

# MOTHER INDIA

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## VOICE OF THE SUMMITS

Voice of the summits, leap from thy peaks of ineffable splendour,  
Wisdom's javelin cast, leonine cry of the Vast.  
Voice of the summits, arrow of gold from a bow-string of silence!  
Leap down into my heart, blazing and clangorous dart!  
Here where I struggle alone unheeded of men and unaided,  
Here by the darkness down-trod, here in the midnight of God.

I have come down from the heights and the outskirts of Heaven  
Into the gulfs of God's sleep, into the inconscient Deep.  
All I had won that the mind can win of the Word and the wordless,  
Knowledge sun-bright for ever and the spiritual crown of endeavour,  
Share in the thoughts of the cosmic Self and its orders to Nature,  
Cup of its nectar of bliss, dreams on the breast of its peace.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 681)*

# THE KARMAYOGIN

## A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of July 2010)

### Part II

## Karmayoga; the Ideal

### Chapter IV

#### The Eternal in His Universe

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनद्देवा आप्नुवन्पूर्वमर्षत् ।  
तद्भावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥

### I. ETERNAL TRUTH THE BASIS OF ETHICS

“There is the One and It moveth not, yet is It swifter than thought, the Gods could not overtake It as It moved in front. While It standeth still, It outstrippeth others as they run. In It Matariswan ordereth the waters.”

### I. The Root of Ethical Ideals

Everything that has phenomenal existence, takes its stand on the Eternal and has reality only as a reflection in the pure mirror of His infinite existence. This is no less true of the affections of mind and heart and the formations of thought than of the affections of matter and the formations of the physical ether-stuff out of which this material Universe is made. Every ethical ideal and every religious ideal must therefore depend for its truth and permanence on its philosophical foundation; in other words, on the closeness of its fundamental idea to the ultimate truth of the Eternal. If the ideal implies a reading of the Eternal which is only distantly true and confuses Him with His physical or psychical manifestations in this world, then it is a relatively false and impermanent ideal. Of all the ancient nations the Hindus, for this reason only, attained to the highest idea and noblest practice of morality. The Greeks confused the Eternal with His physical manifestations and realised Him in them on the side of beauty; beauty therefore was the only law of morality which governed their civilization. Ethics in their eyes was a matter of taste, balance and proportion;

it hinged on the avoidance of excess in any direction, of excessive virtue no less than of excessive vice. The fine development of personality under the inspiration of music and through the graceful play of intellect was the essential characteristic of their education; justice, in the sense of a fine balance between one's obligations to oneself and one's obligations to others, the ideal of their polity; decorum, the basis of their public morality; the sense of proportion the one law of restraint in their private ethics. Their idea of deity was confined to the beautiful and brilliant rabble of their Olympus. Hence the charm and versatility of Greek civilisation; hence also its impermanence as a separate culture. The Romans also confused the Eternal with His manifestations in physical Nature, but they read Him on the side not of beauty but of force governed by law; the stern and orderly restraint which governs the Universe, was the feature in Nature's economy which ruled their thought. Jupiter was to them the Governor & great Legislator whose decrees were binding on all; the very meaning of the word religion which they have left to the European world was "binding back" and indicated as the essence of religion restraint and tying down to things fixed and decreed. Their ethics were full of a lofty strength & sternness. Discipline stood as the keystone of their system; discipline of the actions created an inelastic faithfulness to domestic & public duties; discipline of the animal impulses an orderly courage and a cold, hard purity; discipline of the mind a conservative practical type of intellect very favourable to the creation of a powerful and well ordered State but not to the development of a manysided civilization. Their type too, though more long lived than the Greek, could not last, because of the imperfection of the ideal on which it was based.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese seem to have envisaged the Eternal in a higher aspect than these Mediterranean races; they found Him not in the manifested physical Universe itself, but in its origination and arrangement out of the primal material from which it arose. Heaven, Akasha or the Eternal in the element of Ether, creates in the womb of Earth or formal Matter which is the final element developed out of Ether, this arranged and orderly Universe, — He is therefore the Father, Originator, Disposer and Arranger. Veneration for parents and those who stand in the place of parents became the governing idea of their ethics; orderly disposition, the nice care of ceremony, manners, duties the law of their daily life; origination and organization the main characteristics of their intellectual activity.

1. *The following passage was written in the top margin of the manuscript page. Its place of insertion was not marked:*

Beauty is not the ultimate truth of the Eternal but only a partial manifestation of Him in phenomena which is externalised for our enjoyment and possession but not set before us as our standard or aim, and the soul which makes beauty its only end is soon cloyed & sated and fails for want of nourishment and of the growth which is impossible without an ever widening & progressive activity. Power & Law are not the ultimate truth of the Eternal, but manifestations of Himself in phenomena which are set within us to develop and around us to condition our works, but this also is not set before us as our standard or aim. The soul which follows Power as its whole end must in the long run lose measure and perish from hardness and egoism and that which sees nothing but Law wither for dryness or fossilise from the cessation of individual expansion.

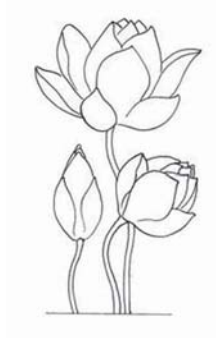
The permanence and unconquerable vitality of their civilization is due to their having seized on an interpretation of the Eternal which, though not His ultimate truth to humanity, is at least close to that truth and a large aspect of it. It is really Himself in his relation to the Universe, but not the whole of Himself. But the ancient Aryans of India raised the veil completely and saw Him as the Universal Transcendent Self of all things who is at the same time the particular present Self in each. They reached His singleness aloof from phenomena, they saw Him in every one of His million manifestations in phenomena. God in Himself, God in man, God in Nature were the "ideas" which their life expressed. Their civilisation was therefore more manysided and complete and their ethical and intellectual ideals more perfect and permanent than those of any other nation. They had in full measure the sense of filial duty, the careful regulation of ceremony, manners and duties, the characteristics of origination and organization which distinguished the Chinese. They had in full measure the Roman discipline, courage, purity, faithfulness to duty, careful conservatism; but these elements of character & culture which in the Roman were hard, cold, narrow and without any touch of the spirit in man or the sense of his divine individuality, the Hindus warmed & softened with emotional & spiritual meaning and made broad and elastic by accepting the supreme importance of the soul's individual life as overriding and governing the firm organization of morals and society. They were not purely devoted to the worship and culture of beauty like the Greeks and their art was not perfect, yet they had the sense of beauty & art in a greater degree than any other ancient people; unlike the Greeks they had a perfect sense of spiritual beauty and were therefore able to realise the delight & glory of Nature hundreds of years before the sense of it developed in Europe. On the ethical side they had a finer justice than the Greeks, a more noble public decorum, a keener sense of ethical & social balance, but they would not limit the infinite capacities of the soul; they gave play therefore to personal individuality but restrained and ordered its merely lawless ebullitions by the law of the type (caste). In addition to these various elements which they shared with one civilization or another they possessed a higher spiritual ideal which governed & overrode the mere ethics (*mores* or customary morality) which the other nations had developed. Humanity, pity, chivalry, unselfishness, philanthropy, love of and self-sacrifice for all living things, the sense of the divinity in man, the Christian virtues, the modern virtues were fully developed in India at a time when in all the rest of the world they were either non-existent or existent only in the most feeble beginnings. And they were developed, because the Aryan Rishis had been able to discover the truth of the Eternal and give to the nation the vision of the Eternal in all things and the feeling of His presence in themselves and in all around them. They had discovered the truth that morality is not for its own sake, nor for the sake of society, but a preparation and purification of the soul by which the limited human self must become fit to raise itself out of the dark pit of bodily, mental and emotional selfishness into the clear heaven of universal love and

benevolence and enlarge itself until it came into conscious contact, entered into and became one with the Supreme and Sempiternal Self. Some hold the aim of morality to be a placing of oneself in harmony with the eternal laws that govern the Universe, others hold it to be the fulfilment under self-rule and guidance of man's nature, others a natural evolution of man in the direction of his highest faculties. The Hindus perceived that it was all these at once but they discovered that the law with which the soul must put itself in relation was the law of the Eternal Self, that man's nature must seek its fulfilment in that which is permanent & eternal in the Universe and that it is to which his evolution moves. They discovered that his higher self was the Self of his Universe and that by a certain manner of action, by a certain spirit in action, man escaped from his limitations and realised his higher Self. This way of Works is Karmayoga and Karmayoga therefore depends on the Hindu conception of Brahman, the Transcendent Self and its relations to the Universe. From this all Hindu ethics proceeds.<sup>2</sup>

*(To be continued)*

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 218-22)*



2. The last six sentences of this paragraph, beginning "They had discovered the truth", were written separately. They seem to have been intended for insertion here. — Ed.

## ‘MORE LIGHT, MORE BEAUTY, MORE TRUTH . . .’

**March 1, 1914**

It is in one's own self that all the obstacles lie, it is in one's own self that all the difficulties are found, it is in one's own self that there is all the darkness and ignorance. Were we to travel throughout the earth, were we to go and bury ourselves in some solitude, break with all our habits, lead the most ascetic life, yet if some bond of illusion held back our consciousness far from Thy absolute Consciousness, if some egoistic attachment cut us off from the integral communion with Thy divine Love, we would be no nearer Thee despite all outer circumstances. Can any circumstances be considered more or less favourable? I doubt it; it is the idea we have about them which enables us to profit much or little by the lessons they give us.

O Lord, I implore Thee! Grant that I may be perfectly conscious and master of all that constitutes this personality, so that I may be delivered from myself and Thou alone mayst live and act through these multiple elements.

To live in Love, by Love, for Love, indissolubly united to Thy highest manifestation. . . .

Always more light, more beauty, more truth!

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 86)*

## THE KEY TO MANY, MANY THINGS

*(The disciple asks to know what he must do and what his place is in the universal manifestation)*

IN all religious and especially occult initiations, the ritual of the different ceremonies is prescribed in every detail; all the words pronounced, all the gestures made have their importance, and the least infraction of the rule, the least fault committed can have fatal consequences. It is the same in material life — if one had the initiation into the true way of living, one could transform physical existence.

If we consider the body as the tabernacle of the Lord, then medical science, for example, becomes the initiatory ritual of the service of the temple, and doctors of all kinds are the officiating priests in the different rituals of worship. Thus, medicine is really a priesthood and should be treated as such.

The same can be said of physical culture and of all the sciences that are concerned with the body and its workings. If the material universe is considered as the outer sheath and the manifestation of the Supreme, then it can generally be said that all the physical sciences are the rituals of worship.

We always come back to the same thing: the absolute necessity for perfect sincerity, perfect honesty and a sense of the dignity of all we do so that we may do it as it should be done.

If we could truly, perfectly know all the details of the ceremony of life, the worship of the Lord in physical life, it would be wonderful — to know, and no longer to err, never again to err. To perform the ceremony as perfectly as an initiation.

To know life utterly . . . Oh, there is a very interesting thing in this regard! And it's strange, but this particular knowledge reminds me of one of my 'Sutras' (which I read out, but no one understood or understood only vaguely, 'like that'):

It is the Supreme Lord who has ineluctably decreed the place you occupy in the universal concert, but whatever be this place, you have equally the same right as all others to ascend the supreme summits right to the supramental realisation.

There is one's position in the universal hierarchy, which is something ineluctable — it is the eternal law — and there is the development in the manifestation, which is an education; it is progressive and done from within the being. What is remarkable is that to become a perfect being, this position — whatever it is, decreed since all eternity, a part of the eternal Truth — must manifest with the greatest possible perfection as a result of evolutionary growth. It is the junction, the union of the two,



the eternal position and the evolutionary realisation, that will make the total and perfect being, and the manifestation as the Lord has willed it since the beginning of all eternity (which has no beginning at all!).

And for the cycle to be complete, one cannot stop on the way at any plane, not even the highest spiritual plane nor the plane closest to matter (like the occult plane in the vital, for example). One must descend right into matter, and this perfection in manifestation must be a material perfection, or otherwise the cycle is not complete — which explains why those who want to flee in order to realise the divine Will are in error. What must be done is exactly the opposite! The two must be combined in a perfect way. This is why all the honest sciences, the sciences that are practised sincerely, honestly, exclusively with a will to know, are difficult paths — yet such sure paths for the total realisation.

It brings up very interesting things. (What I am going to say now is very personal and consequently cannot be used, but it may be kept anyway:)

There are two parallel things that, from the eternal and supreme point of view, are of identical importance, in that both are equally essential for the realisation to be a true realisation.

On the one hand, there is what Sri Aurobindo — who, as the Avatar, represented the supreme Consciousness and Will on earth — declared me to be, that is, the supreme universal Mother; and on the other hand, there is what I am realising in my body through the integral sadhana. I could be the supreme Mother and not do any sadhana, and as a matter of fact, as long as Sri Aurobindo was in his body, it was he who did the sadhana, and I received the effects. These effects were automatically established in the outer being, but he was the one doing it, not I — I was merely the bridge between his sadhana and the world. Only when he left his body was I forced to take up the sadhana myself; not only did I have to do what I was doing before — being a bridge between his sadhana and the world — but I had to carry on the sadhana myself. When he left, he turned over to me the responsibility for what he himself had been doing in his body, and I had to do it. So there are both these things. Sometimes one predominates, sometimes the other (I don't mean successively in time, but . . . it depends on the moment), and they are trying to combine in a total and perfect realisation: the eternal, ineffable and immutable Consciousness of the Executrix of the Supreme, and the consciousness of the sadhak of the integral Yoga who strives in an ascending effort towards an ever increasing progression.

To this has been added a growing initiation into the supramental realisation which is (I understand it well now) the perfect union of what comes from above and what comes from below, or in other words, the eternal position and the evolutionary realisation.

Then — and this becomes rather amusing like life's play . . . Depending upon each one's nature and position and bias, and because human beings are very limited, very partial and incapable of a global vision, there are those who believe, who have

faith, or to whom the eternal Mother is revealed through Grace, who have this kind of relationship with the eternal Mother — and there are those who themselves are plunged in sadhana, who have the consciousness of a developed sadhak, and thereby have the same relationship with me as one has with what they generally call a ‘realised soul’. Such persons consider me the prototype of the Guru teaching a new way, but the others don’t have this relationship of sadhak to Guru (I am taking the two extremes, but of course there are all the possibilities in between), they are only in contact with the eternal Mother and, in the simplicity of their hearts, they expect Her to do everything for them. If they were perfect in this attitude, the eternal Mother would do everything for them — as a matter of fact, She does do everything, but as they aren’t perfect, they cannot receive it totally. But the two paths are very different, the two kinds of relationships are very different; and as we all live according to the law of external things, in a material body, there is a kind of annoyance, an almost irritated misunderstanding, between those who follow this path (not consciously and intentionally, but spontaneously), who have this relationship of the child to the Mother, and those who have this other relationship of the sadhak to the Guru. So it creates a whole play, with an infinite diversity of shades.

But all this is still in suspense, on the way to realisation, moving forward progressively; therefore, unless we are able to see the outcome, we can’t understand a thing. We get confused. Only when we see the outcome, the final realisation, only when we have *touched there*, will everything be understood — then it will be as clear and as simple as can be. But meanwhile, my relationships with different people are very funny, utterly amusing!

Those who have what I would call the more ‘outer’ relationship compared to the other (although it is not really so) — the relationship of yoga, of sadhana — consider the others superstitious; and the others, who have faith or perception, or the Grace to have understood what Sri Aurobindo meant (perhaps even before knowing what he said, but in any event, after he said it), discard the others as ignorant unbelievers! And there are all the gradations in between, so it really becomes quite funny!

It opens up extraordinary horizons; once you have understood this, you have the key — you have the key to many, many things: the different positions of each of the different saints, the different realisations and . . . it resolves all the incoherencies of the various manifestations on earth.

For example, this question of Power — *the* Power — over Matter. Those who perceive me as the eternal, universal Mother and Sri Aurobindo as the Avatar are surprised that our power is not absolute. They are surprised that we have not merely to say, ‘Let it be thus’ for it to be ‘thus’. This is because, in the integral realisation, the union of the two is essential: a union of the power that proceeds from the eternal position and the power that proceeds from the sadhana through evolutionary growth. Similarly, how is it that those who have reached even the summits of yogic knowledge

(I was thinking of Swami) need to resort to beings like gods or demigods to be able to realise things? — Because they have indeed united with certain higher forces and entities, but it was not decreed since the beginning of time that they were this particular being. They were not born as this or that, but through evolution they united with a latent possibility in themselves. Each one carries the Eternal within himself, but one can join Him only when one has realised the complete union of the latent Eternal with the eternal Eternal.

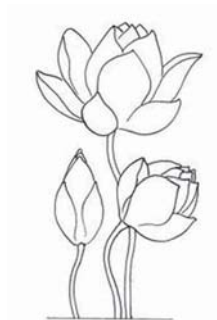
And . . . this explains everything, absolutely everything: how it works, how it functions in the world.\* I was saying to myself, “But I have no powers, I have no powers!” Several days ago, I said, “But after all, *I know who* is there, I know, yet how is it that. . . ? There, up to there (*the level of the head*), it is all-powerful, nothing can resist — but here . . . it is ineffective.” So those who have faith, even an ignorant but real faith (it can be ignorant but nevertheless it is real), say, “What! How can you have no powers?”. . . Because the sadhana is not yet over.

\* Mother added: “The most beautiful part of the experience is missing . . . When I try to formulate something in too precise a way, all the vastness of the experience evaporates. The entire world is being revealed in all its organisation down to the minutest details — but *everything* simultaneously — how can that be explained? It’s not possible.”

The Lord will possess his universe only when the universe will have consciously become the Lord.

THE MOTHER

(From a conversation with a disciple on October 10, 1958)



## SUTRAS

1. Have no ambition, above all never lay claim to anything, but be at each moment the utmost that you can be.

25 February 1957

2. As for your place in the universal manifestation, the Supreme alone will show it to you.

2 May 1957

3. The Supreme Lord has ineluctably decreed the place you occupy in the world concert, but whatever that place may be, you have the same equal right as everyone else to scale the supreme heights as far as the supramental realisation.

17 May 1957

4. What you are in the truth of your being is ineluctably decreed and nothing and no one can prevent you from being it; but the path you will take to attain it is left to your own free choice.

19 May 1957

5. On the path of ascending evolution, each one is free to choose the direction he will take: the swift and steep ascent towards the summits of Truth, the supreme realisation, or, turning his back to the peaks, the easy descent towards the interminable meanderings of endless rebirths.

23 May 1957

6. In the course of the ages and even in the course of your present life you can make your choice once and for all, irrevocably, and then you have only to confirm it at each new occasion; or else, if you have not taken the final decision at the outset, at each moment you will have to make a new choice between falsehood and truth.

23 May 1957

7. But even supposing that you have not taken the irrevocable decision at the outset, if you have the good fortune to be alive at one of those extraordinary moments in universal history when the Grace is present, incarnate on earth, It will give you once again, at certain exceptional moments, the possibility of making a final choice that will lead you straight to the goal.

23 May 1957

*(On Education, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 12, pp. 349-50)*

[In a conversation with a sadhak on 17 October 1958, the Mother spoke again about the Sutras:]

They are in two groups.

The first group ends with a helping hand to those who have made the wrong choice (!):

That was the message of hope.

And then it continues (*Mother reads*):

8) All division in the being is an insincerity.

9) The greatest insincerity is to carve an abyss between one's body and the truth of one's being.

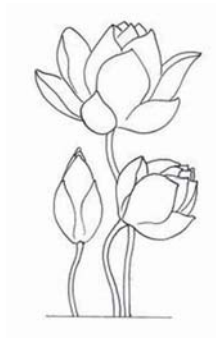
10) When an abyss separates the true being from the physical being, Nature immediately fills it with all the hostile suggestions, of which the most deadly is fear and the most pernicious, doubt.

I wrote that before reading Sri Aurobindo's aphorism on 'the sentinels of Nature'. I found it very interesting and I said to myself, "Well! That's exactly what came to me!"

There is still one more (but it is not the last):

11) Allow nothing, nowhere, to deny the truth of your being: that is sincerity.

THE MOTHER



## COMMENTARY ON AN APHORISM OF SRI AUROBINDO

If mankind only caught a glimpse of what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures. But the way is narrow, the doors are hard to force, and fear, distrust and scepticism are there, sentinels of Nature, to forbid the turning away of our feet from her ordinary pastures.

Sri Aurobindo

WHAT Sri Aurobindo has written, the words [“caught a glimpse”] which have been translated as *entrevoiaient*,<sup>1</sup> means to see something in its totality, but for a very brief moment. It is obvious that a constant vision of all these wonders would automatically compel you to set out on the path. It is also certain that a little fragmentary glimpse is not enough — it would not have enough weight to compel you to follow the path.

But if you had a total vision, however brief, you would not be able to resist the temptation of making the effort needed to realise it. But, in fact, the total vision is exceptional, and that is why Sri Aurobindo says to us: “If mankind only . . .”

To tell the truth, it very seldom happens that those who are ready, who are undoubtedly meant for realisation, do not have, at a certain moment in their lives, even if only for a few seconds, the experience of what this realisation is.

But even those whose destiny is certain have to struggle mightily, resolutely, against this “something” which one seems to take in with the very air one breathes: this fear, this dread of what may happen. And this is so stupid, because, in the final analysis, the destiny of each individual is the same: you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and you die; then you wait for a certain length of time, and again you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and again you die, and so on indefinitely, until you feel you have had enough of it.

Fear of what? Fear of coming out of the rut? Fear of being free? Fear of no longer being a prisoner?

And then, when you have enough courage to overcome this, when you say, “Come what may! After all, there’s not much to lose”, then you become wary, you wonder if it is reasonable, if it is true, if all that is not an illusion, if you are not just imagining things, if there is really any substance to it. . . . And mind you, this

1. In the French text of *Thoughts and Aphorisms* read by the Mother.

mistrust seems stupid, but you encounter it even in the most intelligent, even in those who have repeatedly had conclusive experiences — it is something that you take in with the food you eat, the air you breathe, your contacts with others; and that is why you can speak of the “tentacles of Nature”,<sup>2</sup> everywhere, in all things, like an octopus stealing in and catching you and binding you.

Even when you have overcome these two obstacles, when the experiences are so strong that you can no longer doubt, that doubt becomes impossible — like doubting one’s own life — then there remains something awful, petty, dry, corrosive: scepticism. And this is founded on human pride, that is why it lasts so long. You want to think that you are above all these things, “Oh, I am not one to fall into those traps! I am a reasonable man, I see things from a practical point of view; I’m not so easily deceived.” It is awful! . . . It is sordid. But it is dangerous.

Even in moments of greatest enthusiasm, even when one is filled with an exceptional, marvellous experience — it rises from the lowest depths. It is ugly, slimy, disgusting. And yet it rises, and spoils everything.

To conquer it, one must be a mighty warrior. One must struggle against all the obscurities of Nature, against all her tricks, all her temptations.

Why does she do this? It is as if she were moving away from her own goal. But I have already explained this to you many times. Nature knows very well where she is going and what the outcome is. She wants it, but . . . in her own way. She does not feel that any time is being wasted. She has all eternity before her. She wants to follow her own way as she likes, meandering as much as she likes, going back on her tracks, straying from the straight path, starting the same thing all over again several times to see what will happen. And these enlightened cranks, who want to get there at once, as soon as possible, who thirst for truth, light, beauty, balance — they bother her, they urge her on, they tell her that she is wasting her time. Her time! She always replies, “But I have all eternity before me. Am I in a hurry? Why are you in such a hurry?” And again, with a smile: “Your haste is all too human; widen yourselves, become infinite, be eternal, and you will no longer be in a hurry.”

There is so much fun on the way, for her . . . but not for everyone.

This is what happens when one sees things from a great height, from a great distance, when one’s view is vast, almost infinite. Everything that upsets human beings and makes them suffer, disappears; so those who are very wise, who have abandoned life for the sake of higher wisdom tell you with a smile, “Why suffer? Come out of it and you will suffer no more.” That is all very well individually but, in fact, if you think about others you may wish this rather tragic comedy would come to an end sooner. And it is very justifiable to feel tired of living like a beast at pasture, of roaming from one patch of grass to another, of ruminating in a corner, of having such narrow horizons and of missing all the splendours of life.

2. The translation the Mother had before her was based on a text which read “tentacles of Nature” instead of “sentinels of Nature”.

Perhaps it amuses Nature that we should be like that, but we are tired of it, we want to be different.

And that is it. When you have truly had enough of it and want things to be different, then you have the courage, the strength, the capacity to conquer these three terrible enemies: fear, doubt and scepticism. But I repeat, it is not enough to sit down one fine day, watch yourself be, and struggle with these things inside you once and for all. You have to do it and do it again and again and continue in a way which seems almost endless, to be sure that you have got rid of it all. In reality, you are perhaps never truly rid of it, but there comes a time when inside yourself, you are so different that you can no longer be touched by these things. You can see them, but you see them with a smile, and at a simple gesture they go away, back to where they came from, perhaps a little changed, perhaps a little less strong, less obstinate, less aggressive — until the time when the Light is so strong that all darkness vanishes.

As for the marvels Sri Aurobindo tells us about, it is better not to describe them, because each individual feels them, undergoes them, experiences them in his own way — and for each person that is the best way. One must not adopt another's way, one must go one's own way, then the experience has its full value, its full inestimable value.

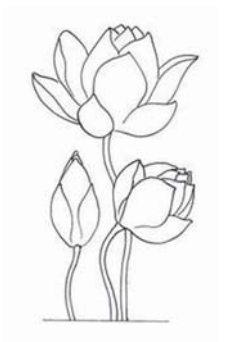
And finally, I wish that you may all have these experiences yourselves. And for that, faith, confidence, much humaneness and great goodwill are needed.

Open, aspire, and . . . wait. It will surely come, the Grace is there. It asks only to be able to work for everyone.

10 October 1958

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 10, pp. 10-14)





## I REMEMBER . . .

I WAS five years old then and living in our Berhampore house. One afternoon our mother dressed my brothers and me in fine clothes and shoes and socks and sent us out for a walk with a servant. I don't know what mischief entered into me, I escaped from the clutches of our servant and returned home. I don't know why but I wanted to play at catching fish. So I took out a length of thread from our mother's sewing box, wound one end of the thread round my finger and tied the other end to a bit of brick. I began going down the paved steps of our ghat. The month was Aswin (September), the annual Pooja was near. Like the house, the ghat was empty too. After the rains the tank was full to the brim.

I went jumping down the steps. I threw the brick-end of the thread into the water and continued jumping from one step to the next, unmindful that there was moss on them. And so, naturally I slipped into the water. It pulled me away as I started drowning. And yet I did not get scared even though I kept bobbing in the water — as my feet touched the bottom I stamped hard and raised myself back to the surface.

With such continual ups and downs my mouth and nostrils were full of water, my head was throbbing and my ear drums felt they were going to split.

Later, when I was a little more grown-up I was told that while one is drowning all the tales related to this accident come rushing into one's mind. This is very true.

Anyway, as I was drowning, I remembered the story my Buro-didi had once told me about a prince who had a moon on his hand and a star on his forehead, he drowned and was carried away to an unknown country.

Although my hands and feet were becoming slack I felt my feet touching the bottom. That was my last effort, I gave a strong push upwards and my head came above water; while still gulping water I gave a cry with all my might: "Maaaaaaa . . ."

My youngest aunt was combing her hair at the time on the terrace. She was startled to hear me call "Ma". She had, however, observed a while earlier that a head was bobbing in the water. She thought it was Kukre, our half-mad neighbour, who was bathing at this odd hour. So she just ignored it.

But when she heard and recognised my voice she called her elder sister and both came running to the bathing ghat, jumped into the water and swam up to me and caught an arm each and dragged me out of the water. I was by then no longer conscious.

At their loud calls several other people turned up at the bathing ghat. Then I was held upside down by my feet and twirled round in order to get the water out of my stomach. I was given some hot water with salt to drink and as I vomited, all the water came out. I was laid flat on the ground till I came back to myself.

Then I was given some medicinal water; a Pooja to Mother Kali was performed at home, mantras for peace were chanted, etc.

Later, when we came to Calcutta with our father, he told me: "If you don't wish to drown again then learn to swim."

And so this is how I became a member of the Bhowanipur Swimming Association at Padmapukur.

Much later when I had grown up and come away to the Ashram in Pondicherry, to our Mother, then my biological mother told me one day: "When you were very young and were drowning you had called out 'Ma' aloud, it was not me that you were calling. The 'Ma' you were calling was Mother, it was this Mother who saved you and now you've found refuge in her." (*I Remember*, pp. 92-94)

\* \* \*

I had just arrived in the Ashram and as is usual in the beginning, many questions cropped up in my mind. I put these questions before Mother and she replied to them. After some time there were no more questions. I kept silent and so did Mother. I stopped asking her questions except for those concerning my work.

This happened during that early period when I used to ask her questions. During this time Pujalal used to sit quietly in a corner. One day Pujalal told me: "Why don't you write down these answers from Mother, all these valuable words may benefit others when they read them."

So I asked Mother one day: "Mother, should I write down all that you tell me?"

Mother countered: "Why do you wish to write it all down?"

I said: "These are valuable words, what if I forget them later?"

Mother said: "All that I tell you, I say to your inner being. Your soul can never forget them. You'll remember them whenever they're needed." (*Ibid.*, p. 4)

\* \* \*

A fine artist named Mrs. Kaspary was on a visit to the Ashram in those days. She used to play the piano very well. Another musician had come too and she was a violinist.

There was a musical story Mother loved very much: *The Son of a Star* which Kaspary played admirably.

Then Mother herself sang the story. I do not know how many of you have heard her sing. It was simply wonderful! And only one who has heard her can understand this. Mother was a soprano: her voice was exceedingly sweet and strong even though high-pitched. It is impossible to describe its beauty.

Mother told me once: "I have known all the fine arts — painting, singing,

instrumental music, dancing, acting, recitation. However, I did not reach up to the highest heights. I laid the foundation for making a garden of fine arts in an all-inclusive way. I did not wish to do anything more.”

On this topic Mother said: “Let me tell you of an incident. While travelling in France I once stayed at a hotel in a town. I found a piano there. As nobody was around and I don’t know what came into me but I began to play the piano. So completely absorbed I was that I lost all awareness of my surroundings. Quite some time later when I looked up I saw that silently a crowd had gathered around me and was raptly listening to my playing.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11)

\* \* \*

I had just arrived in the Ashram, I was very young then and one day I remember telling Mother: “Mother, you and Sri Aurobindo are good friends, aren’t you?” I had meant someone ‘close’ by ‘friend’.

Mother did not answer. What she thought of it she alone knew.

Later in the afternoon at an opportune moment Mother showed me the book *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo and said: “Do you know this book? It was written by Sri Aurobindo about me. Sri Aurobindo calls me ‘Mother’. You must read this book with me.”

After that for a number of days she read *The Mother* to me. We used to have our midday meal together and after the meal Mother would read the book to me.

Then later, she fully read her *Prayers and Meditations, Words of Long Ago* and other books as well. As this reading went on in the afternoons, one by one many came to join us. A good number started coming. Then Mother shifted it to the hall in front of the room where Sri Aurobindo’s darshan was held, just above the Meditation Hall, so that there was enough space for all to sit.

There was a lot of pushing and shoving as everyone wanted to sit very close to Mother. So, instructed by Mother, Udar got some paper slips prepared with each one’s name and he would keep these slips at the fixed places. Udar used to play a very active role in these sittings which lasted for quite some time. After the reading there was a question-answer session. One day Mother said: “Just as a man has a soul every country has its soul too. That is its true existence and its mission is to express that truth.” Tinkori-da (the teacher and not the singer) suddenly came out with a question: “Now that the country has been split into India and Pakistan what has happened to the soul? Has the soul been split too?” Mother looked rather annoyed and said: “No, India’s soul cannot be partitioned.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13)

\* \* \*

I was reading something by Mahasthabir (pen name of a famous Bengali writer, meaning — ‘the old one’). It was a story about a brahmin from Maharashtra. The man’s surname was Pandit, and he had been to France to study engineering. There he came in contact with a group of spiritualists. Later this Pandit returned to India. The writer had taken refuge in this man’s house after fleeing from home. Once when a sudden fire broke out he very heroically saved the Pandit’s daughter.

After reading this writing by Mahasthabir it suddenly occurred to me that the group of spiritualists he had come in contact with might have been the same as Mother’s.

I described the Pandit to Mother just as he had been featured in the book and asked if she had known someone of that description.

Mother was delighted when she heard this: “Yes, yes, Pandit, we used to call him Pandit too. He was a nice man, very amusing, and he was a good speaker.”

*(Ibid., p. 19)*

\* \* \*

I heard Mother once say that in one of her previous lives she had been the princess of a small kingdom somewhere in the Himalayas. She was very beautiful but she died young.

The king announced: “Her body mustn’t be destroyed, she should be beautifully dressed and her body kept in a cave filled with ice.” This was done.

Mother told me that once she saw in a vision that the princess’ body was still lying in that faraway cave. *(Ibid., pp. 19-20)*

\* \* \*

Once Mother told me of a vision she had when she had visited Venice.

She was in a gondola in one of the deep canals. A gondola, as you know, is a Venetian pleasure-boat. There are big ancient palaces and old mansions along the canals. The time was nearly evening and its fading light played with darkness on the old buildings.

As her gondola was going past a mansion she felt as if a man had been murdered there and thrown into the canal from the ramparts. The place was throbbing with the vibrations of a fearful nightmare. Perhaps the remnants of this horrendous incident from the past were still present in a very subtle form at the landing of this nearly dark fort. She saw this in a clear vision. Who knows? She may have been a witness to the murder. *(Ibid., p. 20)*

\* \* \*

Once I strongly felt like reading the life of Napoleon. I was told that Sri Aurobindo had asked some older sadhaks in the Ashram to read Abbott's *Life of Napoleon*. I found a copy of the book and I would read it daily in Mother's room. One day at noon while Mother was resting, I was reading the book in a corner near the window.

Mother suddenly woke up from her rest and asked me: "What's happening? I suddenly saw Napoleon get into my room. He was showing me his maps and charts of the war."

I said: "I don't know anything about that but I'm reading here a book on the life of Napoleon."

Mother asked: "Who's the author?"

"It's by Abbott."

"But Abbott's an Englishman. The English don't like Napoleon," said Mother.

I said: "Mother, that's true, but this writer writes beautifully." And I read the entire preface out to Mother.

Mother was pleased.

Once I heard that K. M. Munshi who was one of Sri Aurobindo's pupils wanted to make a poetic rendering in English of Abbott's book.

But Sri Aurobindo stopped him saying: "Instead of this useless labour why don't you write something in Gujarati?"

Later he jokingly told his friends: "You've all been deprived of an epic poem because of Sri Aurobindo." (*Ibid.*, p. 23)

\* \* \*

We formed our Berhampore club with the ideal of moulding true men. Our youthful minds were convinced that only a straightforward, dutiful, skilled and selfless people could build a true society and country. If the youth of the land became healthy, strong in character, generous and patriotic then the country could become great. Keeping this ideal in mind we tried our best against all odds and in all sincerity to make our club really big.

During floods or other natural calamities we would organise relief camps. Our boys were often called up by people to work as volunteers during festivals. In the temple premises of the Mandals we set up a library, where there were discussions on various topics; some used to write articles that were read there. We even started a hand-written journal. Thus our club became famous all over Berhampore. Young people came from faraway places to join our club for exercising, there were people right from the Bhattacharya para of Kadai upto lower Kadai, from Kotawali road, Radhaghat, Babupara, Khagda, Siadabad, even from the Barracks and Gorabazar. These were all students studying in schools and colleges. We were also invited to other parts of the district to go and build clubs there.

I was struck with the thought that if everything continued in this direction

among the youth in the entire country, we would become important and powerful. We would build up a great strength. But what were we going to do with this strength? In what way could we utilise this strength in society and in life? We were all young in age and immature and if we were not able to channelise the strength in the right lines towards the right goal then the consequences might not be happy. We used to have these thoughts: What is the aim of life? Its goal? What brings the highest fulfilment to man? What is the ideal society? And we often discussed them with our local politicians of various parties. But their words and ideas never satisfied us. We thought their ideas and ideals were all somewhat incomplete, uncertain and unclear.

Such used to be my state of mind whenever I came to Pondicherry. I would go to Mother, do my pranam and receive her blessings.

Then a long time afterwards, when I came to the Ashram for good, and took charge of physical education, I came quite close to Mother. I wanted to ask her some questions. Perhaps it was 1950.

Mother said: "Why don't you give me your questions?"

I began to ask her my questions one after the other and Mother took them all down. I felt that Mother was happy to hear my questions. She even showed them to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo too liked them; I am told that Sri Aurobindo remarked: "If I had had the time I would have written on them."

After Sri Aurobindo's departure Mother re-arranged my questions, put many more things and answered my questions at great length. It is those writings of Mother that were published in book-form as *The Mother on Education*.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37)

\* \* \*

Youngsters no doubt, but even people older than me call me 'Dada', that too from an early age. Probably this was in my destiny.

Way back in 1934, when I was 10 or 12, we lived in a house on the ground-floor and above us there lived a manager of an automobile garage with his family. The garage was a little further away from the house across the street.

Now my younger brother naturally called me 'Dada'. With him the garage owner's children also called me 'Dada'. Then their father, mother and sister also started calling me 'Dada'.

There was quite a large empty space in the big workshop next to our house. We used to go to play there. There were about fifty workers in the workshop, they too all began to call me 'Dada'.

Then I came to the Ashram and here too everybody calls me 'Dada'. Even Mother one day called me 'Dada' when she was telling something to the children about me. So as you can see, I was destined to be called 'Dada'. (*Ibid.*, p. 38)

\* \* \*

Let me tell you about an incident. I cannot express in words Mother's deep care and love for me. Not just for me but for all her children despite their shortcomings. For Mother was not only divine but also so very human. Even while being the divine Mother, she used to be so concerned about us like any human mother. I cannot communicate this in words. She could be human because she was divine.

While I was staying and studying in Calcutta, news reached us that Buro-dadu was very ill. We all went to Berhampore. Later Dadu passed away. On the occasion of his Sradh (a ceremony for the departed) many people came to our house even from faraway places. Among them was an expert astrologer who got busy reading people's palms and telling them their future.

I was only seven then. I was always a lonely child, withdrawn — what is called an 'introvert'. While everybody was having his palm read I too finding an opportune moment put my palm forward.

The astrologer probably did not realise that I was one of the family. And I felt he was a little annoyed.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Promptly I replied: "How long will I live?"

"Twenty-five years."

I quickly withdrew my hand, but did not feel sorry to hear what he had said. On the contrary I felt happy. I rapidly calculated in my mind and concluded that I would be dead in 18 years. It almost made me happy thinking about it. I have told you that I was lonely and an introvert. Probably my child's lonely mind was somewhat distraught at Buro-dadu's death. Quite often the astrologer's forecast would return to my mind.

Then I came away to Pondicherry.

The year was 1947. I remembered what the astrologer had told me in my childhood. I was 25 that year.

One day in the course of a conversation I mentioned to Mother: "Mother, when I was young an astrologer saw my palm and predicted that I would live till the age of 25. This year I am 25."

I mentioned this very casually, but Mother became serious.

I had not imagined that Mother would become so serious. She scolded me roundly. "So you've nourished this childhood incident all this time. It isn't good to dwell upon death in one's mind."

What a scolding she gave me! Then she said gravely: "All right, I'll speak to Sri Aurobindo."

Then one day she called me and said: "I have spoken to Sri Aurobindo about you."

I felt terribly embarrassed to see Mother so concerned and anxious about me. However, the year passed and with it went Mother's anxiety.

Another incident from another time.

We used to live in captain Mona's present house.

One evening I heard some noise nearby. An unknown drunkard was trying to break through Lakshmibai's main door. Although many people were trying to stop him he wouldn't listen. He was bent on breaking in.

I ran out. At first, I tried to reason with the drunkard and calm him down. But when he refused to listen I thrashed him soundly and floored him.

Somehow the matter reached Mother's ears and later she told me: "After the beating you gave him suppose he identifies you and reports to the police? The police will come and arrest you and a police case would follow."

How anxious Mother was for me!

However, the matter did not go that far.

Incidentally, one evening, much later, Mother sent me a chit through Amrita-da. "Pranab," she wrote, "I have a strange feeling that there's some danger hovering over you. Be alert."

But thanks to Mother's grace no danger came my way.

This is just an instance of how very alert Mother always was about my welfare and safety. (*Ibid.*, pp. 38-41)

\* \* \*

In France, at bedtime Mother used to prepare some coffee with milk and keep it covered on the window-sill. In the morning the coffee was completely frozen. Mother would have that coffee after waking up in the morning and then sit to meditate. After her meditation she would write prayers in a notebook — a long-standing habit of hers. Even after coming to India for some time she continued to write prayers. There were seven or eight fat notebooks filled with Mother's prayers.

A selection from those notebooks was brought out as *Prayers and Meditations*. Then she destroyed all those fat notebooks. From one book she cut out a page and gave it to me. The following prayer was on it:

*Remplis les coeurs des délices de Ton Amour  
Inonde les esprits des splendeurs de Ta Lumière  
Permetts que nous réalisons Ta Victoire.*

*19 Juin.*

Fill our hearts with the delight of Thy Love  
Flood our minds with the splendour of Thy Light  
Grant that we may effectuate Thy Victory!

19 June



. . . *par l'Illumination, la Connaissance et le Pouvoir*  
*O le cantique d'allégresse de Ta Présence Victorieuse . . .*

. . . with the Illumination, the Knowledge and the Power.  
 Oh, the canticle of joy of Thy victorious Presence . . .

[18 June 1914]

I asked her: "Why did you stop writing the prayers?"

She replied: "The work they had to do was done, so I stopped writing."

(*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54)

\* \* \*

After 1958, when Mother moved to her room upstairs, she did not come out regularly except on special days. After 1962 that too stopped. She never came down again. And so she could not do any exercises. Then I arranged chairs in a circle in her room and every morning and evening Mother walked for thirty minutes.

In the afternoon, after her thirty-minute walk, she rested for a while. At that time I would get her to do some freehand exercises — these gave the required movements to her arms and legs, abdomen, shoulders and other parts of the body. Then once again she walked for thirty minutes.

In the mornings she walked while it was still dark and during winter, when afternoons became dark much earlier, I used to light some candles. Mother liked this very much. Getting to know of her liking for candlelight many devotees began to send lots of beautiful coloured candles. We got so many candles that we still have some left with us.

I lit the candles near her when she sat down to rest. The soft candle glowed on her face marvellously. I have a photo of it too. In that soft candlelight to watch Mother sitting or walking while her shadows danced on the wall was like a dream-vision. (*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55)

\* \* \*

Once Mother decided not to eat anything but instead absorb from the atmosphere the energy needed for the body. She gave up food completely.

She inhaled only the fragrance of fresh jasmynes. From this she drew in a lot of energy.

But the human body as it is now, needs some intake of food. After a few days she felt that lifting even a cup from the table seemed difficult. She understood that the body was getting feeble from within.

Mother asked Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo said: “You’re looking weak.”

And so Mother resumed eating. (*Ibid.*, p. 55)

\* \* \*

Mother once told me that she had gone round the whole of France on a cycle with some of her women friends. They cycled through towns and villages and at sundown stopped to rest at some wayside inn. For courage, sustained effort, patience, mental strength and endurance, this enterprise of Mother’s was a great adventure indeed.

One evening, Mother stopped with her friends at an inn. The room was dark. Her friends were sleeping unperturbed but Mother was extremely alert. Late at night she noticed a black head silently peering through a gap in the door.

Mother did not wake her friends so as not to frighten them. She called out in a hard and grave voice: “Who’s there? Come out!”

There was such a power and intrepidity in that fearless voice that at once the scoundrel slipped out like a mouse in sheer fright. (*Ibid.*, p. 123)

\* \* \*

I used to enjoy listening to Mother recount stories from her younger days.

Once she told me that her father was very fond of going to the circus. He never let an opportunity go by. Often he would take Mother along. But his wife did not like going to the circus at all. That is why he would take Mother on the sly.

Whenever Mother spoke of her younger days, a marvellous smile would light up her face and her eyes would acquire that indescribably soft gentle gaze, and mesmerised I would listen.

Mother’s father was a most simple, thoughtful and absent-minded person. Once he suffered a tremendous loss in business, and as a result, after paying back all his debts he became penniless overnight.

But even this debacle did not break him. He was fond of keeping birds and kept those small, colourful birds called Love Birds and he spent a lot of time with them. (*Ibid.*, pp. 123-24)

\* \* \*

One day Mother told me: “I’ll make a pencil sketch of you.” In those days, after lunch, Mother used to rest for some time in her chair. And I used to take a short nap resting my head on one side of the cushion on which Mother used to stretch her feet.

Mother said: “I’ll make a sketch of you at noon after lunch when you rest.”

And so one day, as usual, Mother sat on her chair to rest and I lay down to take my nap. Mother made two or three rough sketches. Then one day on a large piece of paper Mother did the final sketch. Before finishing Mother told me: "Now you can open your eyes." After the picture was finished, Mother got a copy made for me.

It was a very beautiful portrait indeed! It shows clearly what a fine artist she was. . . .

Afterwards at the Playground, in the evening, Mother sketched most of her eight hand-maidens. In such a short time with just a few strokes of the pencil she was able to create the most beautiful portraits! (*Ibid.*, pp. 142-43)

\* \* \*

I am reminded of four stories told to me by Mother about her childhood.

Mother was five or six at that time. She accompanied her parents and brother on a trek in the mountains. They were walking along a mountain path that zigzagged upward. Suddenly Mother felt like breaking away from the group to go forward. So she started running. A little further down, the path suddenly sloped steeply downward. One could see this path going downward from a little higher up. Mother couldn't control her speed as she neared the turning of the road and she started falling from the upper slope to the lower one. And as she was falling she felt as if someone was gently lowering her down. Mother reached the path below. The place where she landed was being repaired. Conical-shaped stones were piled on the road. Most of them were very sharp-edged and the edges faced upward. Mother tumbled and landed softly on this pile. And strangely, she did not suffer a scratch. She stood up and saw her parents and brother running towards her. And on finding her without any injury they were stunned. They were expecting a very bloody accident.

Mother grew up a little more. She must have been about nine or ten then. She badly wanted to grow tall.

One night she went to bed. Her heart was impatient to become a little taller and in that state she fell asleep. When she woke up the following morning what did she see? The frock that she was wearing and which normally ended at the knee was almost two inches higher! To grow taller by two inches in one night! She couldn't believe her eyes!

Now Mother must have been eleven or twelve. One day she was running about and playing inside the house. She found herself in the living-room which was quite large. It suddenly entered her mind to try and cross the whole room in three jumps. With the first jump she crossed almost one third of the distance, she advanced further with the second leap and with the third jump she reached the other end of the room. She was surprised at her own achievement! Afterwards she again tried to cross the room in three steps but she could not.

Another incident occurred some years later, perhaps when she was thirteen or fourteen. Mother was very close to her elder brother and both of them would try out different things together.

Once Mother sprained her ankle and it swelled and caused a lot of pain while her brother badly hurt his hand while playing. Both of them decided that while Mother would press her foot he would press his hand in order to see how much pain they could bear. And so both started pressing their respective injured part and increased the pain without any complaint. The pain kept rising and so did their endurance. Even when the pain became almost unbearable they continued to press. After a while they suddenly felt that in spite of pressing the injured spot, they were feeling no more pain! The pain had, as it were, melted away! (*Ibid.*, pp. 164-65)

\* \* \*

I believe some sort of a misunderstanding took place after Mother's meeting with President Rajendra Prasad.

Let me tell you what happened. President Rajendra Prasad came to meet Mother. But since his doctors had prohibited him to climb stairs, the meeting was arranged downstairs in the Meditation Hall. A beautiful chair had been kept on a lovely carpet for him to sit on.

Rajendra Prasad talked to Mother for quite some time. He bowed in pranam and received her blessings. Some photographs were taken.

A photograph was printed in the papers the next day showing Mother on her feet while the President was bowing full of devotion with folded hands.

This provoked some comments. "How was this possible? The President of the country bowing his head while Mother does not even reciprocate! Is this how she respects dignitaries?"

Mother was extremely saddened to hear such comments made by people in the country and said: "Rajendra Prasad came to me with the attitude of a bhakta, of a son. That's why he bowed in pranam and I too did my namaskar to him. But the journalists photographed only Rajendra Prasad's pranam but not mine. What can I do about that?"

Mother was very hurt by this.

How well we know that even if a passing pedestrian raised his hand to greet her, she would always respond at once with a reciprocal greeting. Such a compassionate and gracious Mother, and yet even about her we had to hear such things! (*Ibid.*, pp. 127-30)

PRANAB KUMAR BHATTACHARYA

(Selected from the book *I Remember . . .*,  
published by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta, 1993)

## GRACE

Lord of the lampless lonelihoods of drowse,  
Speak your calm thunder that fills the dark with dreams,  
Stand a black angel athwart a sky all sun,  
Our shield of mystery against sudden power,  
A shadow like a benediction falling  
On every crest of the surge of human sight.  
Then, shutting my lids, I shall see through a thin night-haze  
All the world's outlines framing prisoner souls:  
Each jagged boulder a god who groans to no ear.  
Gulfs of divinity shall gape in me,  
Calling the glittering peaks of thought to plunge  
Head downward in those quiet wisdom-wells.  
Deep and more deep the blinded puissances  
Hurl to the womb of some sweet mother-space —  
Then birth out like a swarm of birds that shine  
And, with soft croon and effortless pinion-song  
Breasting the eternal Blue that all things are,  
Meet in the merciless sun the face of a friend.

10.5.1948

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

*(The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], 1993,  
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, p. 230)*

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of September 2010)

**Monday, 1 March 1926**

*During the past week there has not been much progress. I cannot manage to get out of my mental prison and my mind doesn't want to yield. There are two inner movements which I practise successively: first, while keeping the mind as quiet as possible, I try hard to open myself to a higher perception, to become aware of the higher mental reality; the other movement is to detach my inner being from action and from the mental level, in order to establish myself, as it were, in the higher mental region. Are these two movements right?*

THEY seem to me to be two aspects, active and passive, of the same effort. But it is always with the mind that you are making this effort; this is inevitable at the beginning. But the calm that comes is not an effort — it is a substance, a “mental stuff”.

*I understand this mentally, but I have not yet realised it. I always have to make an effort, quite a strenuous one, for it engages even my physical brain, where I feel it. When I lift this pressure, the waves resume their movement. I am also very easily disturbed by outside noises. Even when they don't awaken any thought in me, they draw my attention sharply, which gets riveted to them.*

You will feel them occurring somewhere in your widened consciousness, but without their disturbing you; indeed, everything will seem as though it were outside you. That is my experience. When I began Yoga, I came to an impasse, unable to go further. My brother then directed me to a Yogi<sup>1</sup> who had certain powers. I remained with him for ten days. He told me to sit beside him and consciously drive away any thought that would appear. I did this and after three days my mind was calm and peaceful, unwavering. Thoughts floated before me, I saw them and was aware of them, but I was no longer their plaything. When I left, since I was the political leader, I was asked to make a speech somewhere. I refused, saying that I didn't have a thought in my mind. But the Yogi told me to go, since the thoughts would come of themselves. And it was true. In the same way, I had to write for the newspapers; and when I went back to Bengal, I had to speak at several stations on the way. Always the mental work was done of itself, without my being its plaything, in detachment and peace.

1. Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. By following his instructions Sri Aurobindo attained complete silence of mind.

This calm is mental at first. There are two parts in the mind, one that reflects the activity of Prakriti, another that shares the calm of the Purusha.

*I understand quite clearly. The only result attained so far is greater calmness and a deeper peace, less easily disturbed by the little things of life, more intuitiveness and a greater capacity to unite myself with what is around me.*

That is already something important. Continue, and also develop this feeling of union with Nature which you have.

\* \* \*

### **Monday, 8 March 1926**

*This week there has not been much progress. My mind is sometimes tamasic, sometimes rajasic. At times outside noises are the cause of difficulties; they resound with much more force as my mind becomes more calm and empty.*

What movements are you making?

*Always the following two movements: having quieted the mind, either to remain attentive to the influence from above, or to separate myself from the quieted mental being and try to realise my existence above the mind, as in the brief experience I glimpsed once.*

If you succeed in keeping out all thought, in reaching absolute passivity, three things can happen, in fact. Either a profound calm descends and takes hold of one, or the consciousness separates from the outer world and reaches another level, or, lastly, the invasion of outside impressions becomes all-powerful. And if one of the first two things is not achieved, then the third sets in. Hence the importance of making everything quiet while remaining attentive to the higher influence — open to the heights, so to say.

*It is difficult for me to keep this attitude and aspiration when I silence the thought, for it is thought that helps me to arouse them.*

Why? Because you think it is difficult and you are not used to it. But it is important. Make an effort to do this. If your consciousness leaves the physical level, that can of itself shut out all sensation. But in any case, you will have to develop it; you may as well do it now.

*I suppose these difficulties are common — such as the fact that the mind is trying by every means to keep its grip on me and toss me violently here and there.*

Quite common.

*It would seem easier to overcome the causes of disturbance by retiring from the world. It is this feeling, no doubt, that has given rise to the Sannyasin's aversion to the world. But I realise that there is another way, that of mental control.*

Yes. Besides, the shrunken world in which the Sannyasin moves very often becomes a theatre of the same difficulties and struggles — and it is the small things that take on importance. It is quite useless to cut oneself off like this. Many have felt this. An old Yogi in Benares told me that if he could start all over again, he would change his whole method in this respect; but he was too old. Those who have long abandoned the world rarely can return to it. They have lost the ability and something in them would not be able to bear it. If here we retire a little from human contact, it is not for the same reasons, but mainly to avoid the shock and pressure of the thoughts others direct towards us.

*Is this experience I am preparing myself for what has been described as a second birth?*

Yes — but in this Yoga one must pass through many new births!

\* \* \*

**Wednesday, 10 March 1926**

*In meditation the whole mind is quiet. The faculty of forming images disappears and as well as that of reasoning, of putting out ideas, and I remain immobile, incapable of any inner movement. There is no change in the consciousness, only in the instruments of this consciousness. What should I do in meditation? Should this new state be brought into the ordinary life?*

At first, the mind is divided into two parts — one part whose movements are activated by Nature, the other which shares the nature of the Purusha and remains immobile. It is now necessary to extend the power of this immobile part in order to remain the witness of the changes of the other part. Thought will seem to occur in front of the mind, and it will become aware that it is universal Nature which activates the play of thoughts. You must move towards this universalisation. Thoughts will come from outside and you will



see them taking shape in you. You will also experience that you have power over them: you will be able to make a choice, to refuse a movement, and so on. This is the beginning of mastery. The immobile part of the mind will also have to be seen as the reflection of a vaster universal Purusha above you. From both sides you must free yourself from the limited self. You should relax the pressure you have been putting on the mind in order to master the thought and be free from it. Insist on the witness attitude. When a thought comes, examine it, see where it comes from, follow it.

The two parts you are separating in this way will later have to be united once again.

*I have the feeling that there is only one part, with two possible states, one active, the other passive and inactive.*

At first it is necessary to emphasise the division before making the synthesis. You will experience that it is not you who is thinking, but Prakriti; this is a first liberation. The faculty of thinking has not been taken away from you, but thought seems to be outside yourself.

*But there is no change in the consciousness and this state has nothing spiritual about it.*

True, but it is a preparation of the instruments and as such it is very important.

\* \* \*

### **Saturday, 13 March 1926**

*Master, there is something I don't understand very well. Suppose I am meditating. At first there is quite a lot of activity of the semi-automatic mind, which continues the original movement. Gradually this activity becomes calm and stops; then I find myself before the quiet mind. But there is another activity of the mind, a kind of inner language that seems to be activated by myself. It is with this thought that I tell myself, for example, "Now I am observing my thoughts. . . . Where does this one come from? . . . Now all is calm . . . I must stop talking to myself like this" and so on. It is also possible to completely stop this activity. Where does it come from? Its laws are those of the mind, but it seems to reflect some purpose of the Purusha, or to serve him as an instrument of knowledge and action. If it were activated by Prakriti, Prakriti would be struggling against herself. On the other hand, how can the Purusha, who is calm and immutable, bring about a change? If there were really no change in him, this would be impossible, wouldn't it?*

At first it so happens that Prakriti does struggle against herself — some parts struggle against others. But the Purusha is not totally inactive. The inactivity of the Purusha reduced to the sole role of passive witness, is that of the Sankhya: the Purusha is the Sakshi. But even then he can give or refuse his consent; he is the giver of sanction, Anumanta. And Prakriti works not only for herself, she also works for the Purusha — she executes. But the Purusha is more than that. He does not execute, his activity is not effective, but he is the Knower and Lord (Ishwara), and what he decides, Prakriti executes. In most people the Purusha is hidden behind all the mental activity. There is, no doubt, a consent to the play of Prakriti, but the Purusha is not free then — Prakriti throws her activity on the Purusha. The Purusha must first recover his attitude of witness. Then he sees for himself that he has a certain power over the activities of Prakriti.

*Is this consent of the Purusha conscious? Or is it something much more profound?*

It is not in the mental ego; that is why it seems unconscious. But when the Purusha is free, it becomes conscious.

*This part that I call myself, which looks at the quiet mind without taking part in its activities, is this the Manomaya Purusha?*

Yes.

*Is the consent of the Purusha individual? Is it not the universal that determines it?*

There is the universal Purusha as there is the individual Purusha, and there is that which transcends them both. This individual Purusha is distinct, though not separate (he does not feel himself separate) from the whole. And when he is fully conscious, he has direct access to the Transcendent. Without this individual Purusha, no organised action would be possible. There are many sadhaks who try to eliminate this action. For example, the stage of the Paramahansa in which one is absolutely unconscious of one's activities, be it as a child or one inert or one carried away like a leaf in the wind, is a phase preparatory to total cessation. When the impetus given ceases, there is a final rejection at the time of the dissolution of the body. But we, we do not want cessation, but to replace limited action, circumscribed by limited knowledge, by true action, governed by knowledge of the Truth. Thought is a means of knowledge, but it is the lowest means. When the Purusha is disengaged from Prakriti, he has all knowledge in him, direct. He knows directly by a sort of vision, by direct contact with the Truth. For example, when you are angry you don't need to think, "I am angry" you know it without thinking. Direct knowledge is similar.

Even when later one translates this knowledge into mental terms, it remains independent of them. Besides, only a part, fragmentary and deformed, can be translated. That is why I find it so difficult to express myself in words. If you had developed this faculty in yourself, I could have shown you the Truth directly without putting it into words.

*I am aware that I exist independently of my thoughts, but then I am weak and feeble, without knowledge and action.*

A new state has to be attained. You will see that your knowledge is not limited by thought.

*In the same way, I don't see that thoughts are aroused in me by Prakriti. I know that the mind is not myself, but the thoughts seem to be born in the mind.*

Yes, but in the universal mind, which formulates them in you. So long as you are confined to the physical brain, naturally you cannot have this understanding. But later you will be able to perceive this action of the universal mind, which projects the thoughts into your mental field.

*How can one achieve that?*

Continue to stress the separation. You say that you can silence even the inner language, guided by the Purusha. Can you also separate yourself from him?

*Yes, I observe him as outside myself.*

Stress the separation even more. There are stages like that to go through. People remain at one stage or another for varying periods of time.

*(To be continued)*

PAVITRA

[From *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* by Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire) published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 2007 being the English translation of *Conversations avec Pavitra*, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.

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# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

*(Continued from the issue of September 2010)*

### Chapter Nine

#### Summa of the Divine Consciousness

Pondicherry, March 19, 1930

My dear Papa,

YOUR last two letters — that of December and the one received a few days back — have made me very happy. Once again I feel you close to me and I can tell you how highly I value your affection and your confidence.

I thank you for Le Roy's book. I have not yet had the time to open it, but I have already heard a little about its author. The paths that he follows are very different from those of Bergson. Moreover, if I have mentioned Bergson to you, it is only because he is the first, to my knowledge, to have introduced in classical philosophy — or one on its way to becoming classical — the notion of a knowledge independent of the channel of the sense and superior to the reason. Also, I too like the clarity of his mind and the lucidity of his style. But I do not accept him or his philosophy, no more than any other system of philosophy — either occidental or oriental. They are all efforts of the intellect to attain a truth which is inaccessible to it, and the constructions which result from them are most often without any bearing on real life.

However that may be, I very much appreciate your thoughtfulness and I sincerely request you that whenever you think of something which might interest me or simply that you feel like communicating it to me, not to hesitate to do so.

You must be thinking that I am full of animosity towards the West and its spirit. No, I have nothing against the Western civilisation as such, taken on the whole. I am aware of its numerous defects, even vices and perversions; I know from experience that the training that it gives to the intellect makes it restless and at the same time rigid, rebellious and conceited; I am obliged to note the uncouth sensuality and the lack of refinement which are almost the general rule, the ignorance of spiritual values etc. But I am not blind to its beautiful sides, its love of clarity and

precision, its energy, its patience and its discipline in study and in action, its aspiration for the knowledge of nature, the wealth and the variety of its technique, etc.

Moreover, all cultures have their weak points; generally they concentrate their effort on a particular point to the detriment of the others.

If I speak to you so often of the defects of the occidental spirit, it is because they are very real obstacles to the acquisition of a truer and more ample knowledge. I would probably use quite a different language to a Hindu. What reason would I have to speak to you about the defects of the Japanese education or about the poverty of the inner life of the American?

Usually, one speaks of a civilisation as though it were a single compact block either to be admired or rejected wholly. We boast of the beneficial effects that our civilisation brings to the so called “inferior” races, but they experience the damaging effects first. It is not surprising that the results disappoint both sides. The real benefits of our civilisation, like the ones I have mentioned earlier, are accessible only to a very small elite. I mean that those who can appreciate them at their spiritual value, and utilise them to express themselves without becoming slavish and without losing their own inner life, are indeed rare. For the rest, the progress is quite debatable: the increase of material well-being is paid for with a loss of moral character and dignity; universalisation of culture is paid for by a general lowering of taste; the great production of specialists by the absence of general culture, etc.

It must also be recognised that there are civilisations, like that of ancient Japan, essentially aristocratic and feudal, which have raised the people to a level of culture far superior to our modern democracies.

There are good and bad things in the world and the good things must not make us swallow the bad (I am not speaking, it is well understood, of moral notions of good and bad). The fact of being **such as it is** is not at all a justification for our physical world. There is no reason why it cannot be otherwise. I was reading today a book by Ernest Seillière, where I came across this sentence:

For the Greeks, essentially although wisely mystical, the marvellous is not a disturbance, but only an increase of this divine influx, which, according to their conviction, penetrates everything all the time. To their finalist thinking, **nature had habits**; for the modern materialist mind, **she has laws**.

Here, it is indeed the Greeks who are right. There is here the indication of a very profound truth, without which our yoga would be impossible. A **law** has immutability; one can change a **habit**. It is that which we want to do here. But contrary to the reformers, we do not pretend to transform others; it is ourselves that we wish to regenerate.

I am sorry to have put in my letter a passage which could upset or even grieve you. Please be assured that it was far from my intention. If my words have been

somewhat sharp, see behind them only an ardent desire for frankness, a wish to clear up all misunderstanding and all confusion.

At present the world is so constituted that the majority of the people draw, just as you do, a line between the utilitarian life, imposed by the necessity to live, and the inner life, full of true aspirations or of fanciful ideals as the case may be. It seems almost inevitable, and yet only those who have centred their whole life around a fixed point (idea, ambition, ideal, faith, etc.) have been great. Sri Aurobindo has often said that only those can succeed, in the broadest sense of the term, that is to say fully accomplish their destiny, who manage to unify their life in this manner. The others are endlessly pulled in the contradictory directions of the various elements and tendencies of their being. This unification may be achieved at different levels of the vital, the mental or the psychic. To discover this centre in oneself and to rally all one's energy there, this indeed is to find one's way.

You remember that, since my childhood, I lacked perseverance and sustained attention in my studies. Even the subject in which I succeeded very well could not long retain my attention. And it was not due to laziness nor due to my incapacity to concentrate; I was able to put in a great effort into what attracted me at the moment. This kind of restlessness which carried me endlessly to something other than what I had to do is, I think, a sign that a formative being perceives confusedly an inner call and seeks its **vocation**. What with the War and my last years of study, the separation became so serious that it generated an acute uneasiness. I had to exercise a great self-control so that my studies would not suffer because of it, but the divorce between my job of a young engineer and my inner aspirations was complete. It was impossible that it could go on for long.

Before being able to use my mind again, but in another way, before integrating my first Western and scientific formation harmoniously into my whole life, I had to abandon all that to plunge deep within myself, to join the true centre of my life and discover my **vocation**. It is around this centre, from now on, that the powers of my being must unite, organise, harmonise themselves, purify themselves of unnecessary elements, free themselves from harmful influences, in one word attain **regeneration**. And that is the actual work.

I have spoken a lot about myself — too much, in fact — because basically these retrospective considerations are only of a very secondary interest.

By the same post I am sending you a set of seven French issues of the review *Arya*. The French edition appeared simultaneously with the English, but the fact that it had very few subscribers and the War led to its closure. The English edition continued for eight years, I think; it is almost unavailable in its completeness.

I hesitated to send you these few issues. First of all, the whole being extremely intellectual, I was afraid that you might infer from that that we too have a constituted doctrine, a philosophical system or a creed. So again I repeat, before you start

reading, that our Yoga is based exclusively on inner experience and not at all on one or more *a priori* ideas. An intellectual study can only give a limited and fragmentary understanding of its complexity and range. That is why one must not talk of the “doctrine” of Sri Aurobindo: there is no doctrine.

Sri Aurobindo has expressed, for a particular disciple, or for a particular case, or with a fixed goal in mind, a mental aspect of the truth; but that is not the whole truth, and he has always refused to let himself be tied down by what he had written. His inner experience and his realisation being indefinitely progressive, his disciples evolving, the conditions changing, he would probably treat in a very different manner today the subjects of which he had spoken fifteen or twenty years ago.

If you remember then that the writings in *Arya* do not have any finality about them and that they reveal only a very small part of Sri Aurobindo and even of his thought, you will perhaps profit from reading them. In any case, it is better that you make contact with this thought directly, because you wish to understand better what we want to realise.

In the French issues, nothing is complete. *Isha Upanishad* is three fourths complete. Also I would advise you to start with this study. Subsequently you could take up *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and then, if it is not too arduous and you are interested in it, *The Life Divine*. As for the articles by Paul Richard, I frankly urge you to leave them aside. His is a very brilliant intellect, handling the ideas skillfully and juggling with paradoxes, but it does not go beyond the mind.

I was happy to receive good news of you two, and above all to learn of the happy change in Maman’s health. I will scribble a few words to her before closing this letter, already very long.

Embracing you very affectionately,

*Signed:* Ph B St Hilaire

P.S. Wishing to obtain Russian stamps, by means of exchange, I had put in an advertisement to this effect in a philatelic magazine. However, in order not to get into any trouble, already very much under suspicion from the political viewpoint, I had specified that I did not want to deal directly with Russia. In spite of that, I have received a very kind letter from that country, containing beautiful stamps. Naturally, I cannot but reply.

So as not to raise unnecessary difficulties, may I ask you to send off the enclosed letter by registered post after duly sealing and stamping it? Naturally there is nothing that prohibits contacts with Russia, but it will not need much for the local imagination to accuse us of suspected relations with the Soviets. And yet it is a thing of so little importance that it is not worth all the noise that it might create!

Thank you in advance. Please send me the receipt in case a claim has to be made.

I shall be grateful to you for returning to me the stamps of my letters, if they are in good condition. They will be very useful to me for exchanging. The aerogramme envelope has reached me safely. It is an item which will be worth a few hundred francs some day.

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, March 19, 1930

My dear Maman,

I do not have much time before the post goes, but I do not want to let it go without telling you how happy I was to learn about your recovery. It is really unthinkable that all the doctors and specialists consulted till today were incapable not only to cure you but even to diagnose the cause of your illness. Medical science is still in its infancy.

But all the more reason to be happy for having met the rare bird, this well-advised and inspired specialist who has led you little by little to your recovery.

How happy and gay you must be after all these years of torment! Is it not the lost liberty that you have regained? And how much pleasure was forbidden to you! Papa tells me that you came from Corrès to Paris by car without any undue fatigue. It is a very fine result. Papa and Albert must also be well pleased.

On my side, nothing new. No change in the outer life. Always the same inner work and the same well-ordered life. I am sending you some photos of the Ashram. Do you have recent photos of all of you? Write to me to reassure me of the good news concerning you.

I embrace you very lovingly,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, September 26, 1930

My very dear Parents,

I received your telegram today and immediately I have wired the reply in order to reduce your anxiety which I am sorry to have caused.

It is true that I have not written to you for a long time, but that was not for any special reason except that my work in the Ashram leaves me very little time. Neither negligence nor laziness was responsible for my silence because not a day passes without my thought going towards you, and I should have written to you long ago and I intend to do it all the time . . . And then the time passes . . . Also, I wanted in



my letter to talk to Papa about Le Roy's book which has strongly interested me, and the difficulty of finding the time to philosophise a little has equally contributed to my delay.

The only workshop for automobile repairs which existed in Pondicherry has closed down — due to bankruptcy; since then we have been obliged to look after our five cars ourselves. There is always something to be done and I have had to start a veritable little workshop and order the machine-tools from France. At present I am acting as a fitter: I am replacing four shock absorbers at the head of the connecting rod, which have melted. Our drivers are totally incapable of doing this work requiring precision and moreover, handling matter in all its forms always interests me. What we call "crude matter" is not all that unconscious and there is a kind of identification of consciousness which permits one to work on it with understanding and success. It is somewhat like the "contact" the mechanic has with his machine and by which he "feels" it functioning properly. I am telling you this to show you that the most material activities are part of our integral yoga. But this new work has taken up all my available time and has made me neglect my correspondence. In the same way I have incurred the reproaches of my friends in Japan whom I have left without any news.

I have told you about the interest that I have always had for matter, its study and its use: chemistry, the art of the engineer, applied arts, mechanics, etc. It is strange that it is inorganic matter that attracts me the most. I am relatively less attracted by the vegetal kingdom and even less by the animal. Evidently it is a question of temperament and it is very personal to me. Here, in this tropical climate, there is so much to be done for agriculture and horticulture. All that is still in its infancy, except some specialised products which have attained a great enough perfection: rice, bananas, cassava . . . And again there is no doubt that with the modern methods one can multiply still more these results already so beautiful: just think here we have three harvests of rice per year. As for the fruit trees — apart from mango and banana — they are almost at the wild stage! Everything remains to be done: selection, grafting, importing and acclimatisation of exotic species, etc. We have not yet undertaken this work, but we are seriously thinking of doing it one day. The climate will permit much, I think, because water is always there since the groundwater is a few metres below the surface and there are also artesian wells. If the rain is insufficient, one can have recourse to watering.

Your experiment with arboriculture in the Midi, is it going well? I too remember the book by a "fruit faddist" who calculated that fruit tree culture, on a big scale, would yield a return infinitely more lucrative than that of the cereals. Moreover, Morocco and Algeria have built their prosperity partly on fruits: tangerines, lemons, dates, figs and grapes.

We also intend to start a dairy. At present we are buying the milk from milkmen who milk the cows in our house — a precautionary measure — but the cost is very

high, 2.30 F a litre, and we need 60 litres per day. The monthly bill is very high. Only, such an enterprise means a big capital investment and is not without risk (epidemics). We need somebody with a perfect knowledge of cattle in general (or in Europe) and also of the local conditions. We are still waiting!

Little by little, with the help of modern and improved methods, we want to do by ourselves all that work for which we are dependent on the merchants and workmen from outside. Naturally, we buy raw materials and manufactured goods, but only wholesale. At present we get our supplies mainly from France. But I am speaking essentially of the maintenance work and the procuring of the essential goods like the following which have either been worked out or are in our not too distant future projects: bakery, vegetables and fruits, dairy, laundry, construction and maintenance of buildings, dispensary, carpenter's workshop, machine repair workshop, electrical workshop. Quite a lot of work, isn't it? Our monthly budget varies between 40,000 and 60,000 F and in 1929, with the purchase of houses during the year, our expenses have reached one million.<sup>1</sup> From France alone we have directly bought raw materials worth more than 100,000 F. Since it is I who look after the business transactions with France, you will understand that it takes up a lot of my time.

In Pondicherry we occupy a considerable area: 27 houses of which six belong to us, the others being rented. These are quite big houses, but due to the current layout, there are hardly three or four suitable rooms per house. Each disciple has a room, and we are now 80 to 90 in the Ashram!

I notice that I have forgotten to mention the flowers and ornamental plants that we cultivate with care and skill. They have won for the Ashram a diploma of honour (First prize) at the Agricultural Competition held last March.

You see that we have plenty to keep us occupied, even apart from our time for meditation and spiritual studies which are nevertheless the most important of all our activities.

Maman asked me if I was happy. On reading this question I asked myself how to translate my intimate feeling on this subject. I think that for me happiness resides in the fact that I am where I must be — not smoothly perhaps, nor without failures — but in short, I see the goal and the path and I try hard to follow it! The development of my life is going on in a greater and greater harmony, towards a more and more luminous and vast consciousness. What more can I ask for than what I already have? At every moment I can be in contact with the very source of happiness and bliss, enter into the immutable Peace which surpasses all human joy and feeling.

I see that I must postpone talking about Claude Roy's book; it will have to wait for the next letter for which, be sure, I shall not keep you waiting so long.

For Papa I have kept aside several letters written to a new French disciple on Sri Aurobindo's behalf. I am sharing them with him because I think that they will

1. Approximately 40,000 euros.

interest him and that they will show him the path that I have traversed since leaving you.<sup>2</sup>

Maman's letter from Bourbonne arrived a few days ago. I often try to guess where you are and what you are doing, but I would never have thought of finding Maman in Bourbonne. I was hoping that she would be free, at least to a great extent, of the doctors and their institutions. In any case Bourbonne has the advantage of being close to La Minelle. At present you must be in Paris, or about to return there, and this letter will find you there and bring my loving thoughts to you.

Lovingly I embrace you.

*Signed:* Phillipe

P.S. I wanted to send you some photos of the Ashram, but they are not ready. I shall enclose them with the next letter.

I thank Maman for the stamps she has sent me; among them I found many which I did not have as yet. If it is possible, please keep for me all the stamps of my letters; they are difficult to obtain, even for me, because there is no internal correspondence in Pondicherry.

*(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.

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

2. It is the second lot of four letters addressed to Marquès Rivière and dated 27/8/1929, 7/3/1930, ?/7/1930 and 7/9/1930.

# THE NOTION OF PROGRESS IN DARWINIAN THEORY

## Abstract

Various viewpoints have been offered on the question whether evolution through the Darwinian paradigm (variational evolution) is “progressive” or not. While it is widely accepted that evolution as we know it from the viewpoint of Darwinism is not goal-driven or teleological, there is plenty of debate on whether Earth’s evolutionary history can be judged to have progressed across any parameters. Needless to say that there is no one definition of progress and thinkers from different backgrounds in biology view it differently. One common theme among them is the avoidance of a definition that is not general enough and ends up with a bias towards any particular species (mainly avoiding anthropomorphism). The second “agreement” is to keep the definition materialistic. This article explores these viewpoints and suggests a wider definition of progress.

## Introduction

The theory of natural selection, as presented by Darwin, offers no conclusions about progress, yet ever since the word evolution became commonplace to describe Darwin’s theory of “Descent with Modification”, numerous attempts have been made to prove that evolutionary data shows a gradual transition to the better and fitter species over time. Using the same data there have been numerous attempts to deny this conclusion. The word “progress” (and the related phrase “survival of the fittest”) was popularised by Herbert Spencer and in fact Darwin did not use the word evolution in the first edition of *On the Origin of Species*. Similarly he was wary of using terms like “higher” or “lower” in the context of evolution since he realised that evolution is mainly a theory of change, and survival being tied to the immediate environment, long-term predictions cannot be made by this theory.

Over the years there has been a lot of work on genetics and heredity as well as a few cutting-edge field studies. Darwin’s theory was given a makeover in the last century when the neo-Darwinist paradigm was created by incorporating insights from genetics. However, the debate over whether evolution has a direction or not still continues, while the term “progress” itself keeps getting redefined in almost every such attempt.

### Gould's Narrative — Statistical Illusion

The second chapter of S J Gould's book *Life's Grandeur — The spread of excellence from Plato to Darwin* reduces them both to a freak accident in the passage of time.

Laying out his agenda, Gould states:

If we are but a tiny twig on the floridly arborescent bush of life, and if our twig branched off just a geological moment ago, then perhaps we are not a predictable result of an inherently progressive process (the vaunted trend to progress in life's history); perhaps we are, whatever our glories and accomplishments, a momentary cosmic accident that would never arise again if the tree of life could be replanted from seed and regrown under similar conditions. (*Op. Cit.*, Vintage, 1997, p. 18)

Freud has famously observed that every major revolution has done its bit to dethrone man from his self-appointed cosmic status. He notes three such revolutions. The first was the Copernican which displaced Earth from the centre of the universe, the second the Darwinian thesis that ripped off our notion of man being the mirror-image of God (and almost finished off God in the process) and the third was the Freudian revolution that displaced our claim to being rational beings by the discovery of the vast dungeons of the unconscious. To this Gould adds a fourth — the discovery by geologists and paleontologists (incidentally his own trade) that not only is Earth at least 4 billion years old, but human history, going by the fossil record, is a mere blip in time.

Faced with these facts men, egocentric and arrogant as they are, have been trying to subvert the evolutionary saga to bring in a progressive bias. Faced with the fact that we are restricted to "the last sliver of earthly time", men have constantly been trying to show evolution in the light of a series of steps leading to themselves, a last-ditch effort to regain our sense of universal importance. The objective of the book then is to:

show that progress is, nonetheless, a delusion based on social prejudice and psychological hope engendered by our unwillingness to accept the plain (and true) meaning of the fourth Freudian revolution. (*Ibid.*, p. 20)

Progress is defined by Gould as

a tendency for life to increase in anatomical complexity, or neurological elaboration, or size and flexibility of behavioural repertoire, or any criterion obviously concocted (if we would only be honest and introspective enough about our motives) to place *Homo sapiens* atop a supposed heap.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20)

Gould's objections to the progressionist agenda are rooted in the nature of evolutionary theory itself. After a brief discussion of the nature of natural selection, he proceeds to call out the fallacies of the progressionist argument by a vigorous attack on the pillars sustaining it viz. an anthropomorphic reading of evolutionary trends (mainly by giving undue importance to later arrivals on the evolutionary scene), extrapolating from trends that either do not exist at all or are at best a freak short-term phenomena and a linear view of evolution resulting in a mistaken and simplistic notion of a species replacing another often in increasing order of an identified evolutionary trend.

But before we get to Gould's arguments, let's take a short detour to variational evolution (Darwin's theory of evolution).

### **Variational Evolution and Natural Selection**

Darwin's theory of Variational Evolution can be summed up as follows. I am basing this section on Ernst Mayr's seminal discussion of the Evolutionary Theory in his book *What Evolution Is*.)

1. There is an enormous amount of genetic variation produced in every generation.
2. This varied "genotype" endows the resulting "phenotype" with differential attributes.
3. Under the given environmental conditions a particular combination of attributes may impart a selective advantage to the individuals possessing them. This results in differential survival of the individuals in the given generation and this in turn affects the "genotype" of the next generation since only the survivors have an opportunity to breed. Hence, only favoured genotypes get passed on.
4. Over time the genotypes best suited to cope with the environment are selected so there is a continuous change in the genetic combination of a population.
5. So the unequal survival of individuals is partly due to competition between the recombinant genotypes within the population and partly due to chance processes affecting gene frequency.
6. The resulting change of population is called evolution.

Evolution is best understood as the genetic turnover of the individuals of every population from generation to generation. (*Op. cit.*, Basic Books, 2001, p. 76)

The presence of variation is the prerequisite for Darwinian evolution. If there

were no processes that lead to loss of existing genes or production of new ones, evolution in the sense described above would not be possible. The main processes responsible for this genetic turnover of the population and hence evolution are:

election, genetic mutations, gene flow, genetic drift, biased variation, movable elements and non-random mating. (*Ibid.*, p. 98)

## Natural Selection

Natural Selection is often seen as a process of elimination rather than selection. The individuals who survive long enough to be the progenitors of the next generations are either lucky or possess traits that favoured their survival over others for the given time and place. The rest were eliminated by natural selection. Natural selection in that sense, is seen as a sieve that allows only a few to pass on their genes (and phenotypic attributes) to the next generation. The holes in the sieve can be bigger or smaller depending on the environment, which is not just the weather but also constitutes other members of the given populations as well as other species. A benign year or the discovery of an empty niche will result in survival of greater numbers and a harsh year will result in higher casualties. In other words, the difference will be the mere elimination of the unfit (bigger sieve) or a thorough scrutinising of the fit (smaller sieve). This is the reason populations vary from year to year. This severity of the selection or elimination process is also referred to as “selection pressure”. In that sense “fitness” is not an absolute property that an individual is endowed with. It can be identified only in the short term — an attribute that results in increased differential survival in a given time and place may not do so under different circumstances. Hence evolutionary biologists often say that natural selection “tracks the environment”. It also follows that individuals who have gone through the sieve are extremely well adapted to the local conditions but not well adapted in an absolute sense. The attributes of fitness and survival will never be constant. Some commentators have stressed this aspect of natural selection and concluded that natural selection is essentially random. This is not entirely true.

## Two Steps

Mayr stresses the fact that natural selection is a two-step process. The first step involves the production of variation and is a random process. It involves processes involving mutations of the zygote, meiosis with crossing over, fertilisation etc. It is not possible to predict the mutations though we know that certain genes are more prone to mutations and mutation rates can change under certain conditions. The

mutations are completely random changes in the hereditary material.

The second process involving the selection of the inherited mutations is a mix of chance and determination. Differential survival is linked to the attributes resulting from the inherited genotype and the non-inherited attributes that are a result of learning. Individuals that are best able to adapt to the circumstances will survive long enough to reproduce. However, chance may intervene here as well in the form of natural calamities that do not differentiate between the degrees of adaptedness. Hence while chance does play a role, the differential survival is not “purely” a matter of chance.

Nor is natural selection goal-directed or teleological. It has no purpose, to produce better individuals for example (though better individuals or, to be precise, better adapted individuals, result due to natural selection). It scrutinises every generation afresh and eliminates the unfit.

Another aspect of natural selection that needs to be mentioned is that evolution through natural selection is slow. Mayr explains this in terms of stabilising selection. He states:

the major reason is that owing to the hundreds or thousands of generations that have undergone preceding selection, a natural population will be close to the optimal genotype. The selection to which such a population has been exposed is *normalising* or *stabilising selection*. This selection eliminates all of those individuals of the population who deviate from the optimal *phenotype*. Such culling drastically reduces the variance in every generation. And unless there has been a major change in the environment, the optimal phenotype is most likely that of the immediately preceding generations. (*Ibid.*, p. 135)

Stabilising selection is the reason why we see medium and short-term trends in evolution that are the object of Gould’s scorn.

## **Random Histories**

Gould first dismisses the possibility of any real trends based on the principles of evolution, especially natural selection.

The principles of variational evolution are broad enough to allow for varying viewpoints to emerge so much so that some disagreements have now become rather raucous debates. Natural selection leaves plenty of leeway to read it either as a random chance-driven walk or an extremely creative process which results in great innovation in the short to medium term.

Gould is quite dismissive of natural selection producing any trend whatsoever. It can result in some exquisite adaptations though, but any attempt to see a long-



term trend is doomed to failure since natural selection tracks a random variable — the environment, and hence will be random in its output — a random evolutionary history — of any given organism. Gould does not however spell out if he means trends are just not possible or if they are possible but do not sustain. A lot depends on this as we shall see later. The key question then is exactly how variable is the environment being tracked.

### **Drunkard's Walk**

Next he picks up the second error — that of seeing a trend with respect to one attribute, in this case complexity. He states:

Again we have abstracted the full and rich complexity of life's variation as a "thing" — by taking either some measure of average complexity in a lineage or, more often, the particular case judged "best" (the most complex, the brainiest) — and we have then traced the history of this "thing" through time. Since our chosen thing has increased in complexity through time (once bacteria, then trilobites, now people), how could we possibly deny that progress marks the definition and central driving principle of evolution? (*Life's Grandeur*, p. 148)

His objection then, is that we are forcing patterns by first selecting attributes that suit us best and then reading the trend in a manner that completely ignores the fact that the given trend is present in a tiny tail of the "Full House" (the complete assembly of species on the earth) and this miniscule sample hardly qualifies as representative of life. In other words, braininess being the exquisite preserve of mammals which represent but a tiny fraction of the total species on earth, a trend that culminates in mammals is a gross misrepresentation of the facts of life. Most life has not bothered about being brainy since it does not suit their way of life (it is not a criteria for success via natural selection in their environment) and they are doing fine anyway. You might as well say that humans are the best navel gazers and then place yourself on a pedestal, but then most life does not bother with navel gazing. It does not matter to them and they still proliferate. If one were to ask them they might want to use different attributes, for instance, nose lengths in the case of elephants, streamlined bodies in the case of fishes and echolocation in the case of bats.

So either our categories are anthropocentric and hence matter to us alone and thereby are rendered useless as a criterion of progress (most species will never get selected for that criteria and hence never develop those attributes, at least never show a meaningful trend), or we have a vast array of criteria from running speeds to body odour where each such criteria will put a different species on the pedestal.

In addition to this, there is a strange thing with trends, especially when applied

to life. They need not represent any

directed causality within the system — but may actually arise as a consequence of entirely random movement among all items within the system.

*(Ibid., p. 149)*

This is best explained by the “Drunkard’s Walk”. Suppose a drunk staggers out of a bar and gets on the sidewalk. Towards his left is a wall so he can start to move only towards the right. 30 feet from where he starts off is a gutter. If at each stagger he takes five steps, what are the chances that he will end up in the gutter?

The answer is 100%. He cannot move left due to the wall so the first five steps will be to the right. After that there is a 50 % probability of his going either left or right. So while he may spend any amount of time between the gutter and the wall, the gutter is where he will eventually end up. The point is:

in a system of linear motion structurally constrained by a wall at one end, random movement, with no preferred directionality whatsoever, will inevitably propel the average position away from a starting point on the wall.

*(Ibid., p. 151)*

Gould uses this paradigm to probe Cope’s rule that states that most lineages increase in body size during their evolutionary history and represent one evolutionary generality that has survived.

The left wall for most species is dictated by the fact that you cannot get smaller than a certain size and starting from there size can only increase. Moreover, after every episode of mass extinction, typically species at the minimal size survive, so every beginning is always from a lower-size range. In this specific case of Cope’s rule, that added artifact was the size of the laboratory sieve that set the minimum size of the left wall for every species. So the apparent size increase in a large majority of lineages is better explained by

Stanley’s rule of random evolution away from small size rather than by the conventional account of directed evolution towards selectively advantageous large size. *(Ibid., p.164)*

So any argument for general progress in life’s evolutionary history

represents a ludicrous case of the tail wagging the dog, or the invalid case of small and epiphenomenal consequence into a major and controlling case.

*(Ibid., p. 169)*

The primary reasons for the absurdity of any such attempt at defining progress based on the right tail of the bell curve (which includes all forms of life existing on Earth) are:

First, the tail is small and occupied by only a tiny percentage of species (more than 80% of multicellular animal species are arthropods, and we generally regard almost all members of this phylum as primitive and non-progressive). Second, the occupants of the extreme right through time do not form an evolutionary sequence but rather a motley series of disparate forms that have tumbled into this position, one after the other. Such a sequence in time might read: bacterium, eukaryotic cell, marine algae, jellyfish, trilobite, nautiloid, palcoderm fish, dinosaur, saber-toothed cat and Homo sapiens. Beyond the first two transitions, not a single form of this sequence can possibly be a direct ancestor of the first in line. (*Ibid.*, p. 172)

### **Planet of the Bacteria**

So, if not the occupants of the right tail, who are there due to a stroke of luck, then which lineage is the true representative of the life on Earth? Gould's answer? — Bacteria. Not only have they been around for the maximum time, an estimated 3.5 billion years (which is almost double the time eukaryotic cells have been around, and six times more than the time multicellular creatures have been here), they are also the greatest in diversity, virtually indestructible and their combined biomass exceeds that of the rest of life. They are ubiquitous both in the aspect of numbers — “one spoonful of high quality soil harbors about 10 trillion bacteria” — and of places — they are found in liquids at the acidity of sulphuric acid, at temperatures up to 480 F and on the surface of burning coals. They have singlehandedly fashioned this planet and made it suitable for life both by altering the composition of the atmospheric gases as well as inventing technologies that helped in the evolution of life as we know it now — photosynthesis and energy production in the mitochondria. They are also the reason we are alive and it is stated that fully 10% of our own dry body weight consists of bacteria, some of which, although they are not congenial parts of our bodies, we can't live without.

In conclusion Gould states:

On any possible, reasonable or fair criterion, bacteria are — and always have been — the dominant forms of life on Earth. Our failure to grasp this most evident of biological facts arises in part from the blindness of our arrogance but also, in large measure, as an effect of scale. We are so accustomed to viewing phenomena of our scale — sizes measured in feet and ages in decades — as typical of nature. (*Ibid.*, p. 176)

## Coup de Grâce

Having demolished the attempts to understand life in terms of anthropomorphic trends, Gould moves in to deliver the final punch. We have been led to believe that the minuscule right tail of the bell curve representing life cannot and should not represent life in any sense, but then how does the tail come about?

Gould takes a brief detour into the nature of explanation. Any explanation of change must clearly separate the “results directly caused from the consequences incidentally arisen”. So while natural selection builds certain features which are critical to adaptation to the local environment, there may be other features that are uncaused or indirectly produced but have nevertheless become vital to the bearers. So the thick coats of the woolly mammoth is a feature “directly built by natural selection” and is an adaptation to the cold while our ability to read and write was an unintended consequence of a large brain size. Brain size was selected for entirely different reasons and symbolic communication is a fortuitous result of an enlarged brain.

The issue to ponder is this — whether the right tail of the bell curve of life’s complexity (representing the handful of complex species) is due to the inherent tendency of evolution to build complex forms or

an incidental side consequence of life’s necessary origin at the left wall of minimal complexity followed by successful expansion thereafter with retention of an unvarying bacterial mode. (*Ibid.*, pp. 196-97)

In one case the trend to produce complex life forms is the intended consequence and in the other the right tail is evolution’s passive consequence, a result of evolution straying too far from the left wall. It is the equivalent to the “systemic noise”, never intended, but always present.

There are no prizes for guessing which way Gould turns the knife. Should we at all pay attention to this incidental tail perhaps since it is the “main effect among all of evolution’s incidental consequences”? Perhaps, since a species in this right tail can laugh and cogitate. Gould counters: true that bacteria cannot laugh and cogitate but then can we live 6 miles below the earth’s surface on basalt and water? Then can the *Homo sapiens* be granted any special place inside this miniscule incidental right tail? As per Gould, no, since our existence in this tail is nothing more than a lucky lottery ticket. Never underestimate Stephen J Gould.

Let’s ponder a bit on Gould’s differentiation between the two scenarios — in one case the right tail is an intended result and in the second an incidental consequence. Gould appeals to our intuition to separate the two instances, leading however to the same result, based on our notion of causality:

for — in one case, increasing complexity is the driving *raison d'être* of life's history; while, in the other, the expanding right tail is a passive consequence of evolutionary principles with radically different main results. (*Ibid.*, p. 197)

In order to drive home the point he gives the example of a policeman who kills an innocent shop-owner while firing at the robber and in the other case where the robber kills the shop-owner. The result is the same but we will judge the two situations differently — one is intentional and the other accidental.

**1. The fine-tuned definition** — Evolutionary biologist and a long-time debater with Gould, Richard Dawkins points out that Gould's definition of progress is

calculated to deliver a negative answer to the question whether evolution is progressive. (Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain*, p. 208)

Further, Dawkins points out:

Why should any thoughtful Darwinian have expected a majority of lineages to increase in anatomical complexity? Certainly it is not clear that anybody inspired by adaptationist philosophy would.

Gould uses a human-chauvinistic definition of progress, measuring it in terms of complexity. This was why he was able to use parasites as ammunition against progress. Huxley's tapeworms, using a parasite-centred definition of progress, see the point with opposite sign. A statistically minded swift would search in vain for evidence that a majority of evolutionary lineages shows trends towards improved flying performance. Learned elephants, to borrow a pleasantry from Steven Pinker (1994), would ruefully fail to uphold the comforting notion that progress, defined as a driven elongation of the nose, is manifested by a statistical majority of animal lineages. (*Ibid.*, p. 211)

Natural selection will select each lineage for success in its immediate environment. There is no reason why any attribute should matter over another. Every time one substitutes a different attribute in place of complexity in Gould's definition, one gets the miniscule (and unintended) right tail. The rest of his arguments can be applied *in toto* to any such substitution.

e.g.

Substitute "streamlined body"

"a tendency for life to develop streamlined body, or any criterion obviously concocted (if we would only be honest and introspective enough about our motives) to place fishes atop a supposed heap"

Substitute “ability to execute high speed dives”

“a tendency for life to develop ability to execute high speed dives, or any criterion obviously concocted (if we would only be honest and introspective enough about our motives) to place raptors atop a supposed heap”

Substitute “ability to migrate over long distances”

“a tendency for life to develop ability to migrate over long distances, or any criterion obviously concocted (if we would only be honest and introspective enough about our motives) to place migratory fishes and birds atop a supposed heap”

**2. Intentional causes vs. Accidental causes** — Extrapolating from Gould’s policeman example is problematical. Though the jump from an anthropocentric situation to one in evolutionary history is pretty deftly executed (from an unintended shooting to an unintended right tail while the main motive all the time is something else), the problem is that the policeman, the robber and the shop-owner had “motives” and “volition” (they had the will to act and the capability of predicting the outcome of their actions regardless of the intended course of action as it unfolded in reality), natural selection acting on random variability made available by nature, has none. The sole reason that Gould ascribes to his contention of the right tail being unintended is the argument from quantity — numbers — only a handful of lineages have bothered with size and complexity (he does offer a lot more reasons for the bacteria being life’s dominant form).

The very mode of operation of natural selection excludes any intentionality. Evolution does not “intend” to either remain in the bacterial mode or come out of it and produce complex forms. Either of the consequences is entirely dependent on the availability of the right mutations (which are always present in huge numbers — the “amount of variability surprised even the Darwinists”, (Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is*) and the selection criteria of the environment at that time and place. The right tail is neither intended nor not intended. It simply is. If at all we can predict a trend we need to be able to predict the environment’s trajectory and expect the right mutations to arise sooner or later. His example of the human brain and its unintended cause (symbolic communication — reading and writing) is also problematic. Increasing brain size was the result of phenotype attributes, especially behaviour patterns, it imparted to humans which in turn resulted in differential survival. In other words, natural selection of a large brain led to optimum adaptedness when the brain first started expanding (possibly making humans better hunters and gatherers). Later the development of symbolic communication too imparted the same differential survival (at a different point of time), this time due to another behavioural attribute (better communication and knowledge retention across generations), and was hence favoured by natural selection. The point is that expanding brain size was never

selected for itself (size) — favourable mutations lead to a growth in brain size and it continued to grow to an optimum size due to its favourable impact on survival via the behavioural changes it brought about. There is no way we can posit that the “brain enlargement” was the real intention of evolution and symbolic communication the unintended cause. There is also no way we can compare behavioural attributes across time — both lead to optimum adaptedness at a different point of time (and in the current environment). If somehow the attributes that the brain size imparts to the phenotype become unfavourable, natural selection will select against a large brain size and the trend could reverse (though it is difficult to foresee such a situation).

**3. Size and Numbers** — If we assume that nature has no size bias (acts in a purely mechanical way on the available genetic variability), the smaller life forms will be in vastly greater numbers than the larger ones. This is simply due to the fact that the earth has finite area and limited niches for life. A lot more bacteria can fit into an available niche than elephants. By the same logic bacteria will always be more suited for burrowing 5 miles into the earth and surviving on basalt and water. Elephants will usually find it more difficult to burrow in and lead that sort of life since they are large. So a very neutral evolutionary process, which is neither biased towards elephants nor bacteria, will yield a similar bell curve with a minuscule right tail. Bacteria and smaller unicellular organisms will always outnumber the larger ones.

In fact even if the primary thrust of evolutionary process was “creation of complex and large life forms”, the smaller life forms will be far more numerous simply due to restrictions that come along with an increased size. Gould is seeing a pattern based on sizes: none really exists either way.

There is no way to design an empirical test to differentiate between the two statements viz.

Evolution mainly operates in the bacterial mode and existence of the complex right tail is a passive result of evolutionary process

and

evolution does not favour one life form over another and the bell curve distribution of sizes is simply a reflection of emergent life forms under the Darwinian evolutionary laws operating in a landscape with limited niches.

*(To be continued)*

SAHASTRARASHMI

## DETERMINATION AND WILL — DOUGLAS BADER, CHURCHILL AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

*(Continued from the issue of September 2010)*

SRI AUROBINDO was the quintessence of the theme of this article — determination and will — and the instrumentation of will-power. Even during his early school days — by his own admission — he had a bright will. During his revolutionary days Sri Aurobindo almost singlehandedly took on the might of the vast British Empire. He roused the nation and tried to awaken all Indians from the stupor the asuric forces had imposed on India to the necessity of breaking free from the imperial British rulers, if we were to regain our soul and rise to our predestined spiritual heights. Sri Aurobindo's genius and unique command of the English language and his deep psychological insight into the English mentality left the English flustered and scratching their heads. (For, has he not himself said of the English that they play hide and seek with their conscience and if that is exposed they start scratching their heads?) His writings exposed the illegitimacy of the British presence in India — likening them to a beast on his Mother's breast — and the image was extremely evocative. If there was a case of entering the lion's den and pulling its tail for good measure, this would probably be it. After being acquitted in the Alipore bomb case he resumed his battle with the Empire, almost singlehandedly, at great risk to himself. The Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, labelled him “the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with” and tried all means to imprison him on charges of sedition, failing which, the authorities should try to deport him. Such was the psychological damage and fear created in the English that even after Sri Aurobindo went into political retirement to practise his yoga, they spied on him for years and even tried to kidnap him. That Sri Aurobindo did not allow the constant harassment and antagonism of the mightiest Empire in history to affect his equanimity, let alone break his spirit, is a testament to his will-power and faith.

Way back in January 1913, Sri Aurobindo had revealed to a disciple how he was perfecting the transmission of will-power to determine events or happenings in the world without any physical or external action. He wrote:

All these matters, as well as the pursuance of my work to which you allude in your last (commercial) letter, [depend] on the success of the struggle which is the crowning movement of my sadhana — viz the attempt to apply knowledge & power to the events and happenings of the world without the necessary instrumentality of physical action. What I am attempting is to establish the normal working of the siddhis in life ie the perception of thoughts, feelings &



happenings of other beings & in other places throughout the world without any use of information by speech or any other data; 2<sup>d</sup>, the communication of the ideas & feelings I select to others (individuals, groups, nations,) by mere transmission of will-power; 3<sup>d</sup>, the silent compulsion on them to act according to these communicated ideas & feelings; 4<sup>th</sup>, the determining of events, actions & results of actions throughout the world by pure silent will power. When I wrote to you last, I had begun the general application of these powers which God has been developing in me for the last two or three years, but, as I told you, I was getting badly beaten. This is no longer the case, for in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>d</sup> & even in 3<sup>rd</sup> I am now largely successful, although the action of these powers is not yet perfectly organized. It is only in the 4<sup>th</sup> that I feel a serious resistance. I can produce single results with perfect accuracy, I can produce general results with difficulty & after a more or less prolonged struggle, but I can neither be sure of producing the final decisive result I am aiming at nor of securing that orderly arrangement of events which prevents the results from being isolated & only partially effective. In some directions I seem to succeed, in others partly to fail & partly to succeed, while in some fields, eg this matter of financial equipment both for my personal life & for my work I have hitherto entirely failed. When I shall succeed even partially in that, then I shall know that my hour of success is at hand & that I have got rid of the past karma in myself & others, which stands in our way & helps the forces of Kaliyuga to baffle our efforts. (CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 181-82)

On the nature and characteristic of Force Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . Spiritual force has its own concreteness; it can take a form (like a stream, for instance) of which one is aware and can send it quite concretely on whatever object one chooses.

This is a statement of fact about the power inherent in spiritual consciousness. But there is also such a thing as a willed use of any subtle force — it may be spiritual, mental or vital — to secure a particular result at some point in the world. Just as there are waves of unseen physical forces (cosmic waves etc.) or currents of electricity, so there are mind-waves, thought-currents, waves of emotion, — for example, anger, sorrow, etc., — which go out and affect others without their knowing whence they come or that they come at all, they only feel the result. One who has the occult or inner senses awake can feel them coming and invading him. Influences good or bad can propagate themselves in that way; that can happen without intention and naturally, but also a deliberate use can be made of them. There can also be a purposeful generation of force, spiritual or other. There can be too the use of the effective will or idea acting directly without the aid of any outward action, speech or other instrumentation

which is not concrete in that sense, but is all the same effective. These things are not imaginations or delusions or humbug, but true phenomena.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 220)

The ability of a person on whether he can transmit a force would depend on his state of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo states in a letter:

... Consciousness is not something abstract, it is like existence itself or Ananda or mind or *prāṇa*, something very concrete. If one becomes aware of the inner consciousness, one can do all sorts of things with it, send it out as a stream of force, erect a circle or wall of consciousness around oneself, direct an idea so that it shall enter somebody's head in America etc. etc.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 478-79)

During my stay in UK I had visited the Cabinet War Rooms in London. This was Churchill's bunker where he, his war cabinet and staff worked during the war. This was an extensive underground network built with the specific purpose of escaping the aerial bombing. I saw Churchill's bedroom and dining room (he was fond of eating!) and the Cabinet room amongst others. The ambiance was fascinating and the air was still thick with the aroma of the war. I visited too the map room, Churchill's nerve centre and 24-hours-a-day operation centre, and read there that from end August to mid September the staff feared the German invasion to be imminent and were expecting it to happen any day.

In the cabinet room I heard a recording of Churchill's voice menacingly interrogating one of his Generals. To the General's credit he stood his ground and refused to bow down to Churchill for he believed Churchill's proposal to be unsound. Churchill finally grunted and had to give in but this used to be his usual tactic where he used to test and cross-examine his Commanders (Dwight Eisenhower — Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces — once said that Churchill could be quite exasperating but it was a lesson interacting with him as he did come out with brilliant ideas).

This quality of the British to maintain their dignity, not to be servile nor to feel inferior to their superiors gives them a sense of equality among themselves. They will not imitate their superior, on the contrary, they put forward their views with conviction; thus the resources are pooled together. This perhaps is the practical side of the British which Sri Aurobindo had earlier spoken about. In contrast, Sri Aurobindo had earlier spoken about us Indians having a subject and slave mentality — perhaps also a remnant of the Raj and the present bureaucracy. (17 May 1940, *TW*,<sup>1</sup> p. 642)

He also spoke of on 17th May 1940 Sri Aurobindo had mentioned “this kind of slave mentality that keeps Indian in bondage. (*TW*, p. 642)

1. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2001 edition in 2 volumes; abbreviated to *TW*.

Two aphorisms of Sri Aurobindo perhaps reflect the importance of developing one's individuality:

Imitation is sometimes a good training-ship but it will never fly the flag of the admiral.

and

Rather hang thyself than belong to the horde of successful imitators.

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 467)

Prior to the Battle of Britain Sri Aurobindo was told that the Allies were short of bomber planes. He countered:

But they have plenty of fighters with which they can fight the bombers. Bombers are only meant for destruction of military objectives or ships or towns etc. Even then it has been shown that German bombers are not so effective. With whatever bombers the Allies have they have been quite successful at hitting military objectives. (7 May 1940, *TW*, p. 623)

Indeed the Battle of Britain was solely won by the British fighter planes. British bombers came into play much later when they pulverised German cities and industrial areas.

Years later Sri Aurobindo recounted that there was plenty of proof of people whose faith had succeeded where all outer reason was against them. Referring to the period of the Battle of Britain, he said:

. . . if England had only thought about her position and depended on reason, then she should have made peace with Hitler. She had no chance against Germany. But in spite of that she had faith that she could win and she is beginning to win.

It was after Dunkirk that I openly came out with my declaration supporting the Allies, and gave the contribution to the War Fund openly. If I had believed in appearances I should not have. It is in spite of contrary appearances that you have to act on faith. I had fixed the 15<sup>th</sup> August and 15<sup>th</sup> September as the dates on which Germany would suffer defeat and both days it was defeated.

(7 August 1943, *ET*,<sup>2</sup> pp. 767-68)

The Mother echoed the feeling, saying:

2. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2007 edition; abbreviated to ET.

. . . the thought “What is the use” must never come in to weaken the will.  
(*CWM*, Vol. 4, p. 5)

Writing on the theme of Leverage of Faith, Sri Aurobindo reflects:

. . . Faith is the first condition of success in every great undertaking. It is no exaggeration to say that faith moves mountains. It is faith that makes the men of will and thought persevere in spite of apparently insurmountable difficulties. They start with a strong confidence in the ultimate success of a noble undertaking and are therefore never daunted by difficulties, however formidable. Faith is the one predominating characteristic of all great souls. The vision of faith penetrates into the remote future and turns the impossible into the possible. In the region of politics faith is the result of imagination working in the light of history; . . . (*CWSA*, Vol. 6, p. 347)

In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo says:

. . . All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial because of something in them that tells them that this is the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. . . .

Faith is the soul’s witness to something not yet manifested, achieved or realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. . . .

. . . to take the position that everyone takes when he fixes his mind on a great and difficult goal, “I will go on till I succeed — all difficulties notwithstanding.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, pp. 572-73)

In another letter Sri Aurobindo states:

. . . The saint or bhakta have the faith in God long before they have the experience of God — the man of action has the faith in his cause long before his cause is crowned with success, otherwise they could not have been able to struggle persistently towards their end in spite of defeat, failure and deadly peril.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 574)

When someone remarked that the British could not be defeated, Sri Aurobindo commented:

Nonsense. They were saved by Divine Intervention. They would have been smashed if Hitler had invaded England at the right time after the fall of France.  
(TY,<sup>3</sup> p. 132)

This seems to suggest that had Germany started the Battle of Britain immediately after the fall of France they would have won the war, perhaps because the RAF was less prepared then.

Sri Aurobindo's support to the Allied cause was all-encompassing for, besides his spiritual force and encouragement to Indians to join the war effort, there were substantial monetary contributions despite a paucity of resources in the Ashram during the war years. In a letter dated 19 September 1940 addressed to the Governor of Madras he stated:

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

We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order. (CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 453)

When the question of independence arose in 1940, Gandhi complained that the Viceroy did not say anything in reply to all his questions. Sri Aurobindo said:

What could he say? It is very plain why he didn't. First of all, the British don't want to concede the demand for independence. What they are willing to give is Dominion Status after the war and they expect that after that India will settle down into a common relationship with the Empire. But just now a national government will virtually mean Dominion Status, with the Viceroy acting only as a constitutional head. . . .

3. Nirodbaran: *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 1988 edition; abbreviated to TY.

So it is quite natural for the British not to part with power just now. As it is also natural for us to make our claims. But since we have not enough strength to back us we have to see if there is any common meeting-ground with the Government. If there is, a compromise with the Government is the only practical step. There was such an opportunity but the Congress spoiled it. . . .

Of course if we had the strength and power to make a revolution and get what we want, it would be a different matter. Amery and others did offer Dominion Status at one time. Now they have altered their stand because of the temper of the people. These politicians have some fixed ideas and they always go by them. Politicians and statesmen have to take account of situations and act as demanded by them. They must have insight.

(7 October 1940, *TW*, pp. 910-11)

Providentially, in 1942 Britain did offer India Dominion Status but the Congress leaders rejected it. Sri Aurobindo strongly recommended acceptance of the Cripps Mission offer and even sent an emissary, but to no effect.

Nirod-da quotes from a fellow-sadhak:

She [The Mother] said something to this effect: "One should leave the matter of the Cripps' offer entirely in the hands of the Divine, with full confidence that the Divine will work everything out. Certainly there were flaws in the offer. Nothing on earth created by man is flawless, because the human mind has a limited capacity. Yet behind this offer there is the Divine Grace directly present. The Grace is now at the door of India, ready to give its help. In the history of a nation such opportunities do not come often. The Grace presents itself at rare moments, after centuries of preparation of that nation. If it is accepted, the nation will survive and get a new birth in the Divine's consciousness. But if it is rejected the Grace will withdraw and then the nation will suffer terribly, calamity will overtake it." (*TY*, pp. 153-54)

Prior to the British offer of Dominion Status to India Sri Aurobindo was once asked if England were defeated would it be due to her position and Karma, he replied:

Yes. If she had declared Dominion Status to India, then a large part of her karma would have been wiped off. (17 July 1940, *TW*, p. 808)

When war broke out in 1939, Gandhi was initially in favour of "non-violent moral support" for the British — whatever that meant. Some leaders thought it better to participate in the war effort as an equal partner with Britain. But Gandhi would not agree to the idea since it would mean diluting a condition; and conditional non-violence is not non-violence. And yet he thought it better to stand by the line the

Congress took and pleaded with the British accordingly. Gandhi's approach of non-cooperation or Satyagraha at a time of crisis during the Second World War was diametrically opposite to that of Sri Aurobindo.

An extract of Sri Aurobindo's letter states:

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

(CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 461-62)

In Thoughts and Aphorisms Sri Aurobindo wrote:

It is easy to distinguish the evil worked by sin & vice, but the trained eye sees also the evil done by self-righteous or self-regarding virtue.

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 470)

In the same letter he cautions of the dire consequences if India took a stance of neutrality:

. . . The professed separate self-sufficiency of Germany ended in a push for life-room which threatens all other peoples; nations which tried to isolate themselves in a self-regarding neutrality have paid the penalty of their blindness and the others who still maintain that attitude are likely sooner or later to share the same fate; either they must become the slaves or subservient vassals of three or four greater Powers, or a world-order must be found in which all can be safe in their freedom and yet united for the common good. It will be well for India, if in spite of the absorption of her pressing need, she recognises that national egoism is no longer sufficient. She must claim freedom and equality for herself. . . (CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 459)

Mercifully, as the Provinces of India, being imperial colonies of the United Kingdom, were by default a part of the Allies, the Congress option was not feasible. At the outbreak of World War II, the Indian army numbered 205,000 men. Several Indian princely states provided large donations to the Allies to combat the threat of Nazism and Fascism. Later during World War II, the Indian Army became the largest all-volunteer force in history, rising to over 2.5 million men in size. These forces included tank, artillery and airborne forces. Indian soldiers earned 30 Victoria Crosses during the Second World War. The Victoria Cross (VC) is a military decoration awarded for valour “in the face of the enemy”. It is Britain’s highest award for bravery during war-time.

The financial, industrial and military support of India formed a crucial component of the British campaign against the Axis powers. The Indian Army during World War II was one of the largest Allied forces contingents which took part in the North and East African Campaigns, the Western Desert Campaign and the Italian Campaign. Indian forces played a significant part in liberating Italy from Fascism. The British Army of India contributed the 3rd largest Allied contingent in the Italian campaign after the US and British forces. The Indian Army also contributed decisively to halting the progress of Imperial Japan. About 36,000 Indian military personnel died during the war.

During a discussion with Sri Aurobindo during the Talks, the question of Jinnah and Muslims arose.

N: But it is because of the British divide-and-rule policy that we can’t unite.

Sri Aurobindo: Nonsense! Was there unity in India before the British rule?

N: But now since our national consciousness is more developed, there is more chance of unity if the British don’t bolster up Jinnah and his Muslim claims.

Sri Aurobindo: Does Jinnah want unity? His very character shows what he



wants. What he wants is independence for Muslims and, if possible, rule over India. That is the old spirit. But why is it expected that Muslims will be so accommodating? Everywhere minorities are claiming their rights. Of course there may be some Muslims who are different, more nationalistic in outlook. Even Azad has his own terms; only he sees Indian unity first and will settle those terms afterwards. (7 October 1940, *TW*, pp. 911-12)

About Jinnah, Sri Aurobindo said:

Jinnah is already speaking against the National Government. He wants Pakistan. I suppose that if a Muslim majority is granted, he will accept such a government. (10 July 1940, *TW*, p. 797)

Amal Kiran had once told the author that Jinnah was an Asura.

When it was mentioned that Muslims favoured the partition of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

This would seem to indicate that all the Mohammedans in India are descendants of foreigners, but the idea of two nationalities in India is only a new-fangled notion invented by Jinnah for his purposes and contrary to the facts. More than 90% of the Indian Mussulmans are descendants of converted Hindus and belong as much to the Indian nation as the Hindus themselves. This process of conversion has continued all along; Jinnah is himself a descendant of a Hindu converted in fairly recent times named Jinnabhai and many of the most famous Mohammedan leaders have a similar origin. (*CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 104)

Speaking of another politician, Sri Aurobindo said in June 1940, that Rajagopalachari wanted to join the war and said of him:

He is a practical politician. If the colonies surrender, England remains all alone. If she gets India with her, then she can get India's man-power and resources and in that case America also may join. That is the only way left to meet Hitler. In America the two parties are pro-Allies. I hope she will have the grace to do what is necessary. (29 June 1940, *TW*, p. 764)

We now return to Phase 4 of the Battle of Britain which began on 6 October and ended on 31 October 1940. By now the German daylight bomber losses had become too heavy. Their bomber force started to operate only at night, and the damage they caused to Britain's cities was enormous. Many civilian organisations were set up to help deal with the wounded people and damaged buildings. But German losses began to increase and they finally realised that the RAF could not be defeated in

1940. So Operation Sea-Lion — Hitler's invasion plan — was postponed indefinitely and eventually abandoned. It was Britain's and Churchill's finest hour. The Battle of Britain and the threat of invasion was finally over. 544 Allied airmen lost their lives during the period of the Battle. Before the Second World War ended, a further 791 would be killed in action or die in the course of their duties. Even as late as 12 October 1940, the crisis had not passed as Sri Aurobindo said on this day:

. . . Still the danger has not passed. He [Hitler] has a fifty per cent chance of success. . . . (TW, p. 919)

When told that the British had shown themselves more than equal to the Nazis, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes. The Nazis have more enthusiasm and dash. But the British individual is more awake and has more initiative and brain-power.  
(7 October 1940, TW, p. 912)

Hitler's bombings of British cities continued through November 1940 to May 1941 though there was a lull in winter due to bad weather. The Blitz ended on 16 May 1941, when most of the Luftwaffe was re-assigned to the East for the imminent invasion of Russia. The very success of the risky Blitzkrieg approach led Hitler to gamble even more heavily on his next major operation — the invasion of Russia.

Referring to Hitler's decision to attack Russia the Mother said:

It was the Lord of the Nations, the being that appeared to Hitler. . . And I knew when they were going to have their next meeting (for, after all, he is my son, that's what was so comical!). So, for once I took his place and became Hitler's god, and I advised him to attack Russia. Two days afterwards, he attacked Russia. . . . Then I came back from my nocturnal outings and told everything to Sri Aurobindo. . . (Georges Van Vrekhem: *Beyond Man*, pp. 242-43)

When the Mother was asked, "If Russia had been on Hitler's side, would things have been better?" She replied:

Oh, no! Then there would be no hope for the world. It is by our *coup de maître* that they were on the opposite sides. This is divine diplomacy. It is very successful. (TY, pp. 140-41)

Sri Aurobindo too had said in March 1940:

. . . There is no chance for the world unless something happens in Germany or else Hitler and Stalin quarrel. But there is no such likelihood at present.

(13 March 1940, *TW*, p. 553)

On the question that if Hitler was to take the West and Stalin the East, would India then fall under Stalin, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Our condition will be worse, even worse than under Germany. But Russia will have to face Japan before Stalin comes to India. It is Japan's firm, age-long aim to drive out all Europeans from Asia. She considers herself as holding and guarding the destiny of Asia. This aim is stronger than her own imperialism.

(2 August 1940, *TW*, p. 828)

When told that the German soldiers were better fighters than the Russians, Sri Aurobindo replied:

Yes, but Russia has tremendous resources and immense manpower.

(13 March 1940, *TW*, p. 553)

Sri Aurobindo made several references to Hitler and Stalin and their rivalry to be masters of Europe. In December 1939 he had said:

If Stalin is successful in the Baltic and the Balkans, Germany will be in danger and Stalin will be all-powerful in Europe. (8 December 1939, *TW*, p. 296)

In May 1940 he said:

. . . It is said that Russia is panicky and Stalin is upset over Hitler's success. . . .  
. . . he [Stalin] thought that both powers would be exhausted and then he would have his chance. (19 May 1940, *TW*, p. 648)

When it was mentioned that earlier there was a prophecy that Stalin would be dictator of Europe but after the Finnish War it did not seem possible as there were limits to his military strength, Sri Aurobindo observed:

Yes, he has been moderate after that [Finnish War]. What happened is no wonder after he has killed all his generals. I suppose he has no such military knowledge as Trotsky had. (*Ibid.*)

He added:

The Finnish War has been reassuring to Hitler. He has seen Stalin's limited strength and thinks, "Let Stalin do now whatever he likes. After the war I will handle him." (*Ibid.*)

In June 1940 Sri Aurobindo outlined the expansionist policy of Hitler:

Russia is following a dangerous policy for herself. Does she think that Hitler will be so damaged by his fight with England that Stalin will be able to destroy him by an attack? When Hitler gets the whole of France he will build up his position very strongly; then he might try to blockade England, since a direct invasion of England is out of the question. If the French Navy falls into his hands, he will become tremendously strong. But when England is conquered, he will have all the French colonies and most of the British ones. His next step will naturally be to move towards the Balkans and then a clash with Russia is inevitable unless Hitler has given up his project of becoming master of Europe. The Balkan powers are foolish enough not to see that their turn will come later on. (21 June 1940, *TW*, p. 738)

When a disciple mentioned that Hitler's entry into Rumania seemed his first step towards the Balkans, Sri Aurobindo replied:

It is, like all his moves, a slow penetration from which he may go to Turkey, Egypt and Asia. What is wonderful is Stalin's attitude. He is quite silent.  
(12 October 1940, *TW*, p. 917)

When asked if Hitler had any secret pact with Stalin, Sri Aurobindo said:

Even if there were, how long would Hitler respect it if he won? Then Russia would have either to resist or be effaced. Stalin is counting on the exhaustion of the Axis and England and France. Now if Hitler takes Turkey and Egypt and Africa, that will mean practically England's defeat. Then what can Russia do? Hitler has a sufficient army to fight on two fronts while England can hardly spare her troops. (*Ibid.*)

On 20 October 1940 Sri Aurobindo referred to Yugoslavia's agreement with Germany. He said:

... they have signed a protocol by which Yugoslavia is dependent on Germany economically and politically, which means everything. If the news is true, that is the beginning of the end of the Balkans, because Bulgaria won't resist. Greece will be at its wit's end without Turkey's help and what can Turkey do

all alone? So Hitler comes to Asia Minor and that means India. This is what I thought, long before, that Hitler might do in the Balkans. The Asura is up to his tricks again. Now Hitler's moves are quite clear. He will try to move towards the Mediterranean, taking possession of the Suez and then Egypt with a simultaneous movement into Spain for Gibraltar with the help of Franco . . . After Egypt, he will try to take North Africa . . . Then through Spain he can move to Africa. All this will be most dangerous to England and the blockade won't be effective any more. In fact I felt this danger from the very beginning of the war. (20 October 1940, *TW*, pp. 938-39)

Sri Aurobindo disclosed his own occult action in the war. He said:

Do you know that he [Hitler] is trying to get a foothold in South America and doing extensive propaganda there? If he gets a hold there, he can lead an attack against the USA. He is practically master of Europe. If after the collapse of France he had invaded England, by now he would have been in Asia. Now another force has been set up against him. Still the danger has not passed. He has a fifty per cent chance of success. It is a question of balance of forces. Up to the time of the collapse of France he was extraordinarily successful because he sided with the Asuric Power behind him from whom he received remarkably correct messages. He is a mystic, only a mystic of the wrong kind. He goes into solitude for his messages and waits till they come.

(12 October 1940, *TW*, p. 919)

On the question of how Hitler would rule all the conquered countries or colonies, Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . Hitler can bring his own men to rule everywhere, but I don't think he wants to attach all his conquered countries to Germany. He will make them all vassal states and have them all ruled by their own people. How can he govern all the colonies with his own people? For that matter England can't govern India without the help of Indian officials. (21 June 1940, *TW*, p. 739)

On the subject that Hitler would not allow Indians to speak about their freedom, Sri Aurobindo asserted:

Not only that, nobody will be allowed to think or speak anything worthwhile. Of course one can think, but most people are fed by others' thoughts and writings. Very few can think for themselves. Under Italy it would be the same except perhaps with a little less thorough suppression. Under Russia too the same. Japan might allow thought and speech so long as you don't say anything offensive against the police and the State. (24 June 1940, *TW*, p. 748)

Earlier Sri Aurobindo had said:

If Hitler achieves domination of the world there won't be any national independence left anywhere and spiritual work will be doomed. England and France are bad enough but still some liberty of thought and spirituality are left under them. . . . (8 June 1940, *TW*, p. 698)

When Hitler declared that the war had to be finished by 15 August 1940, someone remarked that it seemed significant:

Sri Aurobindo: That is the sign that he is the enemy of our work. And from the values concerned in the conflict it should be quite clear that what is behind him is the Asuric, the Titanic power.

P: It is strange how he takes his decisions.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not he who takes the decisions. The Being behind him decides.

P: It knows perhaps that, August 15 being your birthday, there is going to be some descent of the Divine on that date.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't think it believes in any such descent. It would say, "I must make some decisive movement before anything decisive happens on that date." This Being comes here from time to time and sees what kind of work is going on.

N: It doesn't believe in any descent of the Divine?

Sri Aurobindo: It believes in its own descent and is too self-confident about it.

N: But surely it knows that the work here is against its own interests?

Sri Aurobindo (*laughing*): Of course.

P: Is it only one Being or a troop?

Sri Aurobindo: There are more than one but this is a very powerful Being. Have you read Paul Richard's *Lord of the Nations*?

P: No.

Sri Aurobindo: I believe it was not published. He was in communion with this Being and the plans and methods he has written of in the book are the same as those carried out now. He said there that the present civilisation was to be destroyed, but really it is the destruction of the whole human civilisation that is aimed at, and already in Germany Hitler has done it; there is no civilisation left there. What reigns there is barbarism supported by science — science meaning physical science. And Hitler has destroyed human civilisation wherever he has gone — as in Poland.

P: Christianity and all religions seem to be his targets.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. What he may want is Ludendorff's religion — the Norse religion of a primitive type where primitive instincts are worshipped.

P: Do these Beings recognise that there are higher divine powers?

Sri Aurobindo: It depends on the type of Being. For example, some know that there are Gods but they won't admit that they are greater than themselves.

P: The fight between the Devas and the Asuras is graphically described in the Puranas. Just as the Asuras are against the human race, there must be other Beings who help the human race.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. Human beings by themselves are no match for the Asuras. If it is only an influence from the Asuras or other Beings, the result may depend on that influence. Here in Hitler's case it is not merely an influence but a possession, even perhaps an incarnation. The case of Stalin is similar. The vital world has descended upon the physical. That is why the intellectuals are perplexed at the destruction of their civilisation, of all the values they had made and stood for. They deny the existence of the worlds beyond the physical and so they are bound to be perplexed. (20 May 1940, *TW*, pp. 648-50)

The conversation continued a few days later.

N: If Hitler is defeated what will happen to the Being guiding him?

Sri Aurobindo: He will try to possess somebody else, for instance, Stalin. But I should say Stalin is himself a devil. He is cold and calculating, not suitable for the action of such Beings.

N: . . . he is worse than a case of possession. How does he allow dancing, music, etc. in Russia?

Sri Aurobindo: That he can do. He is an intellectual Asura. All such things are a device to keep the people contented. . . . (24 May 1940, *TW*, p. 660)

One is reminded of these lines from *Savitri*:

He would stamp his single figure on the world,  
Obsess the world's rumours with his single name.  
His moments centre the vast universe.  
He sees his little self as very God.  
His little 'I' has swallowed the whole world,  
His ego has stretched into infinity.

(*CWSA*, Vol. 34, p. 453)

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

## DADA AS I KNEW HIM

IN the Ashram everybody knew him as ‘Dada’. However, in Berhampur, where he lived before coming here, he was known as ‘Pinu’. His real name, of course, was Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

I met Pinu-da when I was twelve. Slowly I grew very close to him. If I had to write about him, my memories would fill a whole book. He shared so many of his life’s events with me! Today all those little memories are coming back to me.

Even as a little boy, Pinu was immensely trusted by his parents. Everybody felt that he was going to be something very special. He had two students then, one Tulu and the other Dulu. They followed Pinu everywhere like his shadows. They were both good boxers too. They would go out for a walk every morning at 5. Pinu-da always dressed very simply: dhoti and shirt and ordinary shoes to cover his feet.

Pinu-da had founded a club that was situated very close to his house. Later the club moved a little further away to Lal Dighi. After a few years in Lal Dighi, it shifted to a club in the town-centre, which was owned by one Habi-da. His club was very big indeed, eight times the size of our present Playground. For some reason we took over this club. There was a garden on one side and a ground on the other. The club did not have any women-members at that time. Drill, wrestling and boxing were its principal activities. Our club was, however, famous for boxing and we would go to Calcutta for tournaments. In those days, most of the boxers were either English or Anglo-Indian. There were few Indian boys who practised boxing. Whenever we went for a boxing championship to Calcutta we always returned as winners. As an ardent admirer of Swami Vivekananda at that time, Pinu-da had called this club ‘Vivekananda Byayam Samiti’.

Pinu-da would go to the market past our house. One day I met him just as he was going past. “Why aren’t you coming to the club?” he asked me. I had not paid my club membership fee lately and consequently was not going to the club. The fee at that time was 2 annas.

In the grounds of our club there were many coconut trees. One day a boy named Shoku asked me to accompany him to the club. He climbed onto a coconut tree and started plucking coconuts for his companions below. Just then he noticed Pinu-da coming towards the club. He brought a coconut down and offered it to him. Pinu-da did not scold him but merely asked him to go home. Pinu-da was fond of Shoku because he always told him everything he did. I remember another incident: some of our boys had gone to volunteer at the local Ramakrishna Mission for a function. A lot of people were being fed on that occasion. At about 3 o’clock a boy named Adinath suggested that we all go to Pinu-da’s house. It was very hot at that time and when we reached his house we saw him stretched out in the drawing room.



On seeing us he signalled us to join him. We were seven in all and we all lay down beside him and napped till 5. Pinu-da began fanning us in order to make us comfortable and when we woke up, he said, "Go home, change and come to the club." Pinu-da had a very strong temper but he cooled down as quickly too. He would explain gently to the one he had scolded, "Don't do this again, will you?"

I remember another incident very clearly. I had started going to the club in the evenings at 5. One day on reaching there, I did not find anybody there. On enquiring, I found out that everyone had gone off to see a football match: East Bengal versus Mohun Bagan. I too decided to go there but I had no money. I saw Pinu-da standing at the entrance to the stadium. "Would you like to see the match?" he asked me. I nodded and at once he took out some money from his pocket and told me to get a ticket. I was a little taken aback as he could have easily slipped me through to watch the match for free. But right from that young age, Pinu-da strictly followed his principles. When I returned with my ticket, a scuffle had broken out and a group of policemen were beating up Pinu-da. Due to some strange divine Grace not a single blow fell on him. All the blows kept falling on a tin-shed. I ran and informed Motakaka (Pinu-da's uncle) about it. He was sitting at that time with the local judge, magistrate and a few police officials. I informed them and returned to the site of the scuffle. When I returned a pre-monsoon storm had broken out. A huge branch from a 'shegun' tree had fallen off. The tin-shed began flapping and flying in the strong winds. A couple of policemen were injured and the match was called off. Everyone began scrambling for cover. Later I found out that those policemen who had beaten up Pinu-da had been severely reprimanded.

Meanwhile, our club continued to grow. One thing I noticed in Pinu-da was that he never discouraged anyone from pursuing what he desired. On the contrary, he would always encourage him. Adinath, one of the boys of our club, wanted to open his own club. Another member, Pankaj-da, also wished to do the same. Pinu-da encouraged them both and he also continued to help them to develop in their activities. A Muslim gentleman named Yunus, who greatly respected Pinu-da, would go around telling everyone he met that he had never seen a boy like him.

Once for a function at a girls' school, our club was invited to organise the event. Pinu-da was posted at the main gate. The headmistress of the school had instructed Pinu-da not to let anyone in without a valid pass. The ruler of Berhampur came to witness the event. Pinu-da was standing at the gate and as the gentleman did not have an invitation, he refused to let him in. The headmistress noticed this from a distance and came rushing towards the gate terribly embarrassed. "What are you doing, Pinu?" Before Pinu could say anything, the Maharaja exclaimed, "I'm impressed with the boy's conduct. This sense of duty is what we need in our country."

In Berhampur there was always some function or the other. And our club was systematically invited to provide volunteers. For the Ganga-puja too our club was asked to provide assistance. Some of the boys went along with Pinu-da to assist in

this festival. We had to keep a watch over a 6-mile stretch. It was a very hot summer day and after some time I could not continue any further. Pinu-da noticed my absence and started looking for me in that huge crowd. When he found out that I had gone back home because I was feeling exhausted he felt hugely relieved. Pinu-da held all the boys of the club in great affection and tenderness. The club became very famous in its later years. We would regularly win the 26-mile cycling and swimming races and people began to expect Pinu-da's club to win each time. Once several boys from outside had joined a cycling race, including the Nawab's son. Bimal-da from our club defeated the Nawab's son to win the championship. As the Nawab's son had failed to come first, he refused to take the second prize. I never enjoyed the cycling race as there were too many deliberate accidents. Pinu-da was very fond of sports and participated in them enthusiastically. His favourite events were the discus, javelin and shot-put throws and the walking race. He always came first in these events. One Mr. Bill, an Englishman, was the organiser of these athletic events. He was very fond of Pinu-da. Once as he was coming away after receiving the first prize, Mr. Bill took off his hat and put it on Pinu-da's head!

During Pinu-da's time in the club he had made a rule that no member was to dabble in politics and that rule was and is still followed rigorously today. Even now whenever I go back to Kolkata, I visit the club in Berhampur. The present membership of the club is 350 and now there are two sections: one for small boys and girls and the other for adults.

The club continued to prosper while Pinu-da was there and the number of members kept increasing. One day I discovered that Pinu-da had stopped coming to the club. On enquiry, I found out that he had left Berhampur and gone away somewhere but nobody could tell me exactly where. Then I came to know that Pinu-da had gone away to an Ashram in Pondicherry. One day I saw at the club a copy of the Ashram 'Bulletin'. There was a picture of Pinu-da in it and everyone got all excited. It was then that everyone came to know that he had settled at the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. Pinu-da never came back to Berhampur after that.

On seeing Pinu-da's photograph in the 'Bulletin', I had felt myself transported to this Ashram in Pondicherry. And then on an impulse I boarded a train from Berhampur for Madras. In Madras, I found another train for Pondicherry. In those days the train stopped at Chingleput (Chengalpattu) and the passengers' passports were checked. I told the authorities I did not have a passport. "Then go and get one from Madras," they advised me. I did not know what to do and kept sitting in front of the office in Chingleput. Then another officer came by and asked me what I was doing there.

"I want to go to Pondicherry," I told him.

He asked me to open my suitcase. There was a photograph of Sri Aurobindo I had placed on top. I don't know what happened but the next minute I was allowed to go to Pondicherry. As the train had left I took a bus. When I arrived at the Ashram

main gate, I was asked if I had any letter. "No," I said.

"Then you can't come in."

"But I haven't come to stay, I have only come for the Darshan," I explained.

While this discussion was going on, the Ashram Secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta's wife stopped near us and enquired, "Who do you want to meet?"

"I've come to meet Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya," I said.

It must have been around 8 in the evening. The Secretary's wife took me to the Playground. She went in and returned with Pinu-da. He did not recognise me at first since four years had passed and I now sported a moustache and beard. However, he took me to the Mother who was at that time in the Playground. I bowed down in front of her. Later I was told that the Mother had liked me. It was only thanks to Pinu-da that I was able to meet her. She told him a lot of things about me. I stayed on at the Ashram.

Later, the Mother wanted to teach me occultism but unfortunately She had very little time with all the work of the Ashram and so we never got around to that. Then of course, the Mother left and a very deep regret has remained within me ever since.

From the very start Pranab worked very hard in the Ashram, sometimes even at night. His first work was at the Laundry. Then slowly the Mother took him under her wing. The Mother found something special in him and asked him to stay close to her. He started staying with the Mother practically all the time.

Then he began focusing on the Physical Education department. When he had first arrived at the Ashram, there was hardly any infrastructure for sports or physical activities. Later he also set up the photography section of the Ashram in an organised way. He encouraged everyone to join physical activities because he realised that in order to do the Integral yoga, physical education was important. Physical education has always played a very significant role in our yoga. Dada was especially concerned about the physical growth of the boys and girls of the school.

Dada always looked upon me as a brother. He would buy me whatever I needed. I also shared everything about my personal life with him. After coming to Pondicherry, there was a time when I used to stay with him practically throughout the day. Our day would start at 5 in the morning with exercise. This went on till 8, usually in the gymnasium. By 9 a.m. I would be in the darkroom and Dada would assist me in this photography work. One day he called me in the morning and said, "I've made some *mohonbhog*. Come and have some." The *mohonbhog* was full of almonds, raisins and lots of ghee, so much that I just could not relish it. But he had made so much and as he did not wish to waste any, he ate it all himself!

Dada was given charge of the photographic section and in this work I was his assistant. Towards the end he left the full charge of this section to me. I used to work long hours, sometimes even during the night. I worked on the Centenary photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and several people helped me in this. Then he

asked me to go into documentary-making as well. After 60 years of working in this section and seeing all the modernisation I finally quit working there last year.

An amusing incident comes to mind. In those days the darkroom was not air-conditioned. Just a small table-fan was all we had for ventilation. One day while we were both working inside, the electricity went off. What to do? Suddenly Dada suggested, "Come, let's do some exercise while waiting!" I sat on his shoulders and he began doing squats. He must have done about 25 squats. Then it was my turn and I managed about 20. I began panting in that lightless darkroom. Just then Chimam-bhai, a fellow-photographer, entered and seeing us in that sweaty, breathless state got a little flustered. "What are you both doing inside, sweating and panting like that?" he asked. "Well, as there was no electricity, we said we might as well use the time to do some exercise!" Dada replied.

During our exercise-time in the mornings, we used to cycle for 20 to 30 miles everyday. We cycled this distance very fast. One day while we were pedalling away, somebody overtook us. "Vishwajit! Let's overtake this chap!" Dada remarked. We cycled for another 10 miles or so keeping our eyes focused on the chap who had overtaken us. But many other boys seemed to be overtaking us despite our best efforts. Then suddenly we realised that there was a whole band of similarly dressed workers from a factory, rushing to work on their cycles. And we never realised that though we had overtaken the first chap we had seen there were so many others like him ahead of us that we kept imagining he was cycling much faster!

Once we went to Gingee on our cycles, a distance of about 72 kilometres. After reaching there we climbed one of the hills. On reaching the top, Dada took out some snacks and began serving me. I saw that there were some insects in the chocolate so I told him to eat carefully. Dada at once threw the chocolates away. In no time thousands of ants turned up. Then I realised that though I was short-sighted Dada was far-sighted and he had seen them in the grass even from that distance. I was quite stunned.

One morning we went on our motorcycle for a long drive. After driving for some time we felt terribly thirsty. However, no shops were open anywhere! C.N. Annadurai had passed away that day. So we decided to turn back. Suddenly a buffalo appeared in front of us from nowhere. Dada slammed the brakes but could not avoid hitting the buffalo. Both of us fell from the bike onto the road. "Get up!" Dada shouted. But the motorcycle was on top of me. He quickly moved the bike and helped me up. Luckily the bike was not damaged and we managed to get back home without a hitch but we were unbelievably famished and exhausted.

Dada's life was very simple. As long as the Mother was physically present, he stayed with the Mother and most of the photographs we see of the Mother today were taken by him. One day, I entered the office and found Dada extremely angry because he could not find the keys to the darkroom. He was scolding everybody and as soon as he saw me, he turned his anger upon me. "Where are the keys? They

are nowhere to be found!” I quietly remarked, “Perhaps, you’ve left them in the camera-cupboard?” The cupboard was opened and there was the key lying quietly in place of the camera that was forgotten outside!

Dada had a lot of qualities that some people might never imagine: he could write poems, pen short stories and play and compose music. As for his personal sadhana, he did not speak very often about it but we get a glimpse of that inner work in his writings.

Dada had some other facets to his nature too. One morning at 5 he turned up near my window and called me from the street, “Vishwajit, come on, wake up! Let’s go for our drive!” I looked out of the window but there was nobody. I was a little perplexed. Later when I went to him I told him about what had happened. He smiled and said, “Well, I was indeed thinking of you very strongly and wondering why you had not yet turned up!”

One day Ganpatram-ji invited Dada to come and have some *rajbhog* at the Cottage restaurant. So we went there in the morning. Chhanda was also with us. He served us huge *rajbhogs* with potato chips and we began eating. Dada gulped down twelve of them! I could manage to push only ten down with difficulty and Chhanda ate six. Dada always had a huge appetite. After lunch he could eat a whole basketful of mangoes. It was really quite extraordinary.

Once we went to buy some bamboos for the Playground. We negotiated with the bamboo merchant for a rather large quantity of bamboos. The porter started asking for an exorbitant amount of money to transport the load. Dada said: “Let’s carry it ourselves, Vishwajit! Why waste money on the transport?”

And so we carried the heavy load over two kilometres to the Playground. When we reached our destination my shoulders were so sore with pain and blisters that I could not do any work for a few days. Dada, however, continued his work totally unaffected by the ordeal.

At one time I was extremely close to him physically. But slowly I became a little distant although this did not affect our inner kinship. I would see him once a week and we would talk about a lot of things. His door was always open to all. Towards the end he could not walk and was completely dependent on those who served him. Someone so unbelievably active was reduced to this state but never did he even once complain about it and remained increasingly indrawn and contented. Once in 2009 when I was leaving for Kolkata, he told me, “The cells in my body seem to be changing.”

“That’s wonderful,” I remarked. “If you have started on this work, then you’re going to live a long time.” Unfortunately that was not to be.

The saddest thing for me was that on the day he left his body I was away in Kolkata. Despite all my best efforts I could not get a flight and got back only two days later. I understood that though he had left us physically, his presence would remain with us and his work continue the way he had always wished.

## LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of September 2010)

### 8. Energised by the Gita

THE New York edition of *The Life Divine* had a companion volume on Father's shelf. The same size and with a blue wrapper. The bold letters proclaimed: *Essays on the Gita*. A Vaishnava child learns about the Gita quite early in life and my father's shelf already had Sri Ramanuja's *Gita Bhashya*. I could not comprehend it as it was in Sanskrit, but felt close to the scripture when reading Sri Aurobindo. It was a joy to handle this New York edition. After Father passed away in Chennai, this volume came to me along with the money-order receipt with the Mother's signature which had been held with worshipful reverence by him for decades. Not trusting myself with handling books as he did (for him books were holy), I have placed the receipt in my jewel box. Well, this piece of postal stationery makes me the owner of the richest treasure-trove I can think of!

The companion volumes have become companions again. The Sri Vaishnava imagery came easily to Father when he explained Sri Aurobindo's works to me. He would say that *Essays on the Gita* was Sri Aurobindo's *Gita Bhashya* and *The Life Divine* his *Sri Bhashya* (Sri Ramanuja's commentary on the Brahma Sutras). So the linkage with the Gita remained with me all the time. Reading *The Life Divine* one is never away from Krishna!

Not surprising though. It was less than a decade since Sri Aurobindo had come face to face with Vasudeva in the Alipore prison.

... it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Srikrishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover.<sup>1</sup>

Even as he typed in his room in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo may have wondered

1. Speech delivered at Uttarpara, 30 May 1909; *Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 6.

occasionally at the inexplicable turns his life had taken: the Darjeeling days, the enduring of fourteen English winters, the return to India and receiving the Calm within, the Baroda days of reading, writing and teaching, the marriage, the entry into the political turmoil, the lecturing tours to wake up the dozing nation, the midnight knock . . .

The next moment the small room was filled with armed policemen; Superintendent Cregan, Mr. Clark of 24-Parganas, the charming and delightful visage of familiar Sriman Benod Kumar Gupta, a few Inspectors, red turbans, spies and search witnesses. They all came running like heroes, pistol in hand, as though they were besieging, with guns and cannon, a well-armed fort.<sup>2</sup>

Incidentally, what a perfect description of the personality of our Master! An impregnable, beautiful and rich fort! This was on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1908. Sri Aurobindo writes:

I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter in my life.<sup>3</sup>

So many chapters and Sri Aurobindo must have smiled once again recollecting the verse in the Gita that comes towards the end. Krishna tells Arjuna:

Iswara, the Supreme resides in the heart of all beings, *sarvabhutānām*, and makes them all revolve by his maya, as if mounted on a machine, *yantrārūḍhāni māyayā!*<sup>4</sup>

This verse is used by Sri Aurobindo as an epigraph to the chapter, 'The Problem of Life' in *The Life Divine*:

The Lord is seated in the heart of all beings turning all beings mounted upon a machine by his Maya.<sup>5</sup>

When we read the text in the shade of the choice epigraphs, we realise how understanding the book is not impossible: and we fall in love with the quotes from the Gita for our lifetime. At least these verses remain in our consciousness because of their placement in the great book.

2. *Tales of Prison Life*, translated by Sisir Kumar Ghose, (1985 ed.), pp. 8-9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. The Gita, XVIII, 61, (*Yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*): The Gita was frequently invoked and it drew me to *Essays on the Gita*. Sri Aurobindo makes the scene alive, not merely a philosophical compendium. That Sri Aurobindo was writing in detail on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita at the same time makes these epigraphs more than ornamental. They become vital components for aspirants who live with *The Life Divine* in hand.

5. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 220.

*Yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*. So what is the ‘problem of life’? Brahman is the Undivided Sachchidananda. This Force gets divided by “the dividing faculty of the Mind obscured by ignorance”, says Sri Aurobindo and then we remain mesmerised by two long sentences that explain why we are confronted by problems and mysteries all the time, and how “there is the hidden Truth and unity pressing for the solution and by the solution for its own unveiled manifestation in the world.” Even as we are revolving (maddeningly?) on the Maya Machine of the Lord, we have also to keep our mind calm and seek answers to our existence on earth. We have to know what Life is, and Sri Aurobindo helpfully carves the idea into absorbable quantities. Life has three appearances: the material, the vital and the mental. It is the last mentioned with which we proceed now.

The spiritual view is an integral, universal view. Once it is gained, one has realised the Delight of Existence. The opposite of the universal view is the mental view. Its fragmentary view can be understood, for Mind is still in an evolving stage, with its eyes turned to becoming the “whole Truth of existence”. But that is still far away, as we are not able to give much of our conscious time to it, troubled as we are by the mysteries that are beating against us as waves all the time. We are left only with questions. Why did the Tsunami strike so suddenly? Why did Hiroshima and Nagasaki get destroyed? Why is the sky so beautiful with the arched rainbow? How come I missed the bus today by the fraction of a minute?

So much for our questions about the world outside. When we begin to list the questions about ourselves beginning with Ramana Maharishi’s query, “Who am I?”, as we whiz past in our rounds on the Lord’s Yantra, peace eludes us. So my name, my passport, my books . . . they do not exhaust my biodata. So what else is there? Is there so much we do not know about ourselves?

First, he [man] is aware only of a small part of his own being: his surface mentality, his surface life, his surface physical being is all that he knows and he does not know even all of that; below is the occult surge of his subconscious and his subliminal mind, his subconscious and his subliminal life-impulses, his subconscious corporeality, all that large part of himself which he does not know and cannot govern, but which rather knows and governs him.<sup>6</sup>

In effect, something else is shaping our actions, and we are being moved by it. To return to the colourful if somewhat painful simile, we are being moved by a machine. No matter, it is the Lord’s Machine so it is the Machine Divine. For He is seated “within the heart of all existences” and holds us in His Maya. The job of man now is to transcend the Machine Divine to become the divine man, to become one

6. *Ibid.*, p. 225.



with the Indwelling Universal. Not one man, but the whole race of man has to aspire for becoming the Man Divine:

. . . it must aspire to this ascent, conducted indeed through love, mental illumination and the vital urge to possession and self-giving, but leading beyond to the supramental unity which transcends and fulfils them; in the founding of human life upon the supramental realisation of conscious unity with the One and with all in our being and in all its members humanity must seek its final good and salvation.<sup>7</sup>

The striking image of the Unknowable Divine sitting at the centre of a giant merry-go-round (or am I the tiny whirligig in whom the bluish flame is playing the Flute?) moving it while we are all stuck to it, speeding recklessly with arms flying, is not the only one from the Gita that *The Life Divine* stamps in our memory. More than a dozen chapters carry epigraphs from the Gita. When the title gets to be tantalising for the reader, Sri Aurobindo kindly slips in a line from the *Kurukshetra-Sastra* and we are able to proceed with the argument in the chapter without feeling adrift on the high seas. One such is the first chapter of Book Two. The title itself is alarming. Can I ever get to the brass tacks of this set of imponderables? ‘Indeterminates, Cosmic Determinations and the Indeterminable.’

Fortunately a set of epigraphs from familiar texts lessen the fright. Even the Mandukya Upanishad says that the Unseen must be known, and the Katha Upanishad assures us that this is the goal. We must know the Being. Three lines from Gita are present at the heading of this chapter. One says rather ‘helpfully’ that this Being is a mystery which no one knows. The second quote assures us that this Being is Vasudeva, “Me”. With a sigh of relief we draw to the third citation: “Rare is the great of soul to whom all is the Divine Being”, *Vasudevah sarvamiti sa mahatma sudurlabhah*. Then, there is hope.

So why think of the Unknown as the Unknowable? In our own time we had a Mahayogi, a Mahatma who saw all creation as the Divine Being. Can we ever have enough of reading those golden words of Sri Aurobindo? If Krishna was born in a prison, He also gives darshan in a prison! Sri Aurobindo had been arrested, placed in solitary confinement. After some time, he was allowed to walk outside the cell for half an hour. It was when he was walking thus one day (perhaps he was wondering how Krishna by his maya was whirling him upon a machine) that the Lord’s force entered him. Then it was all Vasudeva, the Divine Being. Where were the high prison-walls? It was Krishna all around. What grand illusion is this! The tree is Vasudeva too! Ah, how cool the divine shade! Even the bars are now Krishna, and it was He who was the door, imprisoning Sri Aurobindo in the tiny cell. And outside

7. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

the door, again Vasudeva stands as a guard. And when Sri Aurobindo lay down on the coarse prison rug to sleep, it pricked him no more. Not the rug but Krishna was hugging him and he could feel “the arms of my Friend and Lover.” But this vision did not limit itself to his individual presence:

I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Amongst these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances. One I saw among them especially who seemed to me a saint, a peasant of my nation who did not know how to read and write, an alleged dacoit sentenced to ten years’ rigorous imprisonment, one of those whom we look down upon in our Pharisaical pride of class as *chhotalok*. Once more He spoke to me and said, “Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reason why I raise them . . .”<sup>8</sup>

Once all this springs to our consciousness, the chapter does not frighten us any more. We want to *know* what moves us but our attempts end up in knowing more and more about phenomena, and not of what is at the back of this phenomenon. Science still remains a babe in the cradle when it comes to unveiling the Truth that impels the Force to arrange the varied phenomena which we call Nature. The Truth that is the source continues to remain the Indeterminate. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

At the origin of things we are faced with an Infinite containing a mass of unexplained finites, an Indivisible full of endless divisions, an Immutable teeming with mutations and differentiae. A cosmic paradox is the beginning of all things, a paradox without any key to its significance.<sup>9</sup>

But why should we know about this indeterminate, indeterminable Truth of existence? Science calls it Energy by the results: by what is created by it. But how does the Energy do it? Sri Aurobindo gives a number of examples from science, and for me philosophical enquiry ceases to be dry now. It becomes a charming heritage-walk when he takes up literature as an example.

We do not see or know, but it is expounded to us as a cogent account of Nature-process, that a play of electrons, of atoms and their resultant molecules, of cells, glands, chemical secretions and physiological processes manages by

8. Speech delivered at Uttarpara, 30 May 1909; *Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 6-7.

9. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 311.

their activity on the nerves and brain of a Shakespeare or a Plato to produce or could be perhaps the dynamic occasion for the production of a *Hamlet* or a *Symposium* or a *Republic*; but we fail to discover or appreciate how such material movements could have composed or necessitated the composition of these highest points of thought and literature: the divergence here of the determinants and the determination becomes so wide that we are no longer able to follow the process, much less understand or utilise.<sup>10</sup>

Which is what the Mandukya and Katha Upanishads and the Gita say. A scientist could accept this but not one who is engaged in the yoga of divine knowledge. It is not as though a new production is a variation. There is sameness as well as variation in these products of Energy. “A necessity of immutable sameness at the base, of free and unaccountable variations on the surface seems to be the law; . . .”<sup>11</sup> Why the variations? Is it because basically there is a “delight of creation”?

Thanks to the Gita quote at the head of the chapter we do not feel rattled by the argument though this is a long chapter. After all, we have the Lord’s assurance: “all is the Divine Being”. We shan’t give in to the nagging doubts about the presence of unhappy experiences like pain and death in a world created by the “delight of creation”. Instead of endless questionings, why not take Sri Aurobindo’s advice and “follow the yogic process of quieting the mind itself”?

Like a scientist at his laboratory, Sri Aurobindo takes us into the yogic process and allows us to stand shakily on the sill looking at the Overmental consciousness. Poised thus, we could realise that the individual and the cosmos come from a transcendent Reality. For me this assurance is enough. It is enough to know that a molecule is formed when a group of atoms remain bound to each other. There is no need for me to take up laboratory work to check the idea as scientists have done it for me. In the same manner, Sri Aurobindo has done the needed probe. From the first day with Yogi Lele when he quietened his mind, he worked for us, and the remembrance of the Mahayogi’s past (the bare facts that we know) fill my heart with gratitude. Why bother to understand or come face to face with the indeterminate, the indeterminable, when I can watch this Accused Divine sitting like the Yogeshwara Shiva when Deshbandhu C. R. Das is orating his defence in the Alipore Court?

However, the icon always beckons me again to take it up and so back to the argument. A time comes when Sri Aurobindo writes that even the Overmind gives no solution. We have to go further up to the Supermind which sees the Supreme as an Infinite of Being and an Infinite of Power, containing quiescence as well as action. And even that is not the final plane, says Sri Aurobindo. Further onwards is the plane of “identity in oneness”. What we find in the concluding turn of this

10. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

chapter describing the “mutual delight of existence” comes to us as unforgettable poetry in *Savitri* when Aswapati enters the house of the Spirit and New Creation:

The one Consciousness that made the world was seen;  
 All now was luminosity and force.  
 Abolished in its last thin fainting trace  
 The circle of the little self was gone;  
 The separate being could no more be felt;  
 It disappeared and knew itself no more,  
 Lost in the spirit’s wide identity.  
 His nature grew a movement of the All,  
 Exploring itself to find that all was He,  
 His soul was a delegation of the All  
 That turned from itself to join the one Supreme.<sup>12</sup>

*Vasudevah sarvamiti!* But why think of Krishna here, the Delight of Existence? Why not remain silent because the Cosmic Indeterminate is beyond everything? The answer is found in the last sentence:

The Absolute is not a mystery of infinite blankness nor a supreme sum of negations; nothing can manifest that is not justified by some self-power of the original and omnipresent Reality.<sup>13</sup>

Not ‘neti, neti’, but *Bhaja Govindam!* As we go to the following chapters, “All is the Divine Being” is a phrase which will continue to echo, and even reappear as an epigraph. Sri Aurobindo’s choice of other passages from the Gita tune in with this phrase. “The eye of knowledge sees the Lord abiding in the body and enjoying and going forth from it,” which is repeated in the following chapter. Our mind in its ignorance wonders whether this is possible. So he has to repeat that the Supreme Lord can be seen by practising yoga. The problem is we are not prepared to look! Remember, “for even of the seekers who have achieved, hardly one knows Me in all the truth of My being.”<sup>14</sup>

*The Life Divine* reiterates through arguments and quotes how this world is all Ishwara. The Paraprakriti sustains the universe, is the origin and causes the dissolution too. And the passages from the Gita have certainly sustained me both in personal life and in my writing career.

While discussing the philosophy of rebirth Sri Aurobindo brings to our attention the famous verses of the Gita:

12. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 319.

13. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 335.

14. The Gita, VII. 1, 3; quoted in *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 659.

As a man casts from him his worn-out garments and takes others that are new, so the embodied being casts off its bodies and joins itself to others that are new, . . . Certain is the death of that which is born and certain is the birth of that which dies.<sup>15</sup>

These words never fail to verbalise on our lips when we have to watch a dear one lying quietly in eternal sleep. And the finality of the very apt simile returns to our memory when engaged in spring-cleaning the cupboard. A doubt does not fail to pop up at these times, sublime or mundane. Is it then an eternal movement bound to the spinning-wheel machine? Nothing but birth, death and once again the sleep in the mother's womb?

Certainly not. Where is such a delusion of repetitions when one recognises that it is the Lord who is within, who moves the wheel, who is everything, who does not reject us because we are cooped up in ignorance? If we need to progress in this yoga, the first requirement is such a faith that Vasudeva is everything and he is within us and he will transform us, even as he turns us on the wheel of maya! "I abide in the spiritual and from there destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge", *jnanadipena bhasvatā*.

Sri Aurobindo has followed his yoga with full faith in the assurance of the Lord. So have countless great personalities immersed in the Divine in all the centuries that have gone by. This faith is the life-line to keep ourselves tuned to the divine life especially in times of doubt and distress. Perialwar, the 7<sup>th</sup> century Tamil hymnologist exults:

Diseases that have spread all over my body like ants that hold on to the pot of ghee and hitch themselves up! Run away and save yourselves. The Lord who gifted the Vedas has come with his bed of hooded snake and is resting within me. Guarded by him, this city of my body has ceased to be what it was before.

The Lord who wears the yellow garment came as the spiritual teacher of supreme knowledge and entered the lotus of my hard heart which has intelligence, removed the evils in my heart and pressed his feet on my head. Guarded by him, this city of my body has ceased to be what it was before.<sup>16</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was writing in detail on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita at the same time in *Arya*. That makes these epigraphs vital components for aspirants who live with *The Life Divine* in hand. Surely the preliminary preparation for entering the divine life.

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

15. The Gita, II. 22, 27; quoted in *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 771.

16. *Perialwar Tirumozhi*, 5-1-1, 8.

## THE TWO PATHS OF YOGA

### Tapasya and Surrender — Effort and Grace

(Continued from the issue of September 2010)

[All the passages in this section are from *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani. The page numbers refer to the 2007 edition.]

Disciple: What is the ideal relation of a disciple to his Guru?

Sri Aurobindo: Ask some other question! You must find it out within yourself.

Disciple: What should be the relation of the Guru to his disciple?

Sri Aurobindo: That I know. (*Laughter*)

Disciple: What should be the relation between the disciples themselves?

Sri Aurobindo: That you better ask K. He will be able to explain.

Disciple: How can there be a fixed relation by rule?

Sri Aurobindo: In these matters it is no good forming mental ideas and ideals and trying to cut the behaviour according to it. Again, it depends on the Guru.

Disciple: What I wanted to know was: Is there anything like Grace — what is called *ahaitukī kṛpā*?

Sri Aurobindo: You mean to say that the Guru would give everything whether the disciple deserved it or not? What do you mean by *ahaitukī kṛpā*?

Disciple: I do not know the exact meaning, but I believe it is what may be called Grace. Something from the Divine descending in man.

Sri Aurobindo: But Grace is also a part of divine Wisdom. You do not mean to say that divine Grace is due to a chance caprice of God? It is there because the Divine knows its purpose.

Disciple: *Ahaitukī bhakti* and *ahaitukī kṛpā* means that there is no motive — that is, human purpose or reason — which man can attribute to them. But there is always some other purpose which man may not be knowing.

Sri Aurobindo: That is a different matter; it may have no human purpose.

Disciple: Then is there nothing like the personal side of the Guru?

...

Sri Aurobindo: It depends on the Guru. If he is a human Guru then his personal vital or mental preferences may play a part and often they falsify the purpose of Grace. The less they interfere the better. But what did you mean by the personal and the impersonal? Do you mean to say that if you gave me a lot of fruits and other things everyday there would be a lot of spiritual things going from me to you? (*Laughter*)

Disciple: It will depend upon the object with which one gives the fruit, etc.

Disciple: It will be *ahaituka* fruit.

Disciple: Yes, *ahaituka* offering with an eye to *ahaitukī krpā!* (*Laughter*)

Disciple (*to Sri Aurobindo*): But then, is there nothing like *patita-pāvana* — the Divine purifying the fallen and the low?

Sri Aurobindo: That is sentimentalism.

Disciple: It is specially the work of Grace to raise up the *adhama* — the low and the fallen.

Sri Aurobindo: That is to say, the Divine must neglect the *uttama*, and be partial to the *adhama*? (*Laughter*)

It is like the Christian idea that he who is favoured by God gets a flogging. The more a man is flogged the more favoured he is!

Disciple: Is there nothing, then, like personal grace?

Sri Aurobindo: As I said, it depends on the Guru. You don't mean to say that the personal side of the Guru decides voluntarily and independently of the Divine what is to be given to a disciple? Even when it appears to take that form it is something else that decides. The more the personal element (in the sense of the vital or mental preference on the part of the Guru) the more is the likelihood of mistake being committed. If he is a mere human Guru, then if he is a Bengali, he would like to give his grace to Bengalis or he would choose his relatives. That has nothing to do with the divine Work. All that idea about *patita-pāvana* and *adhama-uddhāra* means only this that however bad or seemingly wicked the external life may be, the man can yet be saved if he has something in him which can receive the Truth. One may say that even for the Grace to descend there are conditions.

Disciple: Are these conditions determined by the Divine?

Sri Aurobindo: If you take the stand that everything is decided by the Divine then we have nothing to do but to sit still. If you drive the matter to a mental logical extreme then you have to come to a dead stop. But, taking things as they are, man *has* his part to play.

6 September 1926

(pp. 348-50)

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Sri Aurobindo: . . . Ours is a very big Yoga, one has to travail. I think X is not prepared to take all that trouble.

Disciple: Never, Sir! I have come here because I can't take so much trouble.

Sri Aurobindo: You are not called upon to do it. Even for me it would have been impossible if I had to do it all by myself. At a certain stage the Heavens opened and the thing was done for me.

29 December 1938

(p. 597)

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Disciple (*to the Mother*): You have said in your *Prayers* that justice exists. One cannot avoid the law of Karma except by Divine Grace.

Disciple: Why does one not believe in Grace?

Mother: It is because the human mind arranges and combines things and does not leave any room for the Grace. For instance, when one is cured of a disease or passes an examination, he thinks it is due to medicine or some chance. He does not see that in between, or behind, there may be Grace acting on him. (*Turning to Sri Aurobindo*) Is it not so?

Sri Aurobindo: They would call it luck. (*Laughter*)

Mother: If you don't recognise the Grace how can it work? It is as if you had shut your doors against it. Of course, it can work below, underneath, so to say.

Disciple: Doesn't it act unconditionally?

Mother: It does, especially in those people who have been predestined for something; but if one recognises and expresses gratitude, it acts more forcefully and quickly.

Disciple: Isn't it because we are ignorant?

Mother: No, I know many ignorant people having the Grace expressing a deep gratitude rising from the heart.

Disciple: We would like the Grace to act like a mother feeding a hungry baby, giving things when it needs, etc.

Sri Aurobindo: And who is the baby? (*Loud laughter*)

Mother: But the Grace does not work according to human demands or conceptions. How can it? It has its own law and way. Very often what seems to be a great blow or calamity at the present moment may appear to be a great blessing after ten years and people say that their real life began after that.

Sri Aurobindo: Grace is unconditional but at the same time, how will it work if a man is throwing away the Grace, or does not recognise it? It is like a man continually spilling from the cup in which something is being poured.

11 December 1938

(pp. 542-43)

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Disciple: Krishnaprem also says that Grace and Tapasya are complementary, neither of them is to be stressed. Girish Ghosh used to say to Ramakrishna that he left everything for Ramakrishna to do for him; and it seems he was very much changed.

...

Disciple: That means, if one has that living faith he can do without Tapasya. C here also says he does not believe in Tapasya. He believes in Grace.

...



Sri Aurobindo (*to C*): What do you mean by Tapasya?

Disciple (*not C*): It has the sense of effort. For example, if the mind is wandering about then one has to make an effort to concentrate it. This is difficult.

Sri Aurobindo: That Tapas is something difficult is the popular idea — that it most often means sitting on nails, standing on the head, etc. But that is not correct. Tapas can be for something one likes or wants. You gather the energy for achieving the object.

Disciple: When one sits in meditation the mind is wandering about and one has to gather it. This is difficult.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, but something in you wants to do it. You want it, is it not so?

Disciple: It is the gathering of force of consciousness for a particular purpose.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, you gather up all the energy and put it on a particular point.

Disciple: Even for gathering up some effort is necessary.

Sri Aurobindo: If you want to achieve the object some effort will be necessary for achieving it.

Disciple: Some men find it easy to meditate for many hours.

Sri Aurobindo; Yes, but that requires concentration of energy. All effort is not unpleasant. For instance, a man who plays cricket has to concentrate on the ball, bat, wicket, fielding, etc.

Disciple: That is comparatively easy because he finds interest in it.

Disciple: Another man may find that effort difficult.

Sri Aurobindo: It is said in the Upanishad that God created the world by Tapas. It was not that he found it difficult to create the world, but he had to make the effort.

1941 or 1942

(pp. 762-63)

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Sri Aurobindo: . . . really speaking, it does not explain anything when you say, “It is Divine Grace.”

Disciple: But is there no law governing the Grace?

Sri Aurobindo: You seem to be very constitutional. You must allow God some absolute power!

Disciple: I do, I have no objection to His having absolute power!

Disciple: A great concession to God!

Disciple: What I object to in God is that He is not definite. There must be certain conditions to deserve His Grace!

Sri Aurobindo: That is again merely a way of putting it.

. . .

Disciple: But there must be some reason.

Sri Aurobindo: God may have His own reasons, which are obviously not your mental reasons.

Disciple: But why can't God be definite?

Sri Aurobindo: If He became definite then all the *mojā* — fun — would go.

Disciple: Then you will make a law of it.

Disciple: But in this way God breaks His own laws!

Sri Aurobindo: How do you know that he breaks His own laws? That is why some religions say that there is nothing but Grace. God's Grace is inexplicable. It eludes all mental analysis.

Disciple: In that case the Bhaktas have a very good chance.

Sri Aurobindo: Again, you want to make another law! You can't say that the devotees have *more* chance. All you can say is, "Such and such things happen." God's Grace is without any reason. There are no mental laws governing it. Even in Yoga what His Grace does is much more than what can be done by personal effort.

Disciple: In Sadhana you go on trying and trying and the obstruction does not yield. Then suddenly you find the point of resistance is removed.

Sri Aurobindo: That is what I say. In such cases the effort is nowhere.

Disciple: Then everything is due to Grace, we must say.

Sri Aurobindo: In a way, you can say that. It is again a way of putting it!

14 October 1925

(pp. 187-88)

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Disciple: I believe that Grace is without condition.

Sri Aurobindo: That may be true from the side of the Divine but the man must try to fulfil the condition under which alone Grace can act.

*(At this point, a disciple quoted a sentence from Sri Aurobindo's The Mother: "The supreme Grace will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and the Ignorance.")*

10 December 1938

(p. 540)

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Disciple: I find in my case that with little effort on my part many things have dropped.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, that is because you, or something in you, wanted to drop these things.

Disciple: But there was no corresponding effort for results.

Sri Aurobindo: It may be so. It is not a question of correspondence: with a little effort something in you wants to drop it sincerely and then the Grace finds it easy to act. But all the same the effort is a contributory element. There are cases in which one goes on making efforts and yet no result comes and even the condition becomes worse. Then suddenly you find, when you have given up the effort, that the thing is done. It may be that the effort keeps up the resistance and when you give it up the resistance says, "This fellow has given up effort, so it is no use persisting."

1941 or 1942

(pp. 763-64)

