journey was naturally eventful. Though our train was not a 'Pilgrim Special', yet we did not have to spend even an anna on our lodging anywhere. We had so planned our schedule that we spent the day in seeing and visiting places and the night on the train. Out of the train, we always took shelter and lodged under some thick and big tree near the railway station. The servant looked after the luggage and cooked the food, and after taking our meals, we would go to the town, city, village, temple or historical places, as the case may be returning to our 'Lodge' late in the evening with sufficient time to have our dinner and board the train for our next destination. Sometimes we managed to cook even in the compartment. That was possible in those days when people were not so crazy for travelling and there used to be enough space in the trains even to use them as play-grounds.

Needless to say that economy was an overriding factor with us. Apart from the above-mentioned measures, we avoided the use of any transport as far as possible, as in those days legs used to be certainly stronger, more mobile and quicker than they are today. Also, we never spent anything on coolies because the heavier load was carried by the servant and the rest by Dr. Indra Sen and me. Anil was responsible for carrying the basket. And can you imagine the result of all that? We did not even have any exact idea of it at that time. But after the conclusion of this over-a-month-long-tour of almost the whole subcontinent, when we made the final account, the total expense, including the cost of both the zonal railway tickets, worked out to be a

‘fantastic’ figure! — Rs. 75/12 as. per head all told.

About ten days after the commencement of our journey, we reached Madras.

...

The journey down and across the South was both pleasing and revealing.

...

When we reached Rameshwaram on the Eastern Coast, we came to know that only a few miles down was the station from where people embarked for Ceylon which was only 40 miles beyond the sea. It was obviously too big a temptation to resist.

...

On our way back from Ceylon, somebody told us that on the off side railway line lay Pondicherry — French India where there was an Ashram of an Indian Yogi. The lure of visiting yet another foreign territory and the Ashram in that far-fetched corner of our subcontinent proved too strong. Moreover, I thought that by visiting Pondicherry I could tell my friends back home that I was ‘*Foreign-Returned*’ having been to two foreign lands including a part of the fascinating country called France. Thus we took a train for Pondicherry where we hoped to spend just an evening and the night.

My first surprise after passing through the streets of Pondicherry was that it was anything but a foreign or French territory. Almost in every way and every inch, it was like any other town of the Madras State — same people, of same stature and complexion, wearing the same dresses and speaking the same Tamil language.

Surprise was again my immediate reaction on first seeing the Ashram building. It appeared as one of the many buildings that dotted the area. We saw no such distinctive feature in the design and architecture of the building that could even faintly suggest that it was an Ashram. When we got inside the building we saw a number of people, all in simple and neat dresses, and some even in pants and coats, but no saints or sannyasins, no monks or mahants, no shaven heads or jata-dharis, no bare-bodied bhaktas or saffron-robed sadhus, no tilak-dharis or kanphatas. Neither did we spot any temple, moortis or granths.

However, our enquiries solicited for us the information that the Yogi, the Master of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, had his abode on the first floor of the building. To be precise, I heard to my great amazement and dismay that Sri Aurobindo had never stirred out of his room for the past 14 years. However, I was disappointed to know that not only we, but in fact virtually nobody could see Sri Aurobindo and that only four times in a year, on Darshan Days, people could see him. And seeing meant just having a fleeting glimpse from a distance — no talks, discussions or conversations.

All this sounded so intriguing to me! But that was not the end of it. I was further told that there was also the Mother in the Ashram, a French lady. A French lady and

Mother of the Ashram founded by an Indian Yogi! It only further accentuated the atmosphere of surprise and suspense — though these peculiar revelations had naturally heightened my curiosity and keenness to unravel this mystery which was deepening and becoming more and more fascinating with every new bit of information.

What then was to be done! What for had we gone there? We could not see the sage, we could not interview the Mother, there was no kirtan or katha, no preaching or prayers, no shiksha or sermons, no bhajans or artis, no discourses or discussions, no havans or yajnas, no asanas or pranayam, no mantras or meetings! Then what sort of an ashram was this? It was so bewildering! At last someone told us that meditation was held in the evening which we could join.

As directed, we reached the Meditation Hall at about 7 p.m. A few scores of men and women were already seated there with their eyes closed, lips virtually sealed and heads bowed. All the lights had been put out and in the total darkness there was just a glimmer of light. It was so quiet and calm! The atmosphere of meditation was infectious and I felt a strong prompting to join it and close my eyes. But I wanted to see what was to happen, hence I kept watching intently.

Now there was a complete hush. But lo! my eyes suddenly beheld something which looked so utterly superb but so dream-like. A slender lady, draped in light and wearing a gold mukut on her forehead was lightly stepping down on the heavily carpeted curved staircase. In her gait there was majesty, in her face a glowing grace and her eyes flashed gleams that pierced the darkness below and around. My gaze was fixed on that fairy-like figure whose calm and beautiful face was radiating light and making the whole atmosphere so supernatural that she looked every inch an angel descending from Heaven.

She now stopped and stood at the bend of the staircase, her wide open eyes surveying the scene from one end of the hall to the other. In a few moments, she went into a trance which made her look even more rapturous. While she stood there statue-like, I felt as if she was suddenly soaring above. Though her eyelids were now locked in embrace, yet I almost saw them passing sweet messages and exchanging glances with something or somebody that was not perceptible. All her limbs seemed blended in harmony and her entire figure was wrapped in ecstasy. The halo of serenity and divinity around her was like a circular rainbow in the multi-colours of which my eyes perceived visionary images and indications.

And now suddenly a smile dawned on her lips and with the speed of lightning it stole across her cheeks, eyes, the whole face. The smile blossomed into a flower and then the petals of blessings and grace showered down on the entranced devotees, who, in deep gratitude, uplifted their eyes, only to behold that she suddenly turned to return to her abode. Her departure was as blissful and mysterious as her advent and my racing gaze in a few moments lost the heavenly track on which trod that divine figure.

As the congregation dispersed, we learnt that she was the Mother — the French lady.

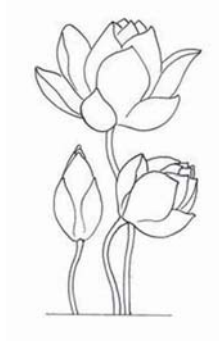
That night as I lay asleep, I underwent strange but sweet experiences. A train of dreams ran on the rails of my mind. That majestic personification of grace and beauty, of love and life appeared on the screen of my mind like a continuously running film. I woke up so light in body as if I had lost some part of it and yet the loss seemed so sweet and exhilarating. There were some peculiar sensations brewing within my heart which I could not fathom. Something had happened though I knew not what it was.

When we left the town, the morning after that fateful and momentous evening, I could clearly see that my destiny had been decided and the die had been cast. I knew that I was leaving only to return and return again and again. As the train steamed out homewards, I felt as if I had found my real home. I was sad to leave but also happy — happy over my luck because the fleeting glance of a few moments had brought to me privileges which the toil of a whole life often fails to achieve.

This was, then, the Supreme Discovery of my life, the miracle of Pondicherry where I lost my heart and won the soul and the real life.

SURENDRANATH JAUHAR

(*My Mother* by Surendranath Jauhar published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Delhi Branch, 1982, pp. 1-7)



THE RADIANT SMILE

I MET Her at the age of ten. At ten in 1971, my grandfather Shri Kalidasa Desai, invited me to accompany him on a journey. A journey to Pondicherry for a Darshana. At ten, I was studying in the St. Francis of Assisi Convent School in Navsari. My bench mate and friend was a mischievous boy called Hateem. I used to boast to him what a pet I was for my grandfather, Bapa, who came from Africa. Bapa was the centre of my universe at that time. He had become devoted to Sri Ambelal Mehta who had joined the Ashram in the early days. Ambelal whom he called Bhai used to send him blessings and messages right from those days of 1940's. My grandfather who had lost his wife in a second childbirth was totally anchored in the Mother since his darshan visits to the Ashram. I agreed to join him on the trip because we were going to fly from Mumbai to Chennai. I remember all the feelings so vividly. We reached Pondicherry, met Bhai who lived with two young Ashramites Hrishikesh and Deepak. He rushed us to the Samadhi. I remember how tired and sleepy I was on the last leg but as soon as we reached the Samadhi in the atmosphere of incense and flowers all on a sudden I was awakened refreshed.

*One lucent corner windowing hidden things
Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.*

I looked up at a window and saw a lady smiling down at me; and all was wondrous. From that moment on memory records show only a gradual widening of that Smile and a growing awareness of a wonder that made everything joyous, marvellous. . . .

On April 24, 1972 we saw the Mother — a crowd silently praying as one, at the Balcony Darshana. Then it drizzled a little but it was felt as a shower of magic. Everyday we asked Her to grant us an audience with Her by putting our little prayers in the message box. But there was no call. But on the Darshan day I wrote to Her with my ugly, clumsy handwriting. On 25th as we waited near the Samadhi the call came. I, my papa and my grandpa had been granted to see Her. . . .

*The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god.*

I felt shy and hesitant as we climbed the stairs. Space, time as a continuum of consciousness became concentrated on one point — how I must bow to Her. I watched all the people bow to Her and being blessed. I saw my father bow to Her and then the awesome moment came when my turn came. I suddenly was so overwhelmed by the radiant Smile that I bent to touch Her feet and found myself completely embraced with my face on Her lap. How to measure that time encapsulating all the yearning and prayer answered in one signal moment when I felt Her touch and I realised in my

overflowing heart that I had met my Mother. Finally, all that followed, being blessed, given gifts by Champaklal-ji, coming down to the Samadhi, going to Auroville directly afterwards, was flowing in that utter feeling of Mother's love.

BEENA NAYAK

(Darshan – Remembering Sweet Mother and Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006, pp. 174-75)

