

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXII

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE INNER FIELDS

There is a brighter ether than this blue
 Pretence of an enveloping heavenly vault,
 A deeper greenness than this laughing assault¹
Of emerald rapture pearled with tears of dew.
Immortal spaces of cerulean hue
 Are in our reach and fields without this fault
 Of drab brown earth and streams that never halt
In their deep murmur which white flowers strew

Floating like stars upon a strip of sky.
 This world behind is made of truer stuff
 Than the manufactured tissue of earth's grace.
There we can walk and see the gods go by
 And sip from Hebe's cup nectar enough
 To make for us heavenly limbs and deathless face.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 158)

1. Royaler investiture than this massed assault

‘ONE THOUSAND MILES AWAY’

It is equally ignorant and one thousand miles away from my teaching to find it in your relations with human beings or in the nobility of the human character or an idea that we are here to establish mental and moral and social Truth and justice on human and egoistic lines. I have never promised to do anything of the kind. Human nature is made up of imperfections, even its righteousness and virtue are pretensions, imperfections and prancings of a self-approbatory egoism What is aimed at by us is a spiritual truth as the basis of life, the first words of which are surrender and union with the Divine and the transcendence of ego. So long as that basis is not established, a sadhak is only an ignorant and imperfect human being struggling with the evils of the lower nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bulletin*, February 1964, p. 14)

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[*During a conversation on 18 December 1963, when the Mother chose this passage for use as a filler in the Bulletin, she remarked:*

I like this letter because he has said: “I have never promised anything of the kind.” It is that which, for me, is important.]

KNOWLEDGE

ALWAYS in this sense of a supreme self-knowledge is this word *jñāna* used in Indian philosophy and Yoga; it is the light by which we grow into our true being, not the knowledge by which we increase our information and our intellectual riches; it is not scientific or psychological or philosophic or ethical or aesthetic or worldly and practical knowledge. These too no doubt help us to grow, but only in the becoming, not in the being; they enter into the definition of Yogic knowledge only when we use them as aids to know the Supreme, the Self, the Divine, — scientific knowledge, when we can get through the veil of processes and phenomena and see the one Reality behind which explains them all; psychological knowledge, when we use it to know ourselves and to distinguish the lower from the higher, so that this we may renounce and into that we may grow; philosophical knowledge, when we turn it as a light upon the essential principles of existence so as to discover and live in that which is eternal; ethical knowledge, when by it having distinguished sin from virtue we put away the one and rise above the other into the pure innocence of the divine Nature; aesthetic knowledge, when we discover by it the beauty of the Divine; knowledge of the world, when we see through it the way of the Lord with his creatures and use it for the service of the Divine in man. Even then they are only aids; the real knowledge is that which is a secret to the mind, of which the mind only gets reflections, but which lives in the spirit.

The Gita in describing how we come by this knowledge, says that we get first initiation into it from the men of knowledge who have *seen*, not those who know merely by the intellect, its essential truths; but the actuality of it comes from within ourselves: “the man who is perfected by Yoga, finds it of himself in the self by the course of Time,” it grows within him, that is to say, and he grows into it as he goes on increasing in desirelessness, in equality, in devotion to the Divine. It is only of the supreme knowledge that this can altogether be said; the knowledge which the intellect of man amasses, is gathered laboriously by the senses and the reason from outside. To get this other knowledge, self-existent, intuitive, self-experiencing, self-revealing, we must have conquered and controlled our mind and senses, *saṁyatendriyaḥ*, so that we are no longer subject to their delusions, but rather the mind and senses become its pure mirror; we must have fixed our whole conscious being on the truth of that supreme reality in which all exists, *tat-paraḥ*, so that it may display in us its luminous self-existence.

Finally, we must have a faith which no intellectual doubt can be allowed to disturb, *śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*. “The ignorant who has not faith, the soul of doubt goeth to perdition; neither this world, nor the supreme world, nor any happiness is for the soul full of doubts.” In fact, it is true that without faith nothing decisive can

be achieved either in this world or for possession of the world above, and that it is only by laying hold of some sure basis and positive support that man can attain any measure of terrestrial or celestial success and satisfaction and happiness; the merely sceptical mind loses itself in the void. But still in the lower knowledge doubt and scepticism have their temporary uses; in the higher they are stumbling-blocks: for there the whole secret is not the balancing of truth and error, but a constantly progressing realisation of revealed truth. In intellectual knowledge there is always a mixture of falsehood or incompleteness which has to be got rid of by subjecting the truth itself to sceptical inquiry; but in the higher knowledge falsehood cannot enter and that which intellect contributes by attaching itself to this or that opinion, cannot be got rid of by mere questioning, but will fall away of itself by persistence in realisation. Whatever incompleteness there is in the knowledge attained, it must be got rid of, not by questioning in its roots what has already been realised, but by proceeding to further and more complete realisation through a deeper, higher and wider living in the Spirit. And what is not yet realised must be prepared for by faith, not by sceptical questioning, because this truth is one which the intellect cannot give and which is indeed often quite opposed to the ideas in which the reasoning and logical mind gets entangled: it is not a truth which has to be proved, but a truth which has to be lived inwardly, a greater reality into which we have to grow. Finally, it is in itself a self-existent truth and would be self-evident if it were not for the sorceries of the ignorance in which we live; the doubts, the perplexities which prevent us from accepting and following it, arise from that ignorance, from the sense-bewildered, opinion-perplexed heart and mind, living as they do in a lower and phenomenal truth and therefore questioning the higher realities, *ajñāna-sambhūtaṁ hṛtsthāṁ samśayam*. They have to be cut away by the sword of knowledge, says the Gita, by the knowledge that realises, by resorting constantly to Yoga, that is, by living out the union with the Supreme whose truth being known all is known, *yasmin vijñāte sarvaṁ vijñātam*.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 203-05)

MEASURING ROD OF IGNORANCE

For knowledge comes not to us as a guest
Called into our chamber from the outer world;
A friend and inmate of our secret self,
It hid behind our minds and fell asleep
And slowly wakes beneath the blows of life;
The mighty daemon lies unshaped within,
To evoke, to give it form is Nature's task.
All was a chaos of the true and false,
Mind sought amid deep mists of Nescience;
It looked within itself but saw not God.
A material interim diplomacy
Denied the Truth that transient truths might live
And hid the Deity in creed and guess
That the World-Ignorance might grow slowly wise.
This was the imbroglio made by sovereign Mind
Looking from a gleam-ridge into the Night
In her first tamperings with Inconscience:
Its alien dusk baffles her luminous eyes;
Her rapid hands must learn a cautious zeal;
Only a slow advance the earth can bear.
Yet was her strength unlike the unseeing earth's
Compelled to handle makeshift instruments
Invented by the life-force and the flesh.
Earth all perceives through doubtful images,
All she conceives in hazardous jets of sight,
Small lights kindled by touches of groping thought.
Incapable of the soul's direct inlook
She sees by spasms and solders knowledge-scrap,
Makes Truth the slave-girl of her indigence,
Expelling Nature's mystic unity
Cuts into quantum and mass the moving All;
She takes for measuring-rod her ignorance.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 244)

UNITY, SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, SPIRIT

THE idea by which the enlightenment of Europe has been governed is the passion for the discovery of the Truth and Law that constitutes existence and governs the process of the world, the attempt to develop the life and potentialities of man, his ideals, institutions, organisations by the knowledge of that Law and Truth and the confidence that along this line lies the road of human progress and perfection.

The idea is absolutely just and we accept it entirely; but its application has been erroneous. For the Law and Truth that has to be discovered is not that of the material world — though this is required, nor even of the mental and physical — though this is indispensable, but the Law and Truth of the Spirit on which all the rest depends. For it is the power of the Self of things that expresses itself in their forms and processes.

The message of the East to the West is a true message, “Only by finding himself can man be saved,” and “what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul?” The West has heard the message and is seeking out the law and truth of the soul and the evidences of an inner reality greater than the material. The danger is that with her passion for mechanism and her exaggerated intellectuality she may fog herself in an external and false psychism, such as we see arising in England and America, the homes of the mechanical genius, or in intellectual, unspiritual and therefore erroneous theories of the Absolute, such as have run their course in critical and metaphysical Germany.

The idea by which the illumination of Asia has been governed is the firm knowledge that truth of the Spirit is the sole real truth, the belief that the psychological life of man is an instrument for attaining to the truth of the Spirit and that its laws must be known and practised with that aim paramount, and the attempt to form the external life of man and the institutions of society into a suitable mould for the great endeavour.

This idea, too, is absolutely just and we accept it entirely. But in its application, and in India most, it has deviated into a divorce between the Spirit and its instruments and a disparagement and narrowing of the mental and external life of the race. For it is only on the widest and richest efflorescence of this instrumental life that the fullest and most absolute attainment of the spiritual can be securely based. This knowledge the ancients of the East possessed and practised; it has been dimmed in knowledge and lost in practice by their descendants.

The message the West brings to the East is a true message. Man also is God and it is through his developing manhood that he approaches the godhead; Life also is the Divine, its progressive expansion is the self-expression of the Brahman, and to deny Life is to diminish the Godhead within us. This is the truth that returns to the East from the West translated into the language of the higher truth the East already possesses;

and it is an ancient knowledge. The East also is awaking to the message. The danger is that Asia may accept it in the European form, forget for a time her own law and nature and either copy blindly the West or make a disastrous amalgam of that which she has in its most inferior forms and the crudenesses which are invading her.

The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self so that it shall re-embrace, permeate, dominate, transfigure the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity.

This is our ideal and our search. Throughout the world there are plenty of movements inspired by the same drift, but there is room for an effort of thought which shall frankly acknowledge the problem in its integral complexity and not be restrained in the flexibility of its search by attachment to any cult, creed or extant system of philosophy.

The effort involves a quest for the Truth that underlies existence and the fundamental Law of its self-expression in the universe — the work of metaphysical philosophy and religious thought; the sounding and harmonising of the psychological methods of discipline by which man purifies and perfects himself — the work of psychology, not as it is understood in Europe, but the deeper practical psychology called in India Yoga; and the application of our ideas to the problems of man's social and collective life.

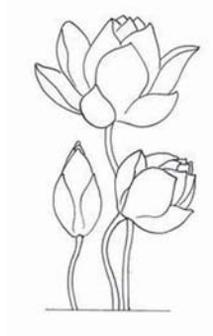
Philosophy and religious thought based on spiritual experience must be the beginning and the foundation of any such attempt; for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things. The attempt to get rid of their supremacy must always be vain. Man will always think and generalise and try to penetrate behind the apparent fact, for that is the imperative law of his awakened consciousness; man will always turn his generalisations into a religion, even though it be only a religion of positivism or of material Law. Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things, religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth, degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised. But again neither of these get their supreme value unless raised into the spirit and cast into life.

What then shall be our ideal? Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that true

supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the Spirit.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 144-47)



A Correction

In the June 2009 issue of the journal, an error had crept in on p. 459, in the footnote the word should have been *abhyavasthāh* and not as it was printed. The error is regretted.

FIVE DEGREES OF OUR BEING

THE oldest Vedantic knowledge tells us of five degrees of our being, the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance, a sheath as it was called in the ancient figurative language. A later psychology found that these five sheaths of our substance were the material of three bodies, gross physical, subtle and causal, in all of which the soul actually and simultaneously dwells, although here and now we are superficially conscious only of the material vehicle. But it is possible to become conscious in our other bodies as well and it is in fact the opening up of the veil between them and consequently between our physical, psychical and ideal personalities which is the cause of those “psychic” and “occult” phenomena that are now beginning to be increasingly though yet too little and too clumsily examined, even while they are far too much exploited. The old Hathayogins and Tantriks of India had long ago reduced this matter of the higher human life and body to a science. They had discovered six nervous centres of life in the dense body corresponding to six centres of life and mind faculty in the subtle, and they had found out subtle physical exercises by which these centres, now closed, could be opened up, the higher psychical life proper to our subtle existence entered into by man, and even the physical and vital obstructions to the experience of the ideal and spiritual being could be destroyed. It is significant that one prominent result claimed by the Hathayogins for their practices and verified in many respects was a control of the physical life-force which liberated them from some of the ordinary habits or so-called laws thought by physical science to be inseparable from life in the body.

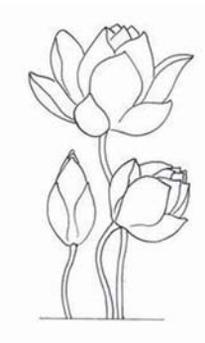
Behind all these terms of ancient psycho-physical science lies the one great fact and law of our being that whatever be its temporary poise of form, consciousness, power in this material evolution, there must be behind it and there is a greater, a truer existence of which this is only the external result and physically sensible aspect. Our substance does not end with the physical body; that is only the earthly pedestal, the terrestrial base, the material starting-point. As there are behind our waking mentality vaster ranges of consciousness subconscious and superconscious to it of which we become sometimes abnormally aware, so there are behind our gross physical being other and subtler grades of substance with a finer law and a greater power which support the denser body and which can by our entering into the ranges of consciousness belonging to them be made to impose that law and power on our dense matter and substitute their purer, higher, intenser conditions of being for the grossness and limitation of our present physical life and impulses and habits. If that be so, then the evolution of a nobler physical existence not limited by the ordinary conditions of animal birth and life and death, of difficult alimentation and facility of disorder and

disease and subjection to poor and unsatisfied vital cravings ceases to have the appearance of a dream and chimera and becomes a possibility founded upon a rational and philosophic truth which is in accordance with all the rest that we have hitherto known, experienced or been able to think out about the overt and secret truth of our existence.

So it should rationally be; for the uninterrupted series of the principles of our being and their close mutual connection is too evident for it to be possible that one of them should be condemned and cut off while the others are capable of a divine liberation. The ascent of man from the physical to the supramental must open out the possibility of a corresponding ascent in the grades of substance to that ideal or causal body which is proper to our supramental being, and the conquest of the lower principles by supermind and its liberation of them into a divine life and a divine mentality must also render possible a conquest of our physical limitations by the power and principle of supramental substance. And this means the evolution not only of an untrammelled consciousness, a mind and sense not shut up in the walls of the physical ego or limited to the poor basis of knowledge given by the physical organs of sense, but a life power liberated more and more from its mortal limitations, a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant and, — in the sense not of attachment or of restriction to our present corporeal frame but an exceeding of the law of the physical body, — the conquest of death, an earthly immortality. For from the divine Bliss, the original Delight of existence, the Lord of Immortality comes pouring the wine of that Bliss, the mystic Soma, into these jars of mentalised living matter; eternal and beautiful, he enters into these sheaths of substance for the integral transformation of the being and nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 273-75)



**‘ . . . O SOVEREIGN LORD OF OUR BEING,
DIVINE MASTER OF LOVE . . . ’**

February 13, 1914

IN the silence of an intense concentration I would unite my consciousness with Thy absolute consciousness, I would identify myself with Thee, O sovereign Lord of our being, divine Master of love, so that Thy law may become clear and perceptible to us and we may live only by it and for it.

How beautiful, grand, simple and calm everything is in the hours when my thought takes its flight to Thee and unites with Thee! And from the day it becomes possible for us to keep this supreme clear-sightedness constantly, with what an airy and yet sure step we shall walk through life above all obstacles and unhesitatingly! For, — this I know through experience — all doubt, all hesitation ceases the very moment one is conscious of Thy law; and if one perceives clearly the extreme relativity of all human action, one knows at the same time, with exactitude and precision, which action is the least relative in regard to one’s body and one’s own way of acting . . . and all obstacles *really* vanish as if by magic. All our efforts, O Lord, will henceforth be bent on an ever more constant realisation of this marvellous state.

May the peace of Thy certitude awaken in every heart!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 73)

THE MIND: AN INSTRUMENT OF FORMATION, OF ORGANISATION

[This talk is based upon the Mother's essay "The Science of Living",
(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 3-8).]

"The mind is not an instrument of knowledge; it is incapable of finding knowledge, but it must be moved by knowledge. Knowledge belongs to a much higher domain than that of the human mind, far above the region of pure ideas. The mind has to be silent and attentive to receive knowledge from above and manifest it. For it is an instrument of formation, of organisation and action, and it is in these functions that it attains its full value and real usefulness."

THE mind is "an instrument of formation, of organisation and action". Why? The mind gives a form to the thoughts. This power of formation forms mental entities whose life is independent of the mind that has formed them — they act as beings that are at least semi-independent. One can form a thought which then travels, goes out to someone, spreads the idea it contains. There is a mental substance just as there is a physical substance, and on this plane the mind can emanate innumerable forms. These forms can be objectivised and seen, and that is one of the most common explanations for dreams. For while you are active and while the physical eyes can see physically, some people can see mentally at the same time. But when you are asleep, your eyes are closed, the physical is asleep and the mind and vital become active.

On the mental plane all the formations made by the mind — the actual "forms" that it gives to the thoughts — return and appear to you as if they were coming from outside and give you dreams. Most dreams are like that. Some people have a very conscious mental life and are able to enter the mental plane and move about in it with the same independence they have in physical life; these people have mentally objective nights. But most people are incapable of doing this: it is their mental activity going on during sleep and assuming forms, and these forms give them what they call dreams.

There is a very common example — it is amusing because it is rather vivid. If you have quarrelled with someone during the day, you may wish to hit him, to say very unpleasant things to him. You control yourself, you don't do it, but your thought, your mind is at work and in your sleep you suddenly have a terrible dream. Someone approaches you with a stick and you hit each other and have a real fight. And when you wake up, if you don't know, if you don't understand what has happened, you say to yourself, "What an unpleasant dream I had!" But in fact it is your own thought which came back to you, like that. So be on your guard when you dream that someone

is unkind to you! First of all, you should ask yourself, “But didn’t I have a bad thought against him?”

Thoughts are real entities which usually last until they are realised. Some people are obsessed by their own thoughts. They think of something and the thought returns and goes round and round in their heads as if it were something from outside. But it is their own formations returning again and again and striking the mind that has formed them. That is one aspect of the matter.

Did you ever have the experience of a thought taking the form of words or a sentence in your mind and returning over and over again? But if you are clever enough to take a piece of paper and a pencil and write it down — that is the end of it, it won’t return any more, you have thrown it out of yourself. The thing has had its little satisfaction, it has manifested itself sufficiently and it won’t return.

And there is something more interesting still: if you have a bad thought that annoys and disturbs you, write it down very attentively, very carefully, putting as much consciousness and will as you can. Then take the piece of paper and, with concentration, tear it up with the will that the thought will be torn up in the same way. That is how you will get rid of it.

The mind is an instrument of organisation. On the outer plane, some people have an organised mind. They have organised their own ideas — note that this is not a very common occurrence! — their own thoughts. But if you look inside yourself, you will see that you have the most contradictory thoughts and if you have not taken care to organise them, they dwell side by side in your head, so to say, and create utter disorder.

For instance, I used to know someone who was able to hold the most mystical ideas in his mind together with the most positivist ideas, that is, the most materialistic ideas, the negation of everything that is not purely matter. It was all unorganised and this person was constantly tossed this way and that in a perpetual confusion. Note that I don’t disapprove of your having all these ideas: it is good to be able to look at things from all sides at once and, as we were saying the other day, there is a way to reconcile the most contrary ideas. But you must take the trouble to do it, you have to organise them in your mind, otherwise you live in a chaos. I have noticed something else: people whose minds are in disorder keep their rooms and their belongings in a similar state of disorder. I have seen people who had no order in their minds and if you open their chest of drawers or their cupboards, you will find an awful mess — everything is in a jumble. There are people who are intelligent and have slips of paper on which they jot things down — authors, for example — but if by chance they need one of these notes, they have to spend an hour hunting it out and turning everything upside down! They either find the paper in the waste-paper basket or in the drawer where they put their handkerchiefs. Well, that’s how it is, isn’t it?

There are people who may not be very intelligent, but who have taken the trouble to put some order among the few ideas they have. If you open their cupboard, you

will find that they have very few things, but these things are neatly and tidily arranged, because they have organised material things in the same way as they have organised their thoughts. The mind is therefore an instrument of organisation.

People who have some power of organisation may start by organising their little personal belongings, then their lives and the events in their lives. They may be in charge of a certain number of people — they can organise a business, a school, anything. Or else if they have the power to govern, they are able to organise a country. Some people have this power of organisation and others don't.

I shall give you an example of someone who had this gift of organisation. It is an old story, but one can always tell old stories. I used to know Sir Akbar Hydari, who was Finance Minister and then Prime Minister of Hyderabad. Before his time, the Hyderabad finances were in the state of chaos I have just mentioned and the Government was always short of money. It was a rich area which ought not to have been in that position. Then came Sir Akbar. He became Finance Minister and from the very first year, they had a few lakhs of revenue and everything was so wonderfully organised that it was perhaps one of the only places in the world where people had no taxes to pay. They had no taxes or duties to pay and the State was never short of money and this went on throughout his whole ministry. But he fell ill and had to leave; in the end, he died. He was replaced by someone who did not have his gift of organisation and immediately, from the very first year, again they were short of 17,000 lakhs! It was the same province, with the same revenue, the same people, but Sir Akbar's marvellous gift of organisation was no longer there. That is a true story. Very few people have this gift.

It is as if you had a large number of miscellaneous things in front of you: it would take a century to make all the possible combinations of them. Some people don't need to do that — they have the vision, they immediately know where to put things and establish an organised relation between them so as to form something orderly and organised. This capacity for organisation is indispensable in life, and if you want to learn to organise, begin by organising your own drawer and you will end up by organising your own head! Some people should do both these things. You must first *see* the ideas in your mind before you can organise them — at least you can see your handkerchiefs and clothes! But you will find that a certain care is needed to achieve an intelligent arrangement — don't put the things you use every day beneath the things you use once a month!

The mind is also an instrument of action. The thoughts form plans. The mind forms a plan of action and with this formation of independent and active entities which I mentioned earlier, it stirs the other parts of the being — the vital and physical — and impels them to action. It often happens that you think of some action or other — you don't do it immediately, but the thought that wants to manifest in this action returns again and again. Perhaps you hear in your mind the words, "I must do that, I must do that," until you leave everything and do what you have "thought". Well, that

is the mind's power of action. Before you get it, you must learn to organise, harmonise and control your mind. But when you have that power, you can begin to act purposefully, whereas most people are tossed about by thoughts whose formation they were not even aware of.

There are many people whose thoughts come from outside, who have not taken the care to organise their mind, which is a sort of public square. So all the thoughts coming from outside meet there; sometimes there are clashes: you don't know what to do, you can't see anything clearly, etc. There are also people who live in a more or less neutral mental state. Suddenly, they find themselves with someone whose mind is well organised and they begin to think clearly — about things that they knew nothing of a minute ago. There are others, on the other hand, who normally think very clearly and know exactly what is going on in their minds. But they come into contact with certain people and everything gets confused, vague and muddled. They lose the thread of their thoughts and forget what they wanted to say. This is an effect of contagion and this mental contagion is constant. There are very few people who do not receive thoughts from outside. I have known people — many people — who, for example, had a very strong faith, who could see very clearly into themselves, who knew very well what they wanted to do, etc. But when they were with other people and tried to grasp all that, to express it, they could no longer find it; instead, there was something that moved in a sort of semi-obscure confusion and they felt incapable of formulating their thought, which before had been quite clear.

There is another phenomenon which is considered spiritual, but which is spiritual only indirectly: it is when you find yourself near someone who has controlled his thought and achieved mental silence. You suddenly feel this silence coming down into yourself and something which was impossible for you half an hour earlier suddenly becomes a reality. This is a rather unusual phenomenon.

“There is another practice which can be very helpful to the progress of the consciousness. Whenever there is a disagreement on any matter, such as a decision to be taken, or an action to be carried out, one must never remain closed up in one's own conception or point of view. On the contrary, one must make an effort to understand the other's point of view, to put oneself in his place and, instead of quarrelling or even fighting, find the solution which can reasonably satisfy both parties; there always is one for men of goodwill.”

I said this mainly for men of action whose thinking is direct and formative, very active and dynamic. They see things in a linear way which is necessary for action; they can see that a thing must be done in such and such a way. Another person may have a thought which is equally dynamic and say, “No, it ought to be done like this.” So they quarrel, they are unable to reach an agreement. But one can keep quiet for a

minute and look at the thing calmly. The other person is not necessarily showing ill will, his point of view may be true or partially true. The question is to find out why he thinks like that. So you stop to think it over and try to identify yourself with the other's point of view, to put yourself in his place and tell yourself, "He may have a reason for thinking as he does, and it may be better than mine." And in this way, you must try to find the solution which can reasonably satisfy both parties. This is very important when dealing with material things. Naturally, each one sees only his own point of view and his own point of view is always selfish. It is very hard to admit another point of view, for this point of view may be "detrimental" to you. This is an absolute truth where nations are concerned. If nations, instead of being in perpetual argument about straightforward things and defending their own interests and seeing only their personal viewpoint, that is, the viewpoint of their national personality, if instead of doing all that, they attempted to understand that each nation has a right to live on earth and that it is not a matter of depriving them of this right, but of finding a compromise that would satisfy everyone. There is always a solution, but on *one* condition, not in order to find the solution but to implement it: individuals and nations must have goodwill.

If they have no goodwill, if they know perfectly well that they are in the wrong but don't care, if they insist on their own interests even when they are absolutely wrong, then there is nothing to be done — you can only leave people to their fighting and mutual destruction. But if, on the contrary, there is mutual goodwill, there is always a good solution.

Can you define "compromise"?

It is an intermediate solution. It is not always the golden mean. A kind of harmonisation must be found.

I will tell you another story, the story of a merchant who set out on a journey saying to his neighbour, "I am going away, I don't know when I shall be back. Keep this big jar for me, I shall take it back when I return." Some time later, the neighbour was tempted to open the jar. He did so and found, under a thick layer of dust . . . some gold coins! This was a great temptation for him and he began to think, "Perhaps my friend has died, perhaps he won't return. What is the use of keeping all this money inside here? And I am so much in need of money!" So he took a few coins, a few more, many more, until all the gold in the jar had gone. The olives that concealed the gold had gone bad and so he threw them away.

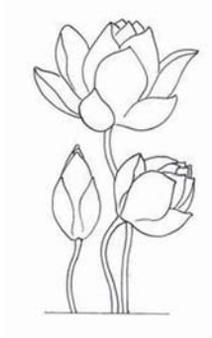
One day the merchant returned and said to his neighbour, "Give me back my jar." A few days later, the neighbour returned the jar all coated with dust, as it was before. The merchant opened the jar and found only some fresh olives. All the gold had gone. He went to the judge and explained what had happened. But the judge said, "How can I be sure you are telling the truth? Perhaps your neighbour is telling the

truth.” They argued and were unable to find a solution. The merchant, who had a headache, thought, “I shall go for a walk in the city tonight.” So he strolled through the city and suddenly he saw some children playing. They had a jar, and also a merchant, a neighbour and a judge! The judge was telling the neighbour, “Open up this jar. But I see only fresh olives! How long has it been since the merchant went away?” “Two and a half years.” “Really? So you were able to keep these olives fresh for so long? Didn’t you by any chance remove what was in the jar and put in some fresh olives?” The neighbour ran away. The merchant thought, “Well, these children are far more intelligent than I am, they found the solution at once.” So he went back to his neighbour and asked him the same questions; and of course the neighbour had nothing further to say and was forced to admit the truth.

22 January 1951

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 308-15)



TOWARDS FREEDOM AND PERFECTION

A Personal Letter

You have inquired about my daily routine or, in Wordsworthian language, my “diurnal course”. The Wordsworthian language is not inappropriate since it comes from a poem in which he speaks of “a thing which could not feel/The touch of earthly years”. I may now explain a certain feature of my day-to-day life which tries constantly to get away from that troublesome touch. Perhaps the explanation will help you also in your moods of fears and anxieties.

When I am working, my mind is on what I read or write, but all my waking hours I am not editor or author. I am very much an ordinary human being — and at present some memories of the near past are fairly unpleasant. I have found a method by which not only are their effects avoided but also the avoidance grows an active part of sadhana.

What I may describe as a fluid mass of general consciousness lies between the brain-mind and the heart of emotion in each of us. Every thought that enters the being rests for the fraction of a second on the surface of this mass before it sinks from the mind-level to the heart. If one attends to it, it immediately starts sinking and once it does it cannot help reaching the emotional level. Then the memories of which I have spoken become painful. What one has to do is to pay no attention at all to the thought but simply sweep it out and away. A single moment’s hesitation in doing this will let you plunge in the direction of the heart. One must refuse to take the slightest interest in it, abstain from the least desire to probe its contents.

Although the procedure I am mentioning is far from easy, it is possible to follow it. But to create a blank on the mental surface is only the first step. In fact, side by side with the saving of the heart from the touch of thought, there occurs a movement of the thought-bare heart itself towards its own inner recesses. At the core of the heart — at the inmost level — is the true soul. The soul is griefless, fearless, stainless, void of the outer being’s past and present. It has a dimension of its own, far from all frailty and from all flux. If one has done Yoga for long, one can feel its presence in a general way and draw an instinctive guidance from it. But the transfer of one’s whole life-centre to it is our aim. By this transfer one’s freedom is not merely negative — a thought-excluding mind. A positive bliss which is the very stuff of existence and therefore independent of persons, objects or circumstances comes into play. One should bend all one’s effort towards it. And a ground for it is prepared by the process I have outlined.

To build permanently on the prepared ground, one must not merely sweep every unattended thought out and away. One must sweep it towards the Divine Mother.

Thus a constant gesture is made of dedication and devotion. At once the heart which is kept free from thought grows more and more aware of its inmost reality as the Divine Mother's Divine Child. Finally its core will kindle into the outer self, and every act be governed openly by the Psychic Being, the Rigveda's Agni who is "the immortal within the mortal" and "the bringer of all the Sun-Gods".

The last phrase is significant. For, in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo whoever has felt the interiorising within the heart, whoever has known the motion of a breakthrough towards the soul-depth has also to a greater or lesser extent the strange accompanying sense of a developing breakthrough across some Beyond that is like a vast of unknown brightness watching one's embodied career. One may recall an expression of Wordsworth's in which he addresses the child-consciousness in which the soul-feeling is yet unsullied by the earth:

Thou over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day

A Presence from a far ether seems on the point of pressing its golden way down to meet the Agni-activity or of drawing up this activity into the noonday-spaces of a birthless and deathless infinitude. Perhaps the two miraculous consummations can be simultaneous, a double manifestation which is at once an all-perfecting Here and an all-liberating Yonder. That would indeed be a truly Aurobindonian fulfilment.

O for that future fusion.

[Undated]

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(From *Mother India*, September 1982, pp. 593-94)

By Yoga we can rise out of falsehood into truth, out of weakness into force, out of pain and grief into bliss, out of bondage into freedom, out of death into immortality, out of darkness into light, out of confusion into purity, out of imperfection into perfection, out of self-division into unity, out of Maya into God.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 98)

A PAGE FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF *MOTHER INDIA*

SIXTY years ago, on 15 July 1949, *The Times of India* (Bombay) published a short review of three issues of *Mother India* which had been launched five months earlier on 21 February. The newspaper item runs:

Mother India

A NEW fortnightly review, *Mother India* (4 as.), described as “politico-cultural,” attempts and achieves much.

Consideration of three recent issues indicates the wideness of its range and the catholicity of its outlook. Outside party feeling, it aims at viewing each problem from the point of view of India’s special genius and sense of spiritual values.

A good deal of room in each issue is devoted to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo,¹ which will commend the paper to many. Ample space, however, is given to topics of national and world interest — a discussion on Bernard Shaw’s recent comparison of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Stalin;² an article on the significance of the English language in India;³ an excellent balancing of the opinions of two literary critics on that controversial novel, *Elephant and Castle*.⁴

Articles on political and educational matters, trends in modern thought, art, literature and poetry make this new venture an interesting experiment.

(*The Times of India*, “Current Topics”, 15 July 1949)

*

Requests for review seem to have been sent to newspapers and journals in *Mother India*’s early days. A carbon copy of one such request — for the Special Number of 15 August 1949 — somehow survived the passage of time. Whether the text was really sent as typed or perhaps modified later on, cannot be ascertained at this stage. Who eventually signed the request is also not known. It may be recalled here that the first page of *Mother India* would list K. R. Poddar as Managing Editor and K. D. Sethna as Editor. Albeit not mentioned, Yogendra Rastogi acted as “Poddar’s right-hand man for management” and Soli Albless as the “editor’s associate”.

The letterhead, originally printed in dark blue, is reproduced here as accurately as possible. The ‘warning’ placed above the thick line surely left no one in doubt that the small team meant business!

The request reads:

From,

“MOTHER INDIA”
(A FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW).
32, Rampart Row, Fort,
BOMBAY.

To,

Our Ref. No. MI /

In order to save time all unnecessary formalities are herein eliminated.

Referring to yours of _____ regarding _____

Dear Sir,

We are sending for favour of review our Special Number of August, 15th 1949. It celebrates both the Independence Day of India and the birthday of Sri Aurobindo — two momentous events that coincide.

As Sri Aurobindo is getting more and more recognised, not only in India but also abroad, as the most significant figure of our day, our Special Number should prove of unusual interest, since it deals at some length with him and his work. We have included, with his permission, an essay by him — The Indian Spiritual Ideal and Its Application to Life — which is of vital relevance in the present formative years of our Independence.

Another feature to which we should like to draw attention is My Last Week with Gandhiji by Dilip Kumar Roy, the well-known Bengali musician, author, and disciple of Sri Aurobindo. It is published at full length for the first time — over 7,000 words.

We have been fortunate also to secure, among contributions from England, a special article by Kenneth Walker.

If you will be kind enough to give us a substantial review, we shall be very thankful. MOTHER INDIA is an idealistic venture, pledged to the cause of promoting the true soul and genius of our country.

Yours truly,
for MOTHER INDIA,

One response to this request is still with us — a newspaper cutting from *The Times of India* (Bombay):

Sri Aurobindo

A SPECIAL number, on August 15, of the new fortnightly review, *Mother India*, commemorates the 78th birthday of Sri Aurobindo, which synchronises with Independence Day, an auspicious omen since his name has recently been suggested for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Poet and philosopher, scholar of both Eastern and Western cultures, once an ardent politician and now withdrawn from the world, a master of *yoga* with a message of dynamic spirituality, seeking not to reject life but to transform it, his significance in the shaping of India's future may prove more weighty than that of statesmen.

(*The Times of India*, "Current Topics", August 1949)

*

Kenneth Walker, author of *Meaning and Purpose* and *The Diagnosis of Man* (i.e. until August 1949), shares his opinion of *Mother India* with the reader at the beginning and end of his essay titled "Traditional Knowledge: The World's Urgent Need Today" — a sort of mini-review from another part of the world:

I accept the invitation to contribute a short article to *Mother India* with pleasure. It gives me the opportunity of expressing my appreciation of that paper and of the great work being carried on in India of which it is an expression. But what happens in India may, and I trust, will, have effects that extend far beyond the frontiers of that country. . . .

. . . I look with hope at the work being done in Pondicherry and read with something more than interest my copies of *Mother India*.

(*Mother India*, 15 August 1949, p. 15)

"E"

Notes and References

1. *E.g.* a monthly feature called “*Lights on Life-Problems*” by K. G. (Kishor Gandhi), “. . . a series of questions of common interest along with precise answers based on Sri Aurobindo’s writings.”

2. “The Most Able, Sensible And Enlightened Statesman In Asia”, editorial by K. D. Sethna, *MI* 28 May 1949, pp. 1, 2. (Excerpt: “We cannot, in the context of recent happenings, challenge his [Bernard Shaw’s] description of our Prime Minister as the most able, sensible and enlightened statesman in Asia, but there seems to be neither genuine wit nor authentic wisdom in coupling him with Stalin whom Shaw describes as the most able, sensible and enlightened statesman in Europe.”)

3. “The Significance of the English Language in India”, editorial by K. D. Sethna, *MI* 11 June 1949, pp. 1, 2.

4. *Elephant and Castle* by R. C. Hutchinson. One review by Richard Church, reprinted from *John o’ London’s Weekly*, and one by Philip Toynbee, reprinted from *The New Statesman and Nation*, *MI* 11 June 1949, pp. 10, 11: BOOKS in the BALANCE — “Is R. C. Hutchinson a Great Novelist? Two Eminent Critics Sit in Judgment.”

The real difficulty is always in ourselves, not in our surroundings. There are three things necessary in order to make men invincible, Will, Disinterestedness and Faith. We may have a will to emancipate ourselves, but sufficient faith may be lacking. We may have faith in our ultimate emancipation, but the will to use the necessary means may be wanting. And even if there are will and faith, we may use them with a violent attachment to the fruit of our work or with passions of hatred, blind excitement or hasty forcefulness which may produce evil reactions. For this reason it is necessary, in a work of such magnitude, to have resort to a higher Power than that of mind and body in order to overcome unprecedented obstacles. This is the need of sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 536)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of June 2009)

Chapter Four

New Projects

DURING the third year of his sojourn in Japan, Philippe had the impression that he was completing the task he had set for himself there, that a phase of his life was coming to a close and that a new path would open before him. Without realising it, little by little, he had freed himself from Zina's influence. He was beginning to recover his independence vis-à-vis the Polish couple; he became friendly with a young lady, a Theosophist, and even considered the possibility of getting married and he opened himself about this to his father. He lived for a while in a Buddhist monastery, then went to discover the harmonious temples in the hills around Kyoto; he began to think about his next destination. A Hindu journalist who lived in the same house had begun to present contemporary India to him: the resistance to the English occupation, the modern Indian metaphysics and ethics, as well as the two new political and spiritual guides of his compatriots: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo Ghose. So Philippe enthusiastically discovered the former whose writings were available only in English at that time. The latter was already known to him before his departure for Japan because some of his works — of which some were probably articles in French which were published in the magazine Arya — had caught the attention of the Parisian Theosophical circle.

He aspired to “lead the simplest and healthiest possible physical life, . . . to eliminate, without asceticism, what is useless . . . to taste the physical calm in order to encourage mental and spiritual activity . . . to devote the maximum free time possible to his scientific, philosophical and mystical studies.” That was why he asked his brother if there was in Pondicherry a post of Civil Engineer for which he could apply; he would thus have reconciled rationally the demands of the family, an immersion in the Indian metaphysics — and more precisely in Sri Aurobindo's thought to which he was already drawn — as well as the way of life to which he aspired. . . .

* * *

Tokyo, April 5, 1923

My very dear Parents,

Spring has returned to Japan; it must have returned also to France. When you receive this letter, perhaps you will already be making your preparations for leaving Paris. I often try, although without much success, to imagine your activities in Paris. Naturally, it is very easy for me to let my thought flow, tracing the activities you had when I left Rue Pigalle;¹ but when I try to follow your new activities or very simply to guess the new directions of your ideas, your new projects, etc., I fail to arrive at anything remotely satisfactory. Yet, there is certainly some change in all that; everybody changes, at every age. La Minelle as a co-operative shows me the accomplishment of a project which was in its embryonic state already since many years and which, I hope will show interesting results, although I do not know under what material conditions it has been realised.²

Albert speaks a little about you, but he sees you from one angle and I from another and often in his vision I search in vain for the points which I know and which interest me. Rather, he presents one *façade* to me. Moreover, he speaks to me like an old professor and he tells me only what he thinks is useful for my edification and my education! His letters are not spontaneous except when he speaks of himself and his projects. There I follow him well and I identify myself with him, but he does not yet understand the effort of my life and the great currents that flow in each one of us.

In short, in spite of my goodwill, it is quite difficult for me to speak to you about yourselves. What to say to you? And yet, it is that which interests me!

I shall therefore speak to you a little about myself, although I understand only too well the difficulty of presenting my life in a way that will be clear to your eyes. This difficulty becomes greater still due to the fact that I do not know your present thoughts and feelings. If you put yourself for a second in my state of mind, you will understand me without any trouble, I am sure. And I am also sure that when I shall re-read my letter, I shall have the impression of being very superficial.

At the practical level, I am still working in the same laboratory, at the chemistry of perfumes. It is sometimes interesting, no doubt, much more than many other professions, but I cannot say that I have given myself entirely to this work. My ideas and my thoughts always go into the mental and the spiritual domain and it is difficult for me to see in what I am doing anything more than a profession. But anyway, I earn my living and I learn.

1. The residence of Paul and Madeleine was situated at 20 Rue Pigalle, Paris IX^e.

2. All through his life Paul was looking for new formulas of association between capital and labour; in this instance, he furnished to the members of the co-operative the premises and his equipment for the production of butter and cheese.

I hardly dare to speak to you of my friends. I shall merely tell you that they are working well with uneven results. It is more difficult for an artist than for a scientist to make good on the physical plane. In addition to the carpets which are moving with difficulty without earning much, although they have brought their share to the daily life, Étienne has managed to have many classes, lessons of music (harmony and counterpoint) which is his speciality, lessons of drawing and painting, Polish lessons in the School of Foreign Languages. His wife gives a certain number of special French lessons in addition to some free service of which I shall not speak. In short, they too are busy and do whatever they can.

I come home around six o'clock. After my bath and dinner, I get only a few hours for my work: philosophy, religion, etc. It is not much and, if I read the newspaper and write a letter or two, nothing is left, but one does not acquire anything except by study. The everyday life, with its monotony and its apparent pettiness, teaches you quite a few lessons by itself and the friction with various personalities rapidly reveal to you the facts that years of calm life hardly show you. Be that as it may, I am observing and studying people and things.

We are managing to keep ourselves steady from the material point of view.

From the moral and spiritual point of view, I must tell you that, very naturally, I have inner battles, intense at certain moments, calmer at others. This is everyone's lot, I think, especially of those who wish to come as close as possible to their ideal. There too, I have some experience and I realise what must be the experience in this field of those who are true spiritual masters. Moreover, there are not many of them.

I am also studying the modern thought of India, and I have discovered things which have truly filled me with wonder. There are great men in present-day India and we know very little of them in Europe; we do not even know their names. Those whom we know, R. Tagore, for example, are not of the highest. I would suggest to Papa, if he is so inclined, to try and collect information on Gandhi who is truly a beautiful being! I can hardly send him any literature on this subject, because what I have is in English which he does not read. And then there is Aurobindo Ghose, who lives in French India, in Pondicherry; we have spoken of him many times at the Theosophical Society; Madame Potel is one of his disciples. There are others, even French, for example Monsieur and Madame Paul Richard who are also living in India. We have a Hindu friend who is a journalist and who elucidates many points of this contemporary history, magnificent and terrible at the same time, of the struggle against the English.

In our house we have this Indian, a Japanese, a student at the Imperial University who will go into diplomacy, two Poles, two kind Japanese ladies and one Frenchman, myself. There are quite a few of us, but everybody lives in harmony. Each person one comes in contact with brings a new message. All the more reason why each nation opens a new insight when one seeks to understand it.

As for the future, I do not think much about it because I have no data to determine

it. How long shall I stay here? I know that I have not finished what I came to do in Japan. To finish it quickly depends more or less on me. What will be the path thereafter that will open itself before me? Frankly, I do not know. Personally, I would like to spend some time in India after passing through France to embrace you or on the way. But I do not know if that will work out for me. At times, it seems to me that I shall have to return to France, but when I shall be able to do it, is more than I can say. You know that India has been pulling me since a long time because of the greatness of the spiritual wave that covers this land and which I feel better in Japan which India had penetrated in days gone by.

In a previous letter I had spoken to you of a journey for you later to India and Indochina, even to Japan. I do not know what you think of it. Is it possible? I do not know. In any case it will be interesting. I would like to see you and to tell you all about our life, with its ups and downs, everything that is impossible for me to tell you by letter being unaware of your inclination.

It has been a long letter. I have tried to speak to you simply and frankly.

I embrace you very tenderly and I request you to convey my good wishes to friends and the family of whom I think often.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Tokyo, May 4, 1923

My dear Albert,³

You must now be getting acclimatised to your bush as you call it, but I have not received anything since your letter where you spoke to me of the strange mixing of races among the officials who are around you.

I think that you are still not down in the dumps, for you sometimes enjoy the active life in the open air, and on the other hand, you are your absolute master, only responsible to yourself, which suits you well, I believe. Tell me of your experiences and your occupations. Have you found something interesting to study or to do? Do you have much work or do you have some free time?

Madame de Manziarles, a Theosophist, whom I knew quite well in Paris and who has come to spend a few months in Japan to study Buddhism, came to see me. She has brought me news of France and of many persons whom I knew among the

3. This letter was sent by Philippe to Indochina from where it was forwarded by Albert to his parents living in France.

Theosophists. This gave me a little whiff of my country. Naturally, no news of Papa and Maman! I think they are both well otherwise somebody would have written to me, you or Aunt Marguerite. Tell me something of Papa's activities, now that La Minelle is a co-operative. Is he still very busy with it?

I have understood all that you have written to me about our parents' attitude towards me. I do not want to vindicate myself; I shall only tell you that none of you has wished to make the effort to try to judge me by placing yourselves in **my** state of mind and that you have judged me superficially, as by looking in my letters for something which would be unpleasant to you. You have taken all that is bad and left out all that is good. I have already written since long everything that I thought and I had to say regarding my feelings for you. You prefer to ignore that and stick to a certain judgement. What can I do about that? You have not taken into account the struggles that I have gone through. But I keep quiet, for what is the use of returning to this subject and protest again and again. Nevertheless, I did not leave because of a quarrel or a disagreement between us, as one may think.

On my side, I am still working at the chemical perfumery. How much longer? I do not really know. But at times I think that I shall soon finish the task that I have undertaken here. Where shall I go then? Probably to India, but perhaps after a voyage to France? Or again, it may be that I shall remain in Japan. I am saying all this to inform you that I have not finalised anything on this subject. Do you know if there is a post of Civil Engineer in Pondicherry or any other French city in India? That would interest me because in Pondicherry there is a great spiritual master of present-day India, Aurobindo Ghose. And well, I must admit that I shall be greatly tempted by a post of engineer in Pondicherry. I think of it at times and if I leave Japan, that would interest me. Here I have lots of work of all kinds and more interesting things than I can do. There are many worthy people. And then, Japan is interesting, because at this moment a very important period is preparing itself and much of the future of the world will depend on the way Japan will go through this period. But this is not the time to write an essay on Japan.

Will you get some leave? You know that I am waiting for you with wide open arms if you could come over here. Our house has become international, because there are seven persons living here, representing four nationalities.

I now speak Japanese sufficiently well to conduct the business of everyday life. But naturally, as soon as it is a question of a little more serious conversation, I am at sea. That is due to two reasons: first because I did not ever try to study it seriously, and what I have learnt is by day-to-day contact; secondly, to learn more one must read and I never had the courage to seriously learn the letters of the Chinese alphabet. You will understand me because you must surely have been daunted by these very beautiful but incomprehensible ideograms.

I do not have anything important to add to this letter. What I do beside my work at the laboratory, you know: it is the study of philosophy, religion etc., that is,

everything that does not interest you. Therefore I shall not dwell on it.
 Hoping to get your news soon, I embrace you very affectionately,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Tokyo, May 22, 1923

Dear Papa,

In my last letter I forgot to mention a point which could have some importance in the future and I think that it is best to talk to you about it very frankly. It is understood that I am asking you not to speak of this matter to anybody, not even to Albert. As for Maman, you be the judge, perhaps silence would be preferable.

Last year in Tokyo I met a young lady with whom consequently I had many conversations. She differs very much from the other young ladies in that she has a great ideal, a serious mind and tastes which are relatively less worldly. Formerly she was a member of the Theosophical Society when there was a branch here, she knew the Richards very intimately when they were in Japan, but she has remained very independent, with a broad and open mind.

Besides, the whole family is very interesting. The father is the owner of the foremost American magazine here. They are, in fact, American. He has built his own fortune, however I do not think of him as an upstart nor as a man for whom money takes precedence over all the rest. He is a great worker, but also an idealist, very much interested in the present social and political questions. I cannot assess him fully; it would require a closer acquaintance.

Her mother is from Alsace, speaks very good French, as do her two daughters. There is a son who is at present in France pursuing his studies.

They are certainly among the most intelligent and most open in Tokyo. Maybe they are not very popular with the French community; could it be as much for their liberal ideas as for their race? They are Jewish and very clearly have all the characteristics. I have just learnt that they have become Christians (Protestants) but I have no further details of their conversion.

The young lady in question, M... F... has just left for America; she will probably return in October. She has gone to work with an uncle who is engaged in social work.

First of all, I should like to make it clear that I am not in love. The qualities that I am pleased to find in her are of the kind that would make a friend of one having the same ideas and some tastes in common. It so happens that these qualities belong to a young lady, that is all.

To me the question of marriage presents itself under an aspect which is quite different from what it must be to many other young persons. In fact, the point is not at all to know if I like such or such a young woman, but to decide on the question of the marriage itself. Up to the present, my ideal (for me and for the present moment, I am not generalising in time and space) is to lead a physical life which would be the most simple and the most healthy at the same time, and to eliminate everything that is useless, yet without asceticism, something for which I have no taste. As much free time as possible (I have not yet been quite successful!) for my special studies. Consequently, a profession, not too demanding, and without the constant preoccupation to earn money. Various studies, scientific, philosophical and mystical, etc. A somewhat isolated and secluded life thus appears desirable to me, and as these last years have plunged me in a precisely opposite environment, this taste for physical calm for permitting mental and spiritual activities, has probably increased.

Naturally, this seems to me to be totally incompatible with the life of the head of a family; I can hardly, even supposing that my wife has the same ideal, consider this kind of life. To be married is not only to take a companion, but it is also to accept the children. And it is they who become the main thing in life. One must therefore have an altogether different direction.

I have weighed very clearly in my mind the pros and the cons of each of these two solutions, because there lies the question to be resolved. Here it is not a question of finding general solutions applicable to all humanity, but of a particular case regarding my little self and what I have to do in life. I have not yet resolved this problem which, certainly, has come up because of my contact with this young lady. She is the first, so far, whom I have been able to envisage as a companion of my whole life. But I must again insist that the difficulty does not lie either in her or in anything concerning her, but in ideas of a different nature. I hope that I have clearly described my case to you. I add that I am in no hurry to take a decision. I have great faith that time will bring clarity, illumination and maturity. But I have decided to write to you, as much to communicate to you one of my current lines of thought, as to have your opinion on an event which evidently, is only a possibility, but not impossible. If one were to speak of probabilities, I would say that there is one chance in three for the affirmative, and two in three for the negative. But mathematics means nothing much in such things.

It is understood that this marriage will lead to notable changes in every domain; new plans will have to be made which I do not even want to sketch out at present. I think I know you well enough to guess at the thoughts that this letter will evoke in you. I request silence from you, firstly, because it is very uncertain and secondly, to talk about it at present will not serve any purpose.

Embrace Maman for me.

Respectfully and lovingly,

Signed: Philippe

P.S. I forgot to tell you that this young lady is twenty-two years old and that she has lived for a long time in Paris with her mother and sisters.

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001. We are grateful to the author and the publishers for permission to publish the translation.)

God is within us, an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient Power; we & He are of one nature and, if we get into touch with Him and put ourselves in His hands, He will pour into us His own force and we shall realise that we too have our share of godhead, our portion of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. The path is long, but self-surrender makes it short; the way is difficult, but perfect trust makes it easy.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 536)

IN NEED OF VEDIC AND VEDANTIC PSYCHOLOGY

DURING a seminar on Indian Psychology, held at Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Pondicherry, December 2004) by the Institute of Indian Psychology, several speakers presented their work as an attempt to validate Indian psychology by means of Western psychology. One may wonder what would remain of it after this validating treatment, since the object as well as the methods of research are based on very different paradigms, one relying on objective measurement, the other on subjective experience, but if validation there must be, it will be more fruitful when it is mutually done and the process may as well go the other way around: Indian psychology validating the Western one. Only on the basis of a real sense of mutuality does a fruitful dialogue become possible. First of all we must examine the radical difference of paradigm between the two and have a clear awareness of it. Then we will examine Freud's psychoanalysis as well as academic psychology and try to understand them from the point of view of Vedic psychology.

The Western mind has evolved a process of knowing that is founded on the analytical observation of what appears objectively to the mind and on processes of rational reasoning about them in order to discover their underlying laws. The Indian mind has evolved methods for going beyond appearances and touching directly the underlying Real, not by reasoning on its probable existence, but by experiencing and becoming it: *'tat tvam asi'* (thou art That). The first implies a process of separation and objectivisation, the second a process of unifying awareness and identity. How can the first approach validate the second, which by its nature eludes so much its grasp? It is generally understood that what is subjective is not scientific because it cannot be validated objectively, quantitatively. But let's look deeper into this pretence: All the Western sciences have gradually and inexorably become more and more specialised and technical; in the process, they have developed complex protocols of research and specific concepts; as a result, only the specialists of the same field can understand each other and validate or invalidate each other's findings. Those who are not specialists can only trust blindly or assume that the work has been done well and that they can trust its conclusions, conclusions that are never conclusive, as the Real always escapes the limiting net the mind throws on it in order to catch it. Therefore Science has become an object of belief, whose edicts are warranted by an establishment of the scientific truth, loaded with vested interests (position, influence, budgets, careers, money), as were the ancient religions, warranted by an establishment of priests with vested interests. But what would you call a system you have to believe in without any chance to know by yourself if it is true or not, whose language is incomprehensible except to the initiated and which condemns as heretic every approach which doesn't submit to it? I would call it the establishment of ignorance, since it systematically

dispossesses men of an access to knowledge they can experience by themselves: they can only become the initiated servants of a system which dominates them for the sake of an official Scientific Truth never reached for good but promising that here is the only way, and that one day, for sure, all will be known.

If we take the Indian approach to knowledge, the picture is totally different: the realities it explores can be experienced by each one who has the will to know them and, although they are subjective by nature, the same results will always appear. If you train yourself to fix your thoughts when they come in, you will observe that they disappear; if you try to listen to the underlying silence then the mind will eventually experience a sense of quietude, silence itself will sometimes come and fill the mind. If you turn your emotions to some lovable presence of which the heart has the intuition, whatever the form — it can be Sri Krishna, Allah or Christ — the experience of something adorable, a Presence which exceeds the form and yet is perceived through the form, will be experienced in the heart. If you renounce the fruits of your works, you will experience that the will starts being liberated and becomes more quiet, deliberate in its movements and therefore more truly efficient. Each individual will have his own way and pace but the same results will tend to occur, invariably the same, along these three lines. Therefore the validation is indefinitely accessible and can be repeated *ad infinitum* by everyone who chooses to make the effort for it. The only conditions are the sincerity of the aspiration, for the result of our quest will depend on it, and perseverance. Spiritual experience does not disclose itself to a mere curiosity or intellectual enquiry, the researcher has to engage himself into it without reservation if he wants to enter it. This said, in the Indian way of knowing, there is no truth that you cannot verify by yourself. And the system is open to new experiences, as well as to a combination of several lines of experiences. It doesn't ask from you blind belief but the first sign of knowledge which is faith in the path you have chosen, sincerity in your motivations, and self-validation by experience. Then, on which side is superstition? On which side validation?

So it is with some confidence that we can turn now towards Indian psychology and its capacity to validate or invalidate Western psychology. Let's take for instance Freud's psychoanalysis. I leave aside for the moment the theory it has developed to speak only on the clinical aspect, the relation between the therapist and the patient. We know that the therapist is supposed to be a silent listening presence, without any reactions or projections of his own, an attentive witness. Then it is observed that this attitude has a liberating effect: the patient finally finds the words to express some truth that was hidden in him and all that was oppressed, covered, denied is liberated through a process of spoken elucidation. Why, how does such a process take place? From the Indian point of view we recognise the enactment of the *purusha/prakriti* (soul and nature) relation. The silent *purusha* has a liberating effect on *prakriti* as soon as *prakriti* becomes aware of the presence of its silent awareness. We can therefore identify the analytical situation as a reflection of *purusha/prakriti* interaction, and

understand how it works. The fact that the operating power is the word as carrying or revealing a covered truth will also be familiar to us, it is the word of truth vocally expressed, *satyamantra*, which destroys all that imprisons us, the instrument of conquest of the Vedic rishis over ignorance and suffering.¹ So we can validate this part of Freud's psychotherapy, because we can explain how it operates, independently of his theories on man and consciousness. Let us note that the fact that it works within the psychoanalytical context doesn't prove the validity of Freud's theory, for the relation between *purusha* and *prakriti* is independent of any cultural or theoretical context, it is truly a universal reality of man's consciousness. But it confirms and illustrates Indian knowledge about it as well as about the effective power of the word.

On the theoretical level, we will not be able to validate Freud's interpretation of his practice, for here we observe the submission of reason to the object of its study, of *purusha* turning his attention to *prakriti*: Freud presents himself as a scientific mind studying the Inconscient. Therefore he is Man defined as Reason, a Cartesian creature, putting the world at a distance as an object to be known. But at the end of his study, man is redefined as determined by blind impulses and desire: the object of study has therefore overcome the studying subject and redefined him in its proper terms. This overcoming of *purusha* by *prakriti* will not be validated as knowledge by Indian psychology, because the knower has been trapped by the known. From this angle, it appears like a defeat of the knower. Borrowing the allegoric language of the Veda, we can draw a suggestive parallel between Freud's research and the legend of *Sarama* and the lost cows: In some cave of the subconscious, the radiating herds of knowledge, which had risen on us with *Usha*, the Dawn, have disappeared, robbed and hidden by what in us is obscure, doesn't want to give itself, the miser, the trafficker, the robber. *Sarama*, the intuitive faculty, finds the cave, and presents herself as sent by *Indra*. She is welcomed by the *panis*, the traffickers, who propose to make a pact with *Indra*. She then answers that *Indra* (the illumined mind) and *Brihaspati* (the soul-word) will destroy them and make them 'vomit their own speech'. Then they propose to share with her their cows as with a sister. She answers that only *Indra* knows about sister and brother (R.V., 10, 108). Then *Indra*, *Brihaspati* and the Rishis *Angirasas*, with their words of truth, destroy the imprisoning caves and the radiant herds are recovered. Now, what happened when Freud took the same path, some thousands of years later? I would allegorically suggest that he discovered the same cave, was welcomed by the same *panis* and gave quite a different answer: "Oh my friends, I am so happy to find you! Thanks to you I now know the reality of man's secret soul: the Inconscient is his ultimate Real, and I will go now all over the world repeating to all and each one '*idam eva tvam asi*' (this 'Id' only you are)." So did he and psychoanalysis became very successful and wealthy, teaching men that escape from impulse and desire is

1. See the significant formulation of the rishis about the recovery of the radiant herds from the subconscious caves by *Brihaspati*: "Thou hast crushed with thy stroke the mouthless Dividers who mar our self-expression, thou hast cloven them asunder in the gated city."

impossible, that one can only make it viable in one's life.

In the field of Western applied psychology, dealing with *Prakriti* rather than with the liberating power of *Purusha*, we will find only the study of processes and habit of reactions to stimuli, the Self never appears. Psychological qualities as sincerity, truthfulness, courage, aspiration, etc, which are so central in the process of self-becoming, are not even considered as worthy of being studied, for how can you measure them 'objectively'? Man is seen not in his capacity to free himself from determinations but as defined by the sum of their interactions. This may lead to some form of enlightened manipulation, not to self-discovery. It seems even sometimes that its results are more immediately efficient in the field of advertisement, propaganda and disinformation (if not of 'special' methods of interrogation) than in the field of education and self-becoming. This approach, when we adopt it in our search for knowledge, subtly changes our way of looking at human beings: if their psyche is only made of processes and conditioned reactions, then we will not see the person any more, but only processes and habits that a good psycho-technology can put into form and manipulate. But what do we become, in this process? Is our integrity not altered? Don't we lose the capacity to be in relation with others in the truest possible way? The process of knowing is identified with the method it uses, and we can observe here also the absorption of *purusha* by *prakriti*: first we have a genuine enquiry of the mind, then the apparatus of science replacing the thinker, then mere technology replacing science, skilful manipulation replacing knowledge. Here also, Indian philosophy would find it difficult to acknowledge the pretence of Western psychology to be a true science, since it is unaware of the process by which it identifies and therefore submits itself to the mechanic functioning of *prakriti*.

But the explanation using the *purusha-prakriti* model is not enough, for if it states that the subject can be absorbed by the object, it doesn't explain how. To know better, with a more liberating knowledge, we will have to turn to the Veda, and follow Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of it.² Here, the Veda appears essentially as a book of psychological knowledge: its whole subject is about human condition and human becoming, about how we do become through work. This question is absent from Western psychology, by lack of concepts. How does the Veda present it? Being truly human requires an effort, it doesn't come naturally as it would for lions to be lions. It has to be chosen and worked out with a conscious will. Indeed, we do practise the Vedic way of becoming every day as soon as we try to be human beings and adopt any learning process. For instance, if I want to become a pianist, I have to find a way to become what I am not (I may be potentially but not actually). The first condition is the flame of inner will, *Agni*, burning for it. That is why *Agni* comes first, in front —

2. Sri Aurobindo has established his interpretation on the basis of spiritual experience, but has also double-checked it: it had to be proven consistent in all contexts (the same word should keep the same meaning throughout the Veda and reveal the underlying structure of each hymn as well as the coherence of all the hymns taken together) and the meaning proposed had also to be justified on the philological level in order to be accepted. Cf. Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*.

purohitam — of the human journey — *yātrā*. In the fire of this will I will burn the energies of my mental, emotional, vital, physical nature and concentrate on music. Then what will invariably happen each time somebody does this? A new nature will be formed in him, he will become a musician, an emanation of music, or a musician will be part of him, or Music will be born in him. The Vedic seers would say: by sacrificing to music, we have called it down to establish its operations in our nature, a son of the god of music has been created in us. But this goes as far as the instrumental nature only is concerned, the integration of a musical capacity of expression. There is a deeper question and a deeper consequence: why do you want to become a musician? Is it because you heard the music of universal joy and you want to become an expressive instrument of it? Then you will grow more and more in this joy, and this joy will establish itself in your very being. Is it because you have the ambition of becoming a great musician, to be successful and admired and rich? Then you will become more and more a swollen ego and most probably lose your capacity of joy. In both cases you will be a musician in your outward nature, but you will have invited in you a very different being according to the path you have chosen or, in the symbolic language of the Veda, according to the god you have served. Here is the simple psychological key of all becomings, which we practise every day without knowing it, in a diluted manner, half conscious of the process. Those who work for money sacrifice to money and they become full of it; those who work by ambition become beings of power and power possesses them. Those who work for an analytical knowledge offer their mind to it and this knowledge takes birth in them and establishes its operations in their nature.

Where could we find an alternative system which can describe as well as this one the experience of becoming, which is always valid, in all times and in all cultures, which offers at the same time a theory and a practice of conscious becoming? Because they had their two feet solidly planted in the human condition, the Vedic seers knew that there is something that opposes the ascent of man, a deep subconscious basis where our nature is also rooted, so that we have also in us the opposite of what we aspire to be. That is why the human journey was described not only as a sacrifice but also as a battle. There are movements that make us vaster and greater, more luminous and free, there are others that restrain and obstruct, divide and tear; we have to put our conscious will on one side or the other, there is no escape from this freedom we are given to choose what we want to become. What we call yoga is only the concentration of this process of choice and offering by which the lower is offered to the higher, through the flame of will, the builder of all becomings, so that the higher can descend into the lower and raise it to a new birth.

According to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Veda (and the idea is also present in the Bhagavad Gita, showing a remarkable continuity of thought), there is no action which is not also a process of self-becoming, through *yajña*: in every action, *karma*, the doer offers his energies, through *yajña*, to some principle or state of

consciousness or way of being, and embodies them in his nature. The scientist has no place to dwell where he can escape this law: Freud, by fixing his attention on and dedicating his life to the Inconscient, has invited it to become the dominant reality of man and has become blind to any other dimension. It is true that this was not his explicit purpose; still it is the result of his *yajña*. Nowadays, you have in Europe (particularly in France where the Freudian school is strong) an ideology of Desire, man perceived essentially as Desire, or as a ‘desiring machine’, with psychologists and educationists ‘listening to the child’s desire’, as a replacement for the soul.³

The techno-psychologist, on his side, by sacrificing to his beliefs in processes, conditionings and habits, has become a manipulator of the human instrumental nature rather than a knower of its deepest and truest reality. Therefore we see that the Vedic intimate approach of action as *yajña* offers not only a psychological clue, but an epistemological one about psychology. The fact that *yajña* cannot be measured in a quantified manner only shows the limits of what, nowadays, is called science in the field of Psychology. But this does not affect its own truth nor its validation by everyone who chooses to explore it.

In this short essay I hope that I have shown that while some psychologists attempt to validate Indian knowledge of consciousness by Western criteria, Indian psychology can return the courtesy with some kind of relevance because its knowledge of consciousness is deeper and wider, more self-aware, more solidly grounded in verified experience, thought out with more universally valid concepts. It doesn’t mean that Western psychology has no validity, it has gathered an abundant mass of results in many fields, but it concerns mainly the instrumental nature of man, without any capacity to formulate a unified theory and practice of man and consciousness, because it can plumb neither his deepest reality nor his highest possibilities. For this attempt, India seems to be in a better position when, after the effort of assimilating Western science, she does what she always did in the past, what Sri Aurobindo expected her to do: a creative synthesis of the elements she has received with her ancient knowledge, a new foundation for a new creation.

JEAN-YVES LUNG

3. It is significant, from an Indian point of view, that Karl Marx has reduced man to be an expression of *artha*, interest, while Sigmund Freud reduced him to *kama*, desire. They start from different grounds but arrive at the same conclusion: *dharma* (one’s ideal law of becoming) and *moksha* (liberation in the knowledge of the Self) — the truest realities of man according to Indian culture — are but unreal and self-deceiving phenomena of consciousness. Indeed, if *artha* and *kama* are the ultimate realities of man, India has no place any more in the future of human destiny. But she alone has kept, clear in conception and living in the heart, the concept of *yajña* as the key to a human life made of endless progress and becoming.

THE MAHABHARATA IN ARABIC AND PERSIAN

THE record of foreign invasions in India's own *itihasa* is not available in any systematic form. However, the references to foreign tribes are several, as in the Vashishtha-Vishvamitra conflict, Sagara's conquests, the Rajasuya sacrifice, the Kurukshetra war and Kalayavana's attack. What we do not find are accounts of foreign rulers except in the cryptic statements regarding the descendants of Yayati's four sons, Yadu, Turvasu, Anu, Druhyu. In historical times when the Arabs and Mughals invaded and settled down here, they found that to understand Indians it was necessary to comprehend the two poetic compositions that appeared to wield an overpowering influence over the population. The unfortunate fact is that in modern India there has been no effort to study what these foreigners made of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The only papers available are quite old: R. G. Harshe's on the Arabic version of the *Mahabharata* (Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, Pune, Vol. 2), and the studies by M. A. Chaghatai (BDCRI, Vol. 5) and J. J. Modi (Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 6) on Akbar's illustrated edition of the Persian *Razm Nama* (*The Book of War*, as Akbar named the *Mahabharata*).

The first Arabic text on the *Mahabharata* belongs to the 11th century AD. In 1845 M. Reinaud, Membre de l'Institut, Paris, published a book containing French translations of Arabic and Persian fragments about India with a chapter entitled, "History of the kings of India and their chronological order according to the information which has come to our knowledge". This was a translation thrice removed, being a French version of the Persian work *Modjmel-altevarykh* (1125 AD) by Abul-Hasan-Ali, keeper of the city library of Jurjan located near the Caspian seashore, written for a chieftain of the Dilemites. This Persian work was itself a translation of the Arabic "Instruction of the Princes" (1026 AD) by Abu-Saleh who had translated it from the Sanskrit. The first Arab invasion was of Sind in the early 9th century AD, conterminous with the Umayyad invasion of Spain. Kunti's narration of the Vidula-Sanjaya dialogue in the *Udyoga Parva* of the *Mahabharata* could have had this in the background. Abu-Saleh's work contains not only the Mahabharata story but also others that have not been identified. A summary, based on Harshe's paper, is given below of what is found in the French translation pertaining to the *Mahabharata*. Typically, it begins with Sind.

Two tribes, Meyd (Madra) and Zath (Jat), descended from Ham, dwelt in Sind. In Arabic the Indians are referred to as from the country Zath. Driven out by the Meyd, the Zath withdrew to the banks of the river Pehen and becoming expert navigators overcame the Meyd. Desiring a settlement, the Zath approached king Dujoshan

(Duryodhana?) son of Daharata (Dhritarashtra) requesting that he depute a ruler over them and the Meyd. Dujoshan gave the land of Sind to his sister Dusal (Duhshala), daughter of Daharata. She married Jandrat (Jayadratha), a powerful chieftain, who ruled for over 20 years till power went from the hands of the Bharata. The princess was extremely wise and wrote to her brother about the lack of learned, wise people. At her request her brother sent thirty thousand Brahmanas from different parts of India along with their families to Sind. Lengthy accounts of their discussions are given in the original work along with descriptions of the country and its strange features. The capital was called Askelend (Asandivat, capital of Janamejaya, ancestor of Pandavas). One part of Sind was given to the Zath whose chief was named Joudarat (Yuddharatha?). The Meyd received another territory.

Fur (Puru?) emperor of India was a son of Mahran (Mandhata?) at the time of Dahak/Zahak and Faridun, descended from Ham. Ham left two sons, blind Dehran (Dhritarashtra) and the minor Fan (Pandu). Enemies seized parts of the kingdom. After Fan came of age, at Dehran's behest he rid the kingdom of evils and enemies. Dehran offered him the throne and, when he refused, gave him half the kingdom.

Dehran's wife Qandhar (Gandhari) gave him a daughter Dusal and many sons of whom the eldest was Dujoshan. All of this dynasty were called Bharata. The other family was named the Fanimin (Pandava) consisting of five sons of Fan. The eldest was Jehtal, the second Bhimasena, the third Ajun, these three from Fundar; the fourth Shaddeb, the fifth Newal, being twins. Each had a special talent. In addition, Fan had another son like himself (Karna?) who lived with king Dehran.

The incident of Fan killing a coupling hermit couple metamorphosed into gazelles and being cursed to die on trying to satisfy his passion is related. Fan's wives were Fundar and Madhar. Being cursed he withdrew to the mountain, informing king Dehran. One day near sunset Fan was asleep. Madhar asked Fundar to wake him to eat as customary at this time. Fundar refused and waited till he awoke at night, being amorously moved. He asked her what she wanted. She told him. Fan said, "What pleasure do I derive from my wives when even the Sun halts to look at them?" He got a funeral pile prepared, gave away all he had to the Brahmanas and told his wives, "No human being can, nor ever will, gratify your desires." Then, while gratifying Fundar, he died and was burnt. The two wives lived for a long time. The dwellers of the air would gather round them out of desire and they were overcome by their passions for these *jinn*s. "The author tells the most ridiculous stories about this subject", writes the translator.

Each son of Fan was educated by a pious man who prayed to God to grant whatever the pupil would desire. Jehtal asked for a mighty rule and a firm minister; Bhimasena for great strength; Ajun for mastery of the bow; Newal for skill in horsemanship and courage; Shahdeb for wisdom, knowledge of hidden things, astronomy. The empire left the Bharatas to come to them.

The pious men took the princes with their mothers to king Dehran who gave

half his kingdom to them, appointing Jehtal their overlord. The other half he gave his own sons led by Dujoshan. People preferred Jehtal, which aroused Dujoshan's jealousy who built an inflammable pavilion and persuaded the Fanimin to reside in it. Dehran warned Jehtal to be obedient to Dujoshan who was his elder and not to trust him. The Fanimin had an uncle Bhimasena (Vidura) who sent a sapper to prepare an underground passage for them to escape from the pavilion, and informed his nephews of the danger. Soon thereafter Dehran died and Dujoshan took charge of all royal authority. The Fanimin with their mothers, a group of seven, went into Saman (wilderness?) and had many adventures before joining king Droupada whose daughter Dropadi became their wife when Ajun hit with his arrow the eye of a golden fish atop a tower. She was the wife for all five brothers, "the narrative tells strange things in regard to this subject." Thereafter they went into another land and the story of their adventures with the *divs* (gods) is too long to reproduce. Finally they obtained kingship.

After some years, war began between them and Dujoshan who would not agree to any settlement and called his brother-in-law Jandrat from Sind. Finally all were killed. Jehtal pierced Dujoshan with an arrow. When Dusal heard of it, she burnt herself. Thus ended the empire of the Bharata. When grieving Qandhar refused to be consoled by a Brahmana, he left and she found herself going mad with grief not having eaten anything. One night, seeing something resembling food in the air, she stood up on the corpse of one of her sons but could not reach it. Vainly she kept making a pile of the corpses of her sons but it was always too high. The Brahmana appeared again, urging her to heed his advice. She replied, "What you say is true. The veil is rent: you see how far the desire to eat has carried me." He gave her something to eat. Then she burnt all the bodies of her children and rested.

Jehtal ruled over all Hindustan. Sendjura, son of Jandrat, was pardoned and Sind given to him. Finally, Jehtal decided to retire to the mountain of hermits like his forefathers. His brothers agreed, installed Parik (Parikshit), son of Ajun, on the throne and withdrew to the mountain where they performed religious practices till their death. Parik reigned for thirty years and was succeeded by Janamedjaya who reigned for twenty years and was replaced by his son Sahdaniq (Satanika) who ruled for twenty-five years. Then Safsanica (Sahasranika) ruled justly for twenty-four years, followed by his son Yesra who ruled for fifty years and people tired of him. There was disorder. After his death his brother Couy-hour (Citraratha or Shuchidrata?) ruled but was a bad ruler. He was killed after fifteen years and the empire went out of the hand of the Fanimin.

In the early 9th century AD Khalifa Al-Mamun, son of Haroun-al-Rashid, who had two Hindu doctors in his court, used to hold religious conferences like Akbar in which Sanskrit-knowing scholars were included. Indian medical works of Charaka and Sushruta were translated into Arabic in the court of the Pahlavi Gajashta Abalis (c. 825 AD). The Tarikh-i-Ferishta records that Feroze Tughlaq got some Sanskrit

works lying in a Hindu temple in Nagarkote (Nagrota in Kangra valley) translated into Persian. The local legend was that Alexander had placed an image of his wife Nowshaba here, which was worshipped by the Brahmins as Jwalamukhi.

Akbar got as many as 15 Sanskrit texts translated into Persian. These were: Atharbed by Badaoni and others; Bhagwad Gita by Faizi and another; Gangadhar by Abul Fazl; Haribans by Maulana Sheri; Jog-Bashishta by Maulana Faraniuli; Katha Sarit Sagara by Badaoni; Kishen Joshi by Abul Fazl; Lilavati and Nal Daman by Faizi; Mahesh Mohanand by Abul Fazl; Singhasana Batatishi by Badaoni, called "Nama-i-Khird Afza"; Tajak on astronomy by Muhammad Khan; treatise on elephants by Mulla Sheri; Ramayana and Mahabharata by Badaoni and others.

Abdul Qadir Badaoni records that in 1582 AD Akbar felt that it would be worthwhile to get translated into Persian the rich material of philosophy and history in the *Mahabharata* for the edification of his nobles. Badaoni states that it narrates the wars of the tribes of Kurus and Pandus who ruled in Hind more than 4000 years ago, which the people commonly say is over 80,000 years ago. Akbar took personal interest in the enterprise, explaining the meaning to Naqib Khan the first few nights so that he could make a Persian summary. Some of the Sanskrit scholars who were called in to assist were: Debi Misra, Satavadana, Madhusudana Misra, Rudra Bhattacharaj, Chaturbhuj, Sheikh Bhawan (a Dakhini Brahmin converted into Islam). Of these Debi Misra author of *Bharata artha dipika*, Chaturbhuj Misra author of *Bharata upaya prakasaka bharata tatparya prakashika* are from Bengal, well known as having written commentaries on the epic. Madhusudana Misra edited the play *Mahanatakam*. They assisted Naqib Khan, Shaikh Sultan (Haji) Thanessari, Mulla Sheri and Abdul Qadir Badaoni who wrote the text in Persian.

Razm Nama is not an exact translation but a free Persian adaptation, as Badaoni states. Badaoni translated two of the 18 books. Badaoni also translated the *Ramayana* for which he received 150 Ashrafis and 10,000 tangahs, the "Singhasan Battisi" as "Nameh-i Khirad-Afza" and the Atharva Veda in which he found that Hindus eat beef, bury their dead and that it has a passage guaranteeing salvation that resembles the Muslim "La-illah illa 'llah". Mulla Sheri (who also translated the *Harivamsha* as *Haribans* which Albiruni says is an authority on Indian matters) and Naqib Khan did a part. The rest was finished by Sultan Haji of Thanessar. Faizi, Abul Fazl's brother and Akbar's personal friend, converted two books into elegant language. Sultan Haji further revised these two and his own portion for over four years, carefully checking against the original, saying, "I render into modern language the knowledge of 10,000 years." Badaoni, on the other hand, calls it "puerile absurdities, of which the 18000 creations may well be amazed . . . Two parts were written. Such discussions as one never heard! As, Shall I eat forbidden things? Shall I eat turnips? But such is my fate to be employed on such works . . . But the Emperor took exception to my translation and called me a Haramkhur and a turnip-eater, as if that was my share of the book." He felt that all the translators were destined for hell. Akbar suspected him of importing

his bigoted ideas into the translation and Badaoni had to defend himself at length over a passage in the *Shanti Parva* dealing with rebirth.

The first draft of the text was completed in August-September 1584 and contained translations of one lakh verses of the epic. It was then copied by expert calligraphists. Abul Fazl wrote a lengthy preface. According to him, recital of the *Harivamsha* was known to cure sterility. After the text was prepared, Akbar asked his court artists to illustrate it. Prominent among these master artists were Daswant, Basawan, Lal, Mukund, Kesav, Muhammad Sharif and Farrukh Chella who produced some of the finest specimens of Mughal miniature painting. There are 168 paintings in Akbar's copy, more than in any other illustrated manuscript of the period. It was bound in four lavish volumes and presented to the emperor who named it *Razm Nama, The Book of War*. Akbar asked his nobles to get copies made for their own study. Akbar's copy, acquired by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh of Jaipur in the 1740s, is in the Maharaja Sawai Mansingh-II Museum in Jaipur City Palace, unavailable for study owing to court cases. Jai Singh ripped off the gold-embroidered lambskin covers of the original on religious grounds. Another of lesser quality was produced in 1598-1599. Most of the other illustrated *Razm Nama* are lost or scattered all over the world in museums and personal collections. One was prepared for Jahangir's commander-in-chief, Abdur Rahim Khankhanan, in 1616-17, which too has been dispersed across the world. In 1602 AD Tahir Muhammad prepared an abridgement of the Persian translation including the *Harivamsha*. Firishta states in the introduction to his history of India and Hindus that he used the *Razm Nama* as his source. Unfortunately, the editors of the critical edition of the *Mahabharata* did not study the *Razm Nama* to check what episodes featured in the epic in the 16th century, which would have enabled us to determine what, if anything, has been interpolated since then.

The *parva*-wise summary of contents of the Persian adaptation are given below as stated by the translators, indicating the number of verses in the original (southern recension) and the Persian separately as in Chaghatai's paper. The differences in names of characters of the later *parvas* show Thanesari's correction of Naqib Khan and others' errors in the earlier parts.

Adi: 8884 verses in both (Persian "Ad"), giving an account of the Kurus and Pandavas.

Sabha: 2511 verses in both. Jadthal sends his brothers on world-conquest; Rajasuya held; gambling assembly arranged.

Vana: 11664 verses Sanskrit; 11360 Persian "Ban". 12 years exile of Pandavas in the forest.

Virata: 2050 verses Sanskrit; 2005 Persian "Barat". Return of Pandavas from forest to city of Barat to hide there.

Udyoga: 6698 verses Sanskrit; 6238 Persian “Odam”. Pandavas reveal identity and move to Kurkhat and arrange army.

Bhishma: 5884 verses in both (Persian “Bhikam”). Battle and Bhikam’s fall. Death of many sons of Dhartashak over 10 days battle.

Drona: 8909 verses in both (Persian “Daruna”). Jarjodhan holds council; fall of Dorun on 5th day. Account of other 5 days concerning Bhikam’s sustaining wounds

Karna: 4964 verses in both (Persian “Karn”). 2 days’ fighting and death of Karn. Account of his fight with Jadshal and being killed by Arjun.

Shalya: 3230 verses Sanskrit; 3208 verses Persian “Shal”. Account of Shal and others being hanged. 90 persons killed. Daryodhan hiding and his brothers killed by mace in battle lasting 18 days.

Sauptika: 870 verses Sanskrit; 880 verses Persian “Sapat”. Night attack led by Karl Barmha (Kritavarma), Astham, Karya (Kripa) on army of Pandavas.

Stri: both 775 verses; Persian “Astari”. Weeping of women of both sides. Gandhari, mother of Daryodhana, curses Krishna.

Santi: 14725 verses Sanskrit; 19374 verses Persian “Sant”. After the victory Jadshall wanted to renounce the world. Krishna urges him in the company of Bhikam who was still alive and Jadshall listens attentively to the advice and admonitions.

Anusasana: 8000 verses both versions. Bhikam’s alms and charities.

Asvamedhika: 3320 verses Sanskrit; 3308 verses Persian “Asmed”. An account of the Asmed sacrifice when Bhikam, on completion of the admonitions, renounces the faithless world. Jadshall wanted to follow the path of renunciation. Vayas praised supremacy and urged Yudhishtar and for his satisfaction ordered a sacrifice.

Asramavasika: 1506 verses Sanskrit; 300 verses Persian. Renunciation of Dhrastik, Gandhari the mother of Jarjashan, Kunti the mother of Jodishtar and their going to the jungle in Kurukshetra where Vayas lived and Pandavas followed to see them.

Mausala: 320 verses Sanskrit; 300 verses Persian “Mosal”. Account of Jadwan (Balarama) and Krishan dying in miserable circumstances and other events.

Mahaprasthanika: 360 verses Sanskrit; 320 verses Persian “Jan”. Jadishtar and his brothers’ renunciation of the world and entrusting the kingdom to people and their departure to the Himalaya (ice-hills).

Svargarohana: 209 verses Sanskrit; 200 verses Persian “Sarkawahan”. Pandvas resigning the souls to the mountain and the physical ascension of Jadishtar to the higher world.

Harivamsha: Khatimas Harbans: account of Jadwan (Balarama).

Recently Mapin Publishing has brought out the *Birla Razmnama* edited by Prof. Asok Kumar Das containing the paintings. This *Birla Razmnama*, kept in the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, is a signed work of Mir Sayyid Ali Tabrizi Judai in three volumes with 629 folios including 84 full-size miniatures by the court

artists of Akbar. Its scribe is Pir Muhammad bin Muhammad Hafiz and it is dated the year of Akbar's death, 1605 AD. Das has pointed out that when compared to the Jaipur *Razmnama*, "the subjects vary widely." Some stories chosen are not common and some others that are depicted in more than one miniature in the Jaipur copy have been condensed into one in the Birla copy.

The *Ashvamedhaparva* is of particular interest because, as Das writes, "The exploits of the sacrificial horse — related in the *Ashvamedhika parva* — are shown in 47 illustrations in the Jaipur copy, 22 in the 1598-99 copy against only four in the Birla copy." In fact, as Shekhar Sen has pointed out, there are five illustrations, not four. Das has missed the fifth one, plate 79. In the *Razmnama* this particular *parva* is taken from Jaimini, not Vyasa. The episodes depicted in the Birla copy are those of Babhravahana, Yudhishtira's *yajna*, Anushalva, Hamsadhvaja and the demon Bhishana.

Why did the authors of most of the medieval vernaculars, especially the eastern, prefer Jaimini to Vyasa? Vyasa had asked each of his four disciples to compose their versions of his work. Of these, only Jaimini's single *parva* exists today. This version is much more sensational. Vyasa's *parva* is full of philosophical issues that do not appeal to the ordinary reader and the tour of the horse is very brief. Arjuna runs through the opposition, stumbling only once at Manipura (also called Manalura, located near Madurai). After the tumultuous war books, the story of these battles comes as a damp squib. Jaimini, however, is full of action, variety, colour and a series of absorbing stories with few philosophical outpourings. It celebrates the exploits of the children of the heroes slain in the great war and Arjuna comes off quite poorly. In addition, it is liberally spiked with Krishna-*bhakti*, which must have appealed particularly to the sensibilities of medieval readers and re-tellers. For these reasons, perhaps, the Jaimini *parva* almost invariably replaced Vyasa's *Ashvamedhika Parva* in later renderings of the *Mahabharata*. Jaimini has not been accessible to the English reading public so far. The first shloka-by-shloka English translation by Major General Shekhar Sen is now under publication from Writers Workshop, Kolkata to sate the curiosity of Indologists.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

Nothing is more remarkable in all the characters of the Mahabharata than this puissant intellectualism; every action of theirs seems to be impelled by an immense driving force of mind solidifying in character and therefore conceived and outlined as in stone.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 160)

NIROD-DA: REMINISCENCES

Preface

In November 1999, when as a student I had gone to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, at Pondicherry, I had the opportunity of meeting Nirod-da. Along with me, some other students were allowed to have a brief conversation with him. I had noted down each and every word uttered by him in a writing pad while he spoke. And I have preserved those papers till date. In May 2006, I had sent the written record of the talks with Nirod-da to Bani-di (Ms. Bani Mutsuddi, Nirod-da's niece) who was extremely kind to accept it and appreciate my efforts. These talks are included in the present essay.

Anurag Banerjee

26.11.2006

* * *

It was the evening of 20th July 2006. I was looking for a book in the library of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture (Lakshmi House — Kolkata) when the librarian asked me, “Have you heard the news of his passing?”

“Whose death are you talking about?” I asked him.

“Nirod-da’s. Nirodbaran’s.”

I was stunned for a moment as the news was absolutely unexpected (to me at least). I knew that he had been in the Nursing Home for the past several months but letters from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry addressed to me did not indicate that his condition was critical. I had sincerely hoped that I would be able to meet him again in his room in the Ashram.

Later, I went to the Meditation Hall where, in front of the Relics, a framed and enlarged photograph of Nirodbaran and his childhood pal and *gurubhai*, Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharya was kept, adorned with flowers. The latter, who was “the Mother’s Instrument”, had left this world for higher planes in 1984 and twenty-two years later, his life-long friend, Nirodbaran, followed him.

When I returned home, I took out Nirodbaran’s *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*; in between its pages I found the “blessings packet” he had given to me with his own hands seven years ago. Along with Sri Aurobindo’s photograph and flowers from the Samadhi, there was printed a prayer of the Mother:

Lord, give me Thy blessings that I may become more and more sincere.

As I looked at the “blessings packet”, old and sweet memories of the past came to me like a gust of breeze.

It was in November 1999 that I had the opportunity of meeting Nirod-da and that is the only reason why that year **is still memorable** to me. Every year, our school (The Future Foundation School) used to take interested students to Pondicherry. And while we were on our way, Ranjan Mitter, our Principal, had told us that the first person whom we were to meet would be Nirod-da. I still remember quite distinctly how excited I was when I heard him; though at that time and age, I had read only one book penned by Nirodbaran (*Sri Aurobindayan*) yet the very fact that I would be able to see and talk to the direct disciple of Sri Aurobindo made my heart beat faster.

We reached Villupuram on the 30th of November at 3.30 in the morning and Pondicherry a couple of hours later. After a brief rest, we were taken to the main building of the Ashram and then, in a long and silent queue, we were made to enter Nirodbaran’s room. When I entered the small room, I found that it was packed with people; I had expected only one person to be there and that too Nirodbaran, but there were many people. I felt nervous and confused because till then, I had not seen any photograph of Nirodbaran so I was in a dilemma — how would I recognise him? Then I saw that an elderly gentleman was sitting on a chair and everyone was looking at him. I was told that Nirodbaran was 96 years old but the gentleman on the chair did not look like a nonagenarian; in fact he looked much younger! So with silent trepidation, I made my obeisance to him and asked him meekly, “Sir, are you Sri Nirodbaran?” He looked up at me and nodded his head. I told him, “I want to ask you something about Sri Aurobindo.” He said to me in Bengali, “First go and see the whole place and then come to me; I will answer your questions.” I made my obeisance to him again and came out of the room, totally breathless.

What an experience it was! For a boy who had turned fifteen the previous month, the feeling of seeing and meeting Nirodbaran, the direct disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was simply overwhelming. It was like a boon granted by the Almighty! Later, we were informed that he would meet us again before our departure from Pondicherry; he would talk to us and we would be able to ask him questions directly. Naturally I was thrilled and waited eagerly for the day to come.

The day eventually came. It was on the 4th of December. We were taken to a room in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education where we sat on the floor. A few minutes later, Nirodbaran entered the room escorted by Ranjan Mitter. Though I had seen him earlier, yet this time I observed him minutely. It was indeed difficult to believe that he was 96 years old; he walked without any support and there was an aura of eternal youth around him. His was a straight physique, though he was slim, but there was no sign of any weakness. I was reminded of what one of the members of the Ashram had said about him: that he had taken part in the parade even in the previous year (1998). He had a solemn face with kind eyes and a brief but affectionate smile on his lips. He

was clad in a white *punjabi* and *dhoti* and was quite erect for his age and had a broad forehead. Age did not defeat him, it was he who had defeated age. Two chairs were placed in front of us and Ranjan Mitter and he sat on them.

Ranjan Mitter said to us, "Nirodbaran. Our Nirod-da was Sri Aurobindo's attendant. He penned *Savitri* taking dictation from Sri Aurobindo. He is a doctor."

Nirodbaran asked: "*Kon bhashay bolbo? Bangla na Ingriji?*" (Which language should I speak in? Bengali or English?)

I was dazzled to hear his diction. It was so distinct! Even his voice was not weak or trembling! It was like:

A music spoke transcending mortal speech.

(*Savitri*)

Ranjan Mitter said, "English will be better, for some of the students are non-Bengalis."

Nirodbaran: "We extend a hearty welcome to you. Hope you are glad to see us. What did you like about the Ashram?"

Some of us suggested the Library; some the Sports Ground.

Nirodbaran: "Anything else?"

A few more suggestions came.

Nirodbaran: "Tell me, how do the other Ashramites differ from me?"

A boy said: "You are younger than them."

Another boy said: "You are young in spirit."

Nirodbaran: "What do you see? What do you feel?"

Answers came: "Trees, flowers."

Nirodbaran: "What do they do?"

Somebody answered: "They beautify the place."

Nirodbaran: "Yes. Imagine the Ashram without plants or flowers. The Mother was very fond of beauty. Now tell me, all the time people are coming to the Ashram, to the Samadhi; why?"

A boy said: "To pay tribute."

Another boy said: "To pray."

Nirodbaran: "You go to the Samadhi out of what?"

A reply came: "To show our love to the Mother."

Nirodbaran: "Ah! That's the word! Love! Love the Mother. The Mother's love is not gratitude. The Mother loves you deeply, very sincerely. You have come here only because of the Mother. Which mother loves you? The Divine Mother. She's everywhere, in you and me. The Mother used to say, 'I'm there always but you must call me; not only when you are in danger, but also when you want something.' If it's good for you, She'll give it. The Mother is in this room. You must love Her. Love is the best means of your

going to Her and Her coming to you. Love is very common. Pray to Her. That's what I've to say. One message I give you. Love. It is the best means by which you can know Her. Physical fitness is required for you children. You must play and exercise. The Mother used to play tennis even when She was 80 . . . I am 96. Do I look like it?"

A boy said: "You look like a boy of 14."

Nirodbaran laughed and then said: "Thanks. Develop fitness of body. You will enjoy life more than others. My last saying to you is — the work done here is to make you pure and sacred."

The last sentence still rings in my ears even after the lapse of so many years. In a nutshell, Nirodbaran had explained everything; why we were there; how and why the Force of the Mother was working in us — Her children; how was it helping us to become "the hero warriors" so that we could fight "the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past" "so that the new things may manifest and we may be ready to receive them." It was like an assurance that

A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.

(Savitri)

Ranjan Mitter asked us if we had any questions for Nirodbaran. Three questions were asked but I can recollect only the first two. The questions were repeated to Nirodbaran by Ranjan Mitter as they were not audible enough for him.

The first question was: "When did you see or hear about Sri Aurobindo for the first time?"

Nirodbaran: "Oops! Somebody, when I was young, told me about Sri Aurobindo. He was not the 'Yogi Sri Aurobindo' then."

The second question was: "How did you become so close to Sri Aurobindo?"

Nirodbaran laughed and replied: "I do not know myself; I know nothing of the Divine. His ways are strange . . . (some words were not audible) My life was supposed to be ruined but why didn't it happen? [Because] Divine Grace stopped. It is everywhere. It can create or destroy. It's called 'miracle'."

The last time we saw Nirodbaran was on the 5th of December. We were coming out of Sri Aurobindo's room after having the "Darshan" in a long queue. I saw him sitting on a chair and giving "blessings packets" to the devotees and visitors. I received one too. When we left Pondicherry, I had lit a lamp of hope in my heart of meeting him once again. Possibilities arose many a time but were not converted into reality. For

seven long years, the lamp kept on burning and on the 20th of July 2006, it blew off.

When I had met Nirodbaran, to me he was special mainly because of the fact that he was the direct disciple of Sri Aurobindo. It was later, much later, when I started reading his books, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, *Madhumoyee Diptimoyee Ma*, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, his poetry, his articles on the Gurus and other *gurubhais* that I realised who he actually was! To me, his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* is like the Gita — how beautifully he had portrayed the outer but veiled life of Sri Aurobindo in that book. The Mother Herself had said, “Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was.” We, the followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, are indebted to him for revealing the unknown sides of our Gurus to us, thus, enabling us to know Them better and love Them more. Through his books, he had revealed:

The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,
Some rapture of the bliss that made the world,
Some rush of the force of God’s omnipotence,
Some beam of the omniscient Mystery.

(Savitri)

Sri Aurobindo used to reside in a lofty spiritual plane and thanks to His voluminous correspondence with Nirodbaran, Dilip Kumar Roy and K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), we’ve been fortunate enough to get an insight into the pure Aurobindonian philosophy. Because of their correspondence, we’ve been enlightened about Sri Aurobindo’s views and opinions on several subjects ranging from spirituality, politics, religion, art etc. And who can exclude the *Yugarishi*’s sense of humour?

Nirodbaran was a great disciple of a great Guru; he was the living and most perfect example of the embodiment of duty, devotion and dedication. Much has been written about him and much will be written about him in future but what can be said or written about someone like him who was greater than his achievements, who was like a pole-star to all the aspirants and followers of Integral Yoga! Men like him are seldom born and therefore, irreplaceable. His demise created a deep emptiness which can never be filled up.

Every person takes birth to fulfil a mission in his lifetime. Nirodbaran too had come to accomplish a special and spiritual mission; now, following the completion of his work, he has gone to the world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Therefore, we must not grieve or mourn, for he has embraced his Lord in that world.

ANURAG BANERJEE

(From *Nirodbaran — The Surrealist’s Journey*)

THE CULT OF VIOLENCE

WHAT makes an “educated” young man a terrorist and pushes him to mercilessly slaughter fellow human beings in the name of the Merciful? What are the motives and psychology behind jihadi terrorism?

The Inner Roots

Let us begin from the general and move on to the more specific motives. There is a streak of violence and aggression in everyone of us, even perhaps in the most saintly. As Mother points out: “Everyone generally has a tiny little corner in him — at times quite small, at times bigger, sometimes quite unconscious, sometimes a little conscious, sometimes superbly, completely conscious — which likes destroying, likes spoiling.”¹ The degenerate vital ego in us reacts to every provocation with an inner reaction which is mostly violent and aggressive though nothing of it may be visible outside. This violent streak, the terrorist within us, remains more or less suppressed by society and culture, discipline and ideals. Mental culture or refinement puts only a mask of the half-cultured philistine over his raw impulses. Even the pursuit of a higher ideal and discipline, if it is done without sufficient self-knowledge, discrimination and insight cannot entirely eliminate this aggressive element in us. The ethical discipline, if it is not sufficiently sincere, conscious and enlightened, creates only a superficial saintliness in which all the aggression, violence and criminal instincts remain suppressed and simmering behind a benign mask.

So, the mentally cultured man suppresses the terrorist in him and moves about wearing a cloak of social respectability. The half-sincere moralist pushes the terrorist into the subconscious and lives in an illusion of saintliness. The more sincere and enlightened ethical man rises a little beyond the terrorist element in him and tries to check, control or sublimate it with a higher mental and moral will. But there are a few who slip entirely into this ghoulish streak in them, get identified with it, and act from it. They are the outwardly visible and destructive terrorists who wreak havoc in society. So the terror and violence we see outside is only an extreme manifestation of the violence and terror within us.

This brings us to the question: “What are the factors which cause such a total identification with the violent elf within us?” There are many factors within, without and beyond, in the universal nature. One of them is the sense of injustice or of being victimised and the urge for revenge. Vengefulness, the urge to hit back, to take an eye for an eye, is a strong and prominent impulse in our vital nature. So, wherever there is large-scale oppression, injustice and inequality, combined with poverty and unemployment, which provide the recruiting ground, they create a fertile soil for

terrorist groups. However, this sense of injustice can be imaginary or real. It can be induced or magnified by hostile or megalomaniac propaganda.

There is also an external factor which can add or reinforce this inner violence. Wherever this aggressive, vengeful urge in us finds easy access to instruments for expressing it, there will be an escalation of violence in society. The Gun is an instrument made to kill and therefore carries the vibration of death and violence. The moment we hold it in our hands, this lethal vibration enters into our consciousness. It is a common experience of the wielders of the gun that the mere holding of it gives a sense of power, and using it to kill, a feeling of exhilaration. The captured terrorist in the recent Mumbai massacre has described how he felt a great sense of power and joy when he first held the AK-47 in his hands. So, one of the more material and external causes of violence is the easy availability of instruments of death and destruction like the gun or RDX on the arms market. However, we must also keep in mind that the inner factors shape the outer life. The inner demand creates the outer need, which the market supplies. A flourishing arms market — black or white — is an indication of the amount of violence within us.

The other factor which supplies a strong motivation for terrorist acts is the sense of the hero and martyr dying for a holy cause. If the cause is a truly holy one, for example, the patriot dying for liberating his country from alien oppression, this motive creates the true hero. But if the cause is a narrow, dogmatic, sectarian and violent creed, then this great motive force is misused for a wrong end. A narrow and violent creed, preached with fiery emotion and in the name of God, is almost irresistible to a narrow mind and an equally narrow heart but with an intensity of feelings. The other lure is the bait of a sensuous heaven after death. One of the terrorists of the 9/11 massacre in US wrote in his diary: “. . . by the time you see my diary I will be in heaven in the embrace of nymphs!” Those who succumb to such fiery, emotionally-charged, fundamentalist creeds have no mercy because the idea and the feeling that they are fighting for God or doing God’s work blunts the ethical instinct. A ruler of medieval India, in his fanatical religious zeal, proudly boasted that he had killed with his own hands many thousand of infidels! The medieval Christian clerics who burned and tortured ‘heretics’ believed sincerely that they were doing good to their victims by driving out the devil in them!

There is one more factor which the modern secular and scientific mind refuses to admit but is well-known in all spiritual traditions. It is the existence of dark and malevolent supraphysical forces in universal Nature who make use of human instruments. Negativities in our consciousness like violence or lust create an opening to these dark forces. They enter into our mind or heart through these chinks and take temporary or permanent possession of the human instrument. Many who commit violent crimes are helpless puppets in the hands of these more powerful cosmic forces. Some of them have admitted that they are forced and driven by a power beyond their control. There are other explanations or interpretations to this phenomenon in modern

psychology. But modern psychology is still an infant science which is yet to explore all the terrain of human or cosmic consciousness.

The Outer Remedies

These are the inner roots of violence. But what is the remedy? The solutions are easy to put on paper but very difficult to implement. The external remedies are well-known, for example, strengthening internal security and international cooperation; close watch and strict regulation over the sale of destructive instruments like the gun or the explosive; stopping or neutralising all political and financial support to institutions which preach or encourage the cult of terror; creating a more inclusive, equitable and just socio-economic order. All these and many other measures, however difficult they may be, have to be implemented to make the outer life of humanity reasonably immune to the cult of violence.

There is another remedy, which is more inward. It is prayer and invocation to the Divine. Whenever a crisis or situation becomes acute and humanly unmanageable, an ardent and sincere prayer, individual and collective, for the divine power to intervene, can bring down the Help of a power infinitely greater than the human. This has been a constantly repeating experience of spiritually receptive people all over the world. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
Then miracle is made the common rule, . . .
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.²

The Inner Transformation

But the lasting and permanent solution to the problem lies in inner transformation, which makes our consciousness immune to all forms of violence. This requires a system of education, which leads to an enlightened mind, a compassionate heart and an inner sensitivity to higher values like truth, beauty, goodness, harmony, unity. As a first step, a system of education, which encourages critical questioning and a culture of universal humanism based on fundamental human values can be an initial bulwark against violent, narrow and fundamentalist ideas and impulses. For example the gunmen who slaughter people in the name of God might never have asked or allowed others to ask the question how merciless killing of innocent men, women and children will lead to the supremely Merciful? Even if some of them dared to ask such questions to their mentors, they must have been smothered by a fiery or threatening emotional onslaught and a convoluted logic which a narrow and unthinking mind would have been unable to withstand.

This is a collective goal, and it is a little far away. But individually, we can accelerate our progress towards this goal, by each one of us making a sincere and persistent effort for inner transformation in our own self. Every inner victory gained over violent impulses within us has a positive occult impact in the mental atmosphere of our planet. The Mother made the following illuminating observation regarding conquest of desire, which also applies very much to the conquest of violence within us:

If through an effort of inner consciousness and knowledge, you can truly overcome in yourself a desire, that is to say, dissolve and abolish it, and if through inner goodwill, through consciousness, light, knowledge, you are able to dissolve the desire, you will be, first of all in yourself personally, a hundred times happier than if you had satisfied this desire, and then it will have a marvellous effect. It will have a repercussion in the world of which you have no idea. It will spread forth. For the vibrations you have created will continue to spread. These things grow larger like the snowball. The victory you win in your character, however small it be, is one which can be gained in the whole world.³

The process of this inner action is the same with the conquest over violence. If we are able to eliminate or dissolve the roots of wanton violence and senseless rage in our consciousness, it has a cascading impact on the other centres of consciousness. The victory we win within us creates the possibility and capacity for a similar victory in others. For there is an inner ecology of consciousness governed by more or less similar type of laws of physical and biological Nature discovered by modern ecology. Our minds and hearts are linked together in an interacting and interdependent unity of consciousness. So our inner movements like thoughts, feelings, desires and impulses are contagious. An inner vibration of thought or feeling, positive or negative, induces a similar vibration in others. A toxic vibration like violence spreads and induces a similar movement in others. And conversely, positive vibrations of love or a vibration created by the conquest over violence also spreads forth and has a healing effect on the mental atmosphere of our planet.

So an inner discipline for self-transformation based on this ecology of consciousness has to be made with three aspects: first, a constant rejection of all violent thoughts, feelings and impulses; second, a conscious cultivation of the opposite virtues like love, compassion, kindness; third, a positive conscious effort, by deep meditation, to discover the subconscious source of violence and dissolve it at its roots. The other important part of the discipline is a sincere and objective self-observation and a straight and courageous look at ourselves as we are.

Our emphasis on this inner action doesn't mean ignoring the external action to fight, prevent, minimise or eliminate visible violence in the outer life. The inner and outer actions are not mutually exclusive. They can proceed simultaneously. At present

most of the attention, analysis and remedies are focused on preventing the visible outer violence. This is a very necessary and urgent step. But there is also the need of those who, consciously, will take up the inner action.

M. S. SRINIVASAN

References

1. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1953*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, p. 233.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 20.
3. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1953*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, p. 19.

It is evident enough that hatred, violence, injustice are likely to create an answering hatred, violence and injustice and that I can only indulge these propensities with impunity if I am sufficiently powerful to defy resistance or so long as I am at once strong enough and prudent enough to provide against their natural reactions. It is true also that by doing good and kindness I create a certain goodwill in others and can rely under ordinary or favourable circumstances not so much on gratitude and return in kind as on their support and favour. But this good and this evil are both of them movements of the ego and on the mixed egoism of human nature there can be no safe or positive reliance.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 410-11)

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of June 2009)

10. For Vishnu's Worship

“NARAYANA!” I said and rested my fingers for a few seconds. I was making a garland for the family deity with *scarlet ixora*, *tulasi* leaves and tuberose alternating, setting up the red, green and white against one another. I have done this innumerable times but have never got the knack of the garland-makers of Srirangam who have specialised in the art of making garlands for the deity. Their garlands have a steady tapering on both the sides till we come to the end where they are made to stand like two decorative arches. It is an art which has been handed down for generations. The *scarlet ixora* is a ‘must’ for the garland, for it is considered very dear to Vishnu, a close second to *tulasi*. Well, did the designer of the Indian flag in its present line-up of colours have a connection with the Srirangam temple? At least I like to think so, for unless there was the grace of the Anandamaya Krishna guarding the nation, it could not have overcome the million problems that have converged upon it since 1947!

The *scarlet ixora*, known as ‘*semkāl vetchi*’ was among the favourite flowers of ancient Tamilians who seem to have created a symbolic cult around the subject. The Sangam texts associate the flower with cattle-capturing. It is said the king’s followers decorated themselves with the *scarlet ixora* when they went out to capture the cows of the enemy. And how about the cows being rescued by the original owner? That theme was known as ‘*vetchi karandhai*’. The soldiers who were engaged in capturing or recapturing the cows were known as ‘*vetchi maravar*’ (soldiers with *ixora* blossoms). The *Purapporul Venpa Malai* refers to the noises made during such capture and recapture of cows as ‘*vetchi aravam*’. One can well imagine the cows mooing, the calves running helter-skelter, the warriors clashing with sticks and trying to herd the beasts away to their enclosures, while whole bunches of *ixora* blossoms lay trampled upon like so many patches of blood on the field.

Sprinkling water on the basket of flowers, I cover it with a wet cloth and move towards my bookshelf reserved for the Sanskrit epics. My thoughts wander. Why do we still hold on to this Aryan-Dravidian division of India? Was it not a wily creation of western philologists and political gamblers to divide and rule India? Were the *Vetchi Maravar* of Tamil Nadu fair or dark? Were they unique to Tamil Nadu? This business of capturing an enemy’s cattle and re-capturing the captured cattle from the enemy . . . my language is growing dreamy as I take down the ‘*Virata Parva*’ of the *Mahabharata*.

Apparently such cattle-thieving went on throughout ancient India. It is understandable for cattle was wealth in those days. Is there anything in human experience that is not found in the *Mahabharata*? I swish the pages to know about the North Indian version of the *Vetchi Maravar*. Whether it is the *Vetchi Maravar* of ancient Tamil poetry or the war-thirsty heroes of Vyasa's stately work, we are in for sublime thoughts and uplifting narratives. There is nothing like what I have read in the Wild West literature starting with *The Virginian*. Horses galloping, cowpunchers shooting around, rough-hewn romance: I must have read Owen Wister a million times when I was growing up. Enfolded in silence in my father's library, I was yet watching the constant war between ranchers, the lynchings, the pistol that fires to kill.

I came to Vyasa's *Mahabharata* much later but the 'Goharana Parva' became an early favourite. Not surprisingly because punishment for Duryodhana here comes swiftly and he was no favourite of mine. In any case, this was a scenario which was familiar to me because of Tamil literature that spoke often of "*ānirai kavarthal*", *goharana*. As I open the volume, Susarma of the Trigarthas has hatched a plot with Duryodhana and taken away most of the cows of Virata land. There is immediately a lot of *Vetchi Aravam*, noise of the *ixora* space. Poor cowherds of Virata! They love their cows: *gopāla gokule bhakta*, says Vyasa. They put up a brave show of defence but what can the rural innocents do against the power and weaponry of the townbred? Some return to their king and complain that lakhs of cows (*gāvām śatasahasrāṇi*) have been stolen by the Trigartha army. The Virata king goes to war and there is a terrible battle. He is imprisoned but is swiftly rescued by the Pandavas who are in disguise.

The story has not ended. Oh, I must finish the garland I tell myself. But then, like the watchers of television serials, the reader of Vyasa must know what happens next. Mercifully my time is my own and I can read on and on. I will never, ever get tired of this epic. Ah, look at the coward Duryodhana! He has come in through another route and stolen the remaining cows of Virata. What a shame to read the list of the great warriors engaged in cow-stealing and killing cowherds! Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Kripa, Ashwatthama, Chitrasena and of course the entire brood of vipers beginning with Duhshasana. Six thousand cows encircled by the wretched chariots! Everyone of them looking like the cow Lakshmi in our house when I was a little child. The docile cow whom my brother and cousins used to take to Tambraparni river to give it a thorough bath. And Lakshmi's calf, Mrinalini. Father had named her so when she was born, as he had been writing Sri Aurobindo's life at that time. Grandmother liked the name very much but felt it was too difficult to pronounce and so shortened it to Meeru. Remembering my childhood days, I now imagine hundreds of Lakshmis and Mrinalinis being driven away harshly by Sakuni and Durmukha and Duhsala. Virata and the Pandavas are still away at the front and now what is going to happen!

Vyasa sets his own pace. The Prince Uttara Kumara is in charge of the kingdom and the chief of the cowherds complains to him. It is time the Prince showed his

mettle in a war and rescued the cows! Vyasa does not speak of the Prince looking around for any crown of *ixora* flowers but he assures the cowherd chief. "Of course I am very capable with my bow but where is an expert charioteer to direct my chariot and keep pace with me? The one I had was very good but he was killed in the earlier battle. If you can get me one as good, I will knock out all the enemies, yes, including Bhishma! . . . Well, people might even compare me to the famous Arjuna!" Lovely shot from Vyasa, that.

The garland will have to wait. Let me watch the Brihannala-Arjuna smile fondly as he hears Uttara Kumara. The Prince's words have given a clue to future action. Arjuna gets Draupadi to propose Brihannala as a charioteer since Brihannala had been Arjuna's charioteer in times past! Arjuna certainly has presence of mind and a glib tongue. The lovely princess Uttara goes to Brihannala with Draupadi's proposal. Brihannala agrees. In the midst of this serious threat and speedy planning, Vyasa brings the temperature down with the clumsiness of Brihannala in wearing the armour.

Telling this story to children has been a joy. I can describe the cows by making appropriate mooings, the way they are driven hither and thither by the cowherds as well as the captors and rescuers. I can make clownish, inelegant, ungainly movements to show Brihannala walking towards the Prince and the beautiful manner in which the Princess walks behind him. My listeners go into gusts of laughter when Brihannala lifts the armour and tries to push himself into it. The 'knowledgeable' Prince helps him and they go to the battlefield. More fun for my listeners! Watch out for the heroic Uttara Kumara shivering in his armour on seeing the Kaurava army! I am going to swoon!

Then, there is the ironic twist which has always made me smile. Brihannala-Arjuna sternly tells Uttara Kumara that he should not run away from the battlefield. He must face the enemy and fight. The same Arjuna who is going to tremble in the Bhishma Parva and say, Gandiva is slipping from my hands, and I am shivering, and I shall not fight! This comparison has certainly saved me from delivering self-righteous homilies at times. Tomorrow I might be in the same position!

So the Viratan Prince is running away and Brihannala catches him. The divine weapons are brought down from the Sami tree, Brihannala engages the Kauravas in battle and before you can say 'Mahabharat' Uttara Kumara is leading the rescued cows to the capital. What a sweet if noisy, *Vetchi Aravam* scene!

The blaring of Arjuna's trumpet, the sounds of chariot wheels, the twanging of the Gandiva bow and the racket made by the spirits of the flag fluttering above reverberated on the earth. The cows lifted their tails high and waved them, kept mooing and gathered together from all sides and began rushing towards the southern direction.

Vyasa speaks of armour, ornaments. But flower garlands are singularly absent

when he describes Uttara Kumara and Brihannala-Arjuna going out to rescue the cows. I ask a Botany Professor about the significance of the Tamil heroes wearing the *ixora* when going out to steal or rescue cows. “*Idli poo?* No idea. Maybe because they look bright and the red colour frightens the cattle. The bullfighter is always dressed in red, right?” I am not satisfied with the answer though the local name makes me smile. Yes, the *ixora* bunch has its top puffed like a well cooked *idli* all right. I would have to find the answer in ancient Tamil poetry itself. But I must first complete the garland. The fingers encircle the flowers with thread. I can be carefully careless since the *ixora* is a tough flower and does not break easily when I pull the thread’s loop. With the *tulasi* leaves, I am never sure and the tuberose can be cut into two if I am hasty with the pull. Aha, that must be the reason!

The ancient Tamils were real heroes, not the ones we see on the screen. On the silver screen the hero would be surrounded by a score of thugs and he would fight them non-stop: *Disshum, disshum, dish!* But his hairstyle, collar, the creases on the shirt or his trousers would not be rendered askew! But the *Vetchi Maravar* needed durable ornaments and sturdy weapons. They were engaged in real-life battle. The *ixora coccinea* does not easily sag or wilt and when strung with thread can remain erect for two to three days. That is why they must have chosen *ixora* and tuberoses for making garlands to Lord Ranganatha in the Srirangam temple. Both of them have a longer garland-life. I have completed the garlands and put them away carefully in the basket, covering them with plantain leaves. Now nothing can stop me from my Tamil shelf.

There is a reason. Whenever I happen to read a passage relating to these heroes wearing *ixora* crowns when engaged in stealing or rescuing herds of cows, I am reminded of Mother’s name for the flower: ‘Aspiration in the Physical.’ Days, months, years have passed and I have had no clue but there must be some reason for Mother’s description. Do these heroes engaged in this very mundane activity suggest turning of the cells to the Supramental Light? Why not? After all, the Vedic cows have been explained to us by Sri Aurobindo as having a profound significance:

The image of the Cow is constantly associated in Veda with the Dawn and the Sun; it also recurs in the legend of the recovery of the lost cows from the cave of the Panis by Indra and Brihaspati with the aid of the hound Sarama and the Angiras Rishis. The conception of the Dawn and the legend of the Angiras are at the very heart of the Vedic cult and may almost be considered as the key to the secret of the significance of Veda.¹

Sarama, the hound of heaven. Doesn’t she come in the early cantos of ‘*Adi Parva*’ of the *Mahabharata* to curse Janamejaya? No, no. Vyasa is haunting me today. Time

1. *The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 124.

was when I used to jump up with such connections and immediately go to the shelves to look it up, take down notes for yet another article . . . I am not suffering any more with that kind of research-mania. No, I shan't direct my thoughts to enter the maze of comparative literature. What I read these days is what I think is an engagement in Mahasaraswati Yoga for transformation. Maybe I could plunge into a poem on *Vetchi* from Tamil and forget myself. My eyes automatically rest upon Iyanaridhanar's *Purapporul Venpamalai* which opens with *Vetchi*. The book deals *in extenso* with the place of eight flowers in Tamil culture. Here are soldiers going out to capture the enemy's herds, in obedience to their king's command:

The soldiers with long lances
 Put on their sandals to go; they ask
 For the sounds of drums to chase away
 The 'silvedu' bees. Wearing the *ixora*
 They go speedily to the forest
 Where numerous cows shine
 With the bells of the enemy,
 While the Kari bird screeches shrill.²

As I try to go deep within the maze of memories, *ixora* gets associated with a couple of religions. Does the *ixora* have a significance in Islamic culture? I am not sure though a passage in N. P. Mohamed's *Deivathinte Kannu* (The Eye of God) flashes past. It is about the burial of a deranged boy who had died due to excessive beatings. Ikkikka is buried while his little brother watches:

Everyone took a handful of earth. I took one too, in my right hand. I threw it into the grave. Hands rose and fell. The grave was level now. Tombstones were buried at its head and foot. A gravedigger took a thecchi plant, planted it at the head and sprinkled water. Then the workers shook the earth off their hands. People had started to leave.³

Remembering the title of the novel means the memory of a dark experience. Violence towards the sick boy, his screaming, '*jakkaram, jakkaram*', the abracadabra of sorcery, the greed for possible hidden wealth, the matriarch in the novel who reminds one of Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage, the author's ability to drive us into a suffocatingly dark corner . . .

No!

Enough of terrors, graveyards, battles, thieving and heroic rescue! I go to the

2. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

3. Translated by Gita Krishnankutty.

basket, open the cover, touch the garland and cover it up again. The splendid *ixora* and the brightness of the blossom brings light back into my mind. So, if Vishnu loves the flower, he must love it as a lover. The flower has a lovely name in Hindi: *Rukmini*. Once again associated with cowherds for Rukmini marries Krishna! It is love's labour won!

Krishna!

This Anandamaya Purusha has a way of insinuating himself into our consciousness, calming our rising hysteria, turning our mind from the harsh realities of life to the calm joy of motherhood. I walk towards the window to look at the silhouette of the temple spire at a distance. There are no thoughts as such now coursing through my mind but the lips automatically begin to form words while the hands clap gently to keep the rhythm:

*Thechi mandaram thulasi
pichaka mālakal chārthi
Guruvayūrappa ninne kanikānanam*

*Mayilpīli chūdi kondum manja thukil chutti kondum
manikuzhalūthi kondum kanikānenam.*

*thechi . . . mandaram thulasi
pichaka mālakal chārthi
Guruvayūrappa ninne kanikānanam . . .⁴*

It is a lovely Malayalam song which invokes Krishna in contrastive brilliance. This blue complexioned boy coming towards us with garlands made of brilliant red (*ixora, hibiscus*), shining white (*pichakam* which is a variety of jasmine) and sparkling green (*tulasi*) swaying on his chest. Many of the legends get conveyed in musical terms in this song. I want to see Krishna open the bundle of puffed rice (brought by Kuchela) and eat it! I want to see him coming with the gopikas in the grove of sweet-scented flowers! Oh, Krishna!

Malayalam has some of the finest songs on Krishna. Their foremost poet Ezhuthachan brings before us the sublime scene of Karna and Arjuna facing each other on

4. O Lord of Guruvayoor,
I want to decorate you
With ixora, hibiscus, jasmine and tulasi
Garlands, and see the lovely sight!
See you wear the peacock feather,
Swathed in the yellow garment
And playing the jewelled flute!

(Translated by Prema Nandakumar)

Kurukshetra. So do their charioteers, Shalya and Krishna. Shalya bursts out in ecstasy on seeing Krishna, *karimukhil ottha sikurabhāravum . . .*

The colourful peacock feathers fixed in a row
 And brought together and tied up on the top
 With the heavy tresses so like dark clouds
 In the diadem with its glitter and glow
 The tiny particles of dust on them
 The tilak too moist with sweat
 The beauty of the brows that keep moving
 To create, protect and destroy the world
 The eyes that reflect the changing sentiments
 With pity and compassion for the lowly
 Anger towards the cruel and the wily,
 Love for the lovely, wonder at the squabble,
 Garlands, swaying on the breast,
 Made of tulsi, and lotus and tender leaves
 Strings of rubies and kausthubha jewel
 Around the neck, the whip in hand
 The breast smeared with kumkum
 The bright yellow clothes, the anklets,
 The twin lotus feet, as in my heart
 So I clearly saw in the chariot to my joy.⁵

Karna had such intense hatred for the Pandavas and their ally Krishna, which was perhaps the reason why Shalya made this ecstatic announcement, just to irritate the son of Surya. No wonder the Tamilians refer to people who indulge in subtle mischief as “*salli-p-payal*”! That is beside the point. Vyasa’s narrative reveals how lucky Karna was to have this vision of the divine during his last moments on the earth!

That seems to be the ultimate prayer of many Indians down the centuries. When one is surrounded by the sobering experience of decades of people withdrawing from the physical, one tends to hold on to the Anandamaya vision tightly. For there are withdrawals which are without struggle: *anāyāsa*. There are some who suffer for long. There are people who would rather go but will not be allowed to by the dubious engines of modern medical technology. For months a dear one lies still on the ventilator, breathing through mechanical lungs and one hopes against hope that he would come out as before and lead a normal life. However rare, that too happens. All this does impinge upon one’s mind while stringing *vetchi* flowers or shutting the windowpanes

5. Translated by Prof. Ayyappa Panikker.

against a drizzle. Will I be spared? Will I suffer like this person? Or remain in coma like that person? Dark thoughts which will not go away easily . . .

Fix the mind then on the form of Krishna! Easier said than done. But literature is a great help in this direction. Ezhuthatchan's Malayalam has reminded me of the greenery of Kerala. Too many days in my life have been spent in reading and bits and pieces of information keep floating around in the mind as autumnal leaves in a gust of wind. Do I see Aryamba in the Kaladi village who is having great difficulty in breathing? Those around her have begun to count the hours. But who is this resplendent young sannyasin walking through the door as if one born in this house?

It is Adi Sankara, of course. The winds had brought him the news of his mother's last days, as he was walking in the northern parts of India. He has come to Kaladi in Kerala by the power of his yoga. With this world-teacher beside her, his mother Aryamba can withdraw now. Adi Sankara tries to help her by speaking of the all-pervading Supreme but the kindly lady tells him that it is not easy for her to meditate upon the formless. So Shankara recites a prayer to Shiva. But the simple lady is frightened. Shiva with the roaring Ganges on the crown and sporting circlets of serpents! The affectionate son calms her and begins a prayer to the All-Beautiful Narayana. Immediately the Anandamaya Purusha appears as the flute-playing Krishna, the little cottage gets transformed with heavenly bliss. Krishna being Aryamba's favourite deity, she is very happy and merges in him.

This has been the aspiration of innumerable Indians. To see the Flute-Player of Brindavan as the shades close around and listen to the strains of his music. The image has been spelt out as a Sanskrit verse of incalculable beauty by Vedanta Desika in his prayer, 'Gopala Vimsati', *adarāhita chāru vamsa nāla*:

As I am dying, I must be shown the vision
With the lovely flute on the lips, the garland
Of peacock feathers slightly sliding from the crown,
Sapphire-hued, spreading brilliance everywhere.⁶

I could add, a bunch of *ixora* among the blue and green peacock feathers. After all, they say the name *ixora* is derived from the Indian name for God, Ishwara. Is that why the flower is all-pervading in Vishnu worship? My mother used to feel extremely happy whenever my friend Saroja or our village assistant Ramaswami brought her a bunch of *ixora* in her last days. Perhaps, for her eyes which were growing duller, this flamboyant red was cheerful. She loved to see the bunch placed in a water-filled vase on her table which had so many portraits including that of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Krishna.

A lifetime's absorption in Aurobindonian literature may have given her a vision

6. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

of Krishna, the Anandamaya at the very moment of passage. Life is a mystery and death is another. Let the two be golden mysteries. We shall not dissect emotions. Enough for us to know that when we sight the *ixora* we remember Ishwara; and we remember the need for Aspiration in the Physical for the Supramental Light. I have already got a tiny *ixora* plant which I hope to place in my little garden-space tomorrow. The plant and soon the flower will remind me to remember the Divine Mother's command to aspire. The answering Grace is never far away!

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

(To be continued)

Preoccupied from the earliest times with divine knowledge and religious aspiration the Indian mind has turned all forms of human life and emotion and all the phenomena of the universe into symbols and means by which the embodied soul may strive after and grasp the Supreme. Indian devotion has especially seized upon the most intimate human relations and made them stepping-stones to the supra-human. God the Guru, God the Master, God the Friend, God the Mother, God the Child, God the Self, each of these experiences — for to us they are more than merely ideas, — it has carried to its extreme possibilities. But none of them has it pursued, embraced, sung with a more exultant passion of intimate realisation than the yearning for God the Lover, God the Beloved.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 465)