

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## REBIRTH

Not soon is God's delight in us completed,  
Nor with one life we end;  
Termlessly in us are our spirits seated,  
A termless joy intend.

Our souls and heaven are of an equal stature  
And have a dateless birth;  
The unending seed, the infinite mould of Nature,  
They were not made on earth,

Nor to the earth do they bequeath their ashes,  
But in themselves they last.  
An endless future brims beneath thy lashes,  
Child of an endless past.

Old memories come to us, old dreams invade us,  
Lost people we have known,  
Fictions and pictures; but their frames evade us, —  
They stand out bare, alone.

Yet all we dream and hope are memories treasured,  
Are forecasts we misspell,  
But of what life or scene he who has measured  
The boundless heavens can tell.

Time is a strong convention; future and present  
Were living in the past;  
They are one image that our wills complaisant  
Into three schemes have cast.

Our past that we forget, is with us deathless,  
Our births and later end  
Already accomplished. To a summit breathless  
Sometimes our souls ascend,

Whence the mind comes back helped; for there emerges  
The ocean vast of Time

Spread out before us with its infinite surges,  
Its symphonies sublime;

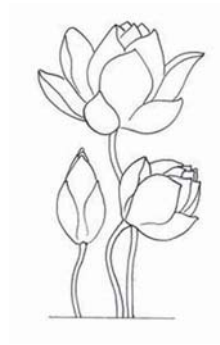
And even from this veil of mind the spirit  
Looks out sometimes and sees  
The bygone aeons that our lives inherit,  
The unborn centuries:

It sees wave-trampled realms expel the Ocean, —  
From the vague depths uphurled  
Where now Himâloy stands, the flood's huge motion  
Sees measuring half the world;

Or else the web behind us is unravelled  
And on its threads we gaze, —  
Past motions of the stars, scenes long since travelled  
In Time's far-backward days.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 213-15)*



# **THE KARMAYOGIN**

## **A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad**

*(Continued from the issue of October 2010)*

### Part II

## **Karmayoga; the Ideal**

### **Chapter IV The Eternal in His Universe**

#### Chapter I. Brahman.

THE first four verses of the Upanishad have given the general principle of Karmayoga; the next four provide its philosophical justification and of these four the first two express in a few phrases the Vedantic philosophy of God and Cosmos as a necessary preliminary to the formation of a true and permanent ethical ideal.

The close dependence of ethical ideals on the fundamental philosophy of the Eternal and Real to which they go back, is a law which the ancient Yogins had well understood. Therefore the Upanishad when it has to set forth an ethical rule or ethical ideal or intellectual attitude towards life, takes care to preface it with that aspect of the Eternal Reality on which its value and truth depend. The first principles of Karmayoga arise from the realization of the Eternal as a great and divine Presence which pervades and surrounds all things, so that it is impossible to direct one's thought, speech or actions to thing or person without directing them to Him. With the declaration of the Eternal as the Universal and Omnipresent Lord the Upanishad must, therefore, begin. Now it is about to take a step farther & set forth the ideal of the Karmayogin and the consummation of his yoga. It precludes the new train of thought by identifying Isha the Lord with Parabrahman the Eternal and Transcendent Reality. Not only does He surround and sustain as the supreme Will by which and in which alone all things exist, but He is really the immutable and secret Self in all things which is ultimately Parabrahman. This Isha whose Energy vibrates through the worlds, is really the motionless and ineffable Tranquillity towards which the Yogins & the sages strive.

“There is One and It unmoving is swifter than thought; the gods could not reach It moving in front; standing still It passes others as they run; 'tis in This that Matariswan setteth the waters. It moves, It moveth not; It is far, the same It is near;

It is within everyone, the same It is also outside everyone.”

There is only One existence, one Reality in apparent multiplicity. The unimaginable Presence which is manifest in the infinite variety of the Universe, is alone and alone Is. The variety of things is in fact merely the variety of forms which the play or energy of the Will only seems, by its rapidity of motion, to create; so when the blades of an electric fan go whirling with full velocity, round & round, there seem to be not four blades or two, but a whole score; so, also, when Shiva in His mood begins His wild dance and tosses His arms abroad, He seems to have not two arms but a million. It is the motion of the play of Will, it is the velocity of His Energy vibrating on the surface of His own existence which seems to create multiplicity. All creation is motion, all activity is motion. All this apparently stable universe is really in a state of multifold motion; everything is whirling with inconceivable rapidity in its own orbit, and even thought which is the swiftest thing we know, cannot keep pace with the velocity of the cosmic stir. And all this motion, all this ever evolving cosmos and universe is Brahman the Eternal. The Gods in their swiftest movements, the lords of the mind & senses cannot reach Him, for He rushes far in front. The eye, the ear, the mind, nothing material can reach or conceive the inconceivable creative activity of this Will which is Brahman. We try to follow Him pouring as light through the solar system and lo! while you are striving He is whirling universes into being far beyond reach of eye or telescope, far beyond the farthest flights of thought itself. तन्मनसो जवीयो । Material senses quail before the thought of the wondrous stir and stupendous unimaginable activity that the existence of the Universe implies. And yet all the time He does not really move. All the time He who outstrips all others, is not running but standing. It is the others, the forms and things His Energy has evolved, who are running and because He outstrips them, they think that He too moves. While we are toiling after Him, He is all the time here, at our side, before us, behind us, with us, in us, His presence pervading us like the ether, clothing us like a garment. “Standing still, He outstrips others as they run.” It is our mind & senses that are running and this universal motion is the result of the Avidya to which they are subject; for Avidya by persuading us to imagine ourselves limited, creates the conditions of Time, Space & Causality and confines us in them as in a prisoning wall beyond which our thoughts cannot escape. Brahman in all His creative activity is really standing still in His own being outside and inside Time & Space. He is at the same time in the Sun and here, because neither here nor the Sun are outside Himself; He has not therefore to move any more than a man has to move in order to pass from one thought to another. But we in order to realise His creative activity have to follow Him from the Sun to the Earth and from the Earth to the Sun; and this motion of our limited consciousness, this sensory impression of a space covered and a time spent, we cannot dissociate from Brahman and must needs attribute the limitations of our own thought to Him; just as a man in a railway-train has a sensory impression that everything is rushing past him and the train is still. The stir of the

Cosmos is really the stir of our own minds, and yet even that is a mere phenomenon. What we call mind is simply one play of the Will sporting with the idea of multiplicity which is, in form, the idea of motion. The Purusha, the Real Man in us and in the world, is really unmoving; He is the motionless and silent spectator of a drama of which He himself is the stage, the theatre, the scenery, the actors and the acting. He is the poet Shakespeare watching Desdemona and Othello, Hamlet and the murderous Uncle, Rosalind and Jacques and Viola, and all the other hundred multiplicities of himself acting and talking and rejoicing and suffering, all himself and yet not himself, who sits there a silent witness, their Creator who has no part in their actions, and yet without Him not one of them could exist. This is the mystery of the world and its paradox and yet its plain and easy truth.

But what really is this Will which as Purusha watches the motion and the drama and as Prakriti is the motion and the drama? It is the One motionless, unconditioned, inexpressible Parabrahman of whom, being beyond mark and feature, the Upanishad speaks always as It, while of Isha, the Lord, it speaks as He; for Isha as Purusha is the male or spiritual presence which generates forms in Prakriti the female or material Energy. The spiritual entity does not work, but merely is and has a result; it is the material Energy, the manifestation of Spirit, which works or ceases from work. Eventually however Spirit and Matter are merely aspects of each other & of something which is behind both; that something is the motionless, actionless It. This which without moving is swifter than thought, is It; this which mind & senses cannot reach, for it moves far in front, is It; this which stands still & yet outstrips others as they run is It. Will, Energy, Isha, the play of Prakriti for Purusha, are all merely the manifestation of that unmanifested It. What we envisage as the manifested Brahman is, in His reality to Himself, the unmanifest Parabrahman. It is only in His reality to us that He is the manifested Brahman. And according as a man comes nearer to the truth of Him or loses himself in Him, so will be his spiritual condition. While we think of Him as Isha, the one in innumerable aspects, the idea of difference remains though it can be subordinated to the idea of Oneness; that is the beginning of Yoga. When we realize Isha as one with Parabrahman, the idea of Oneness has sway & rules; that is the culmination of Yoga. When we realize Parabrahman Itself, that is the cessation of Yoga; for we depart utterly from Oneness & difference and no longer envisage the world of phenomena at all; that is Nirvana.

## Chapter II. Spiritual Evolution in Brahman

It is in this infinitely motionless, yet infinitely moving Brahman that Matariswan or Prana, the great Breath of things, the mighty principle of Life, disposes forms and solidities rescuing them out of the undifferentiated state from which the world arose. To understand these two verses it is necessary to grasp clearly the ideas of creation

& evolution which the Upanishads seek to formulate. What in Europe is called creation, the Aryan sages preferred to call *srishti*, projection of a part from the whole, the selection, liberation and development of something that is latent and potentially exists. Creation means the bringing into existence of something which does not already exist; *srishti* the manifestation of something which is hidden and unmanifest. The action of Prakriti proceeds upon the principle of selection leading naturally to development; she selects the limited out of the unlimited, the particular out of the general, the small portion out of the larger stock. This limited, particular & fractional having by the very nature of limitation a *swabhav*, an own-being or as it is called in English a nature, which differentiates it from others of its kind, develops under the law of its nature; that is its *swadharma*, its own law & religion of being, and every separate & particular existence, whether inanimate thing or animal or man or community or nation must follow & develop itself under the law of its nature and act according to its own *dharma*. It cannot follow a nature or accept a *dharma* alien to itself except on peril of deterioration, decay and death. This nature is determined by the balance in its composition of the three *gunas* or essential qualities of Prakriti, passivity, activity and equipoise, which reveal themselves under different shapes in the animate as well as the inanimate, in the mind as well as in the body. In matter they appear as passive reception, reaction and retention, in human soul as the brutal animal, the active, creative man and the calm, clear-souled god. It must always be remembered that Prakriti is no other than Avidya, the great Illusion. She is that impalpable indeterminable source of subtle and gross matter, Matter in the abstract, the idea of difference and duality, the impression of Time, Space and Causality. The limited is limited not in reality, but by walls of Avidya which shut it in and give it an impression of existence separate from that of the illimitable, just as a room is shut off from the rest of the house by walls and has its separate existence and its separate nature small or large, close or airy, coloured white or coloured blue. Break down the walls and the separate existence and separate nature disappear; the very idea of a room is lost and there is nothing left but the house. The sense of limitation and the consequent impulse towards development & self-enlargement immediately create desire which takes the form of hunger and so of a reaching after other existences for the satisfaction of hunger; and from desire & the contact with other existences there arise the two opposite forces of attraction and repulsion which on the moral plane are called liking and dislike, love and hatred. Thus [the] necessity of absorbing mental and aesthetic food for the material of one's works; this too is hunger. The instinct of self-enlargement shows itself in the physical craving for the absorption of other existences to strengthen oneself, in the emotional yearning to other beings, in the intellectual eagerness to absorb the minds of others and the aesthetic desire to possess or enjoy the beauty of things & persons, in the spiritual passion of love & beneficence, and all other activity which means the drawing of the self of others into one's own self and pouring out of oneself on others. Desire is

thus the first principle of things. Under the force of attraction and repulsion hunger begins to differentiate itself & develop the various senses in order the better to master its food and to feel & know the other existences which repel or attract it. So out of the primal consciousness of Will dealing with matter is developed form and organism, vitality, receptive mind, discriminating mind, Egoism. Out of this one method of Prakriti, selection, liberation and development, the whole evolution of the phenomenal world arises. Creation therefore is not a making of something where nothing existed, but a selection and new formation out of existing material; not a sudden increase, but a continual rearrangement and substitution; not an arbitrary manufacture, but an orderly development.

The idea of creation as a selection and development from preexisting material which is common to the Upanishads & the Sankhya philosophy, is also the fundamental idea of the modern theory of Evolution. The theory of Evolution is foreshadowed in the Veda, but nowhere clearly formulated. In the Aitareya Upanishad we find a luminous hint of the evolution of various animal forms until in the course of differentiation by selection the body of man was developed as a perfect temple for the gods and a satisfactory instrument for sensational, intellectual and spiritual evolution. When the Svetasvatara sums up the process of creation in the pregnant formula "One seed developed into many forms", it is simply crystallizing the one general idea on which the whole of Indian thought takes its stand and to which the whole tendency of modern science returns. The opening of the Brihadaranyakopanisad powerfully foreshadows the theory that hunger & the struggle for life (ashanaya mrityu) are the principle agents in life-development. But it was not in this aspect of the law of creation that the old Hindu thought interested itself. Modern Science has made it its business to investigate and master the forces and laws of working of the physical world; it has sought to know how man as a reasoning animal developed into what he is, how he is affected in detail by the laws of external nature and what is the rule of his thought and action in things physical & psychophysical whether as an individual or in masses. Outside the limits of this inquiry it has been sceptical or indifferent. Hindu thought, on the contrary, has made it its business to investigate the possibilities of man's escape from the animal and physical condition, from his subjection to the laws of external nature and from his apparent limitations as a mere creature of surroundings & sensational impact from outside. Its province has been the psychical and spiritual world. It has not concerned itself minutely with man's physical sheath, but rather with what is vital & elemental in the matter of which he is made, the law of the workings of the breath and the elemental forces within him, the relation of the various parts of his psychical anatomy to each other, and the law of his thought and action as a spiritual being having one side of itself turned to phenomena and this transient life in society and the world, the other to the single and eternal verity of things.

Speculating and experimenting on these psychical and spiritual relations, the



ancient Rishis arrived at what they believed to be the fundamental laws respectively of spiritual, psychical and elemental evolution. Spiritually, the beginning of all things is the Turiya Atman, spirit in its fourth or transcendental state, intellectually unknowable and indefinable, infinite, indivisible, immutable and supra-conscious. This Turiya Atman may be imaged as the infinite ocean of spirit which evolves in itself spiritual manifestations and workings by that process of limitation or selection on which all creation or manifestation depends. By this Turiya Atman there is conceived or there is selected out of its infinite capacity a state of spirit less unknowable and therefore less indefinable, in which the conceptions of finity and division preexist in a potential state and in which consciousness is self-gathered and as yet inoperative. This state of Spirit is called variously Avyakta, the unmanifestation, or the seed-condition or the condition of absolute Sleep, because as yet phenomena and activity are not manifest but preexist gathered-together and undeveloped, just as all the infinite potentialities of organic life upon earth preexist gathered-together and undeveloped in the protoplasm; just as leaf and twig, trunk and branches, sap and pith and bark, root and flower and fruit preexist, gathered together and undeveloped in the seed. The State of Sleep may be envisaged as Eternal Will and Wisdom on the brink of creation, with the predestined evolution of a million universes, the development of sun & star and nebula and the shining constellations and the wheeling orbits of satellite and planet, the formation of metals and the life of trees, the motions and actions of fish and bird and beast and the infinite spiritual, mental and physical stir & activities of man already pre-ordained, pre-arranged and pre-existent, before Time was or Space existed or Causality began. Spirit in this state of Sleep is called Prajna, the Wise One or He who knows and orders things beforehand. The next state of Spirit, evolved out of Prajna, is the pure psychical or Dream State in which Spirit is in a condition of ceaseless psychical activity imagining, willing, selecting out of the matter which Prajna provides, and creating thought-forms to clothe the abundant variety of its multitudinous imaginations. The Dream-State is the psychical condition of Spirit and operates in a world of subtle matter finer and more elastic than gross physical matter and therefore not subject to the heavy restrictions and slow processes with which the latter is burdened. For this reason while physical workings are fixed, slow and confined by walls within walls, thought, psychical manifestation and other operations in subtle matter are in comparison volatile, rapid and free, reacting more elastically against the pressure of Time, Condition and Space. This State of Dream may be envisaged as Eternal Will and Energy in the process of creation with the whole activity of the Universe teeming and fructuating within it; it is that psychical matrix out of which physical form and life are evolved and to which in sleep it partially returns so that it may recuperate and drink in a fresh store of psychical energy to support the heavy strain of physical processes in gross matter. Spirit in the middle or Dream-State is called Taijasa or Hiranyagarbha, the Shining Embryo. It is Taijasa, Energy of Light, and Hiranya

the Shining because in psychical matter luminous energy is the chief characteristic, colour and light predominating over fluid or solid form. It is Garbha, Embryon, because out of psychical matter physical life and form are selected and evolved into the final or Waking State in which Spirit manifests itself as physically visible, audible & sensible form and life, and arrives at last at an appearance of firm stability & solidity in gross matter. Spirit in the Waking State is called Vaisvanor, the Universal Male, He who informs and supports all forms of energy in this physical universe; for it is a root idea of Hindu philosophy that Spirit is the Male which casts its seed into Matter and Matter the female Energy which receives the seed and with it creates and operates. Spirit and Matter are not different entities, but simply the positive and negative poles in the creative operation of the All-Self or Universal which evolves in Itself and out of Itself the endless procession of things.

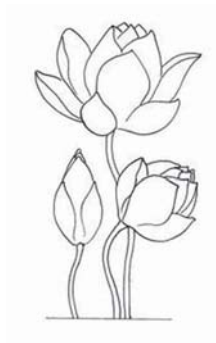
All things in the Universe are of one texture & substance and subject to a single law; existence is a fundamental unity under a superficial diversity. Each part of the Universe is therefore a little Universe in itself repeating under different conditions and in different forms the nature and operations of the wider Cosmos. Every individual man must be in little what the Cosmos is in large. Like the Cosmos therefore each individual man has been created by the evolution of Spirit from its pure essence through the three states of Sleep, Dream and Waking. But this evolution has been a downward evolution; he has descended spiritually from pure Spirit into physical matter, from self-existent, self-knowing, self-delighting God into the reasoning animal. In other words each new condition of Spirit, as it evolved, has overlaid and obscured its predecessor. In the physical condition, which is the ultimate term of the downward evolution, man realizes himself as a body moving among and affected by other bodies and he readily understands, masters and employs physical organs, physical processes and physical forces, but he finds it difficult to understand, master or employ psychical organs, psychical processes and psychical forces, — so difficult that he has come to be sceptical of the existence of the psychical and doubt whether he is a soul at all, whether he is not merely an animal body with an exceptional brain-evolution. In his present state any evolution of the psychical force within is attended with extraordinary disturbances of the physical instruments; such as the development of delusions, hallucinations, eccentricities, mania and disease side by side with the development of genius or exceptional mental & spiritual powers in family or individual. Man has not yet discovered his soul; his main energies have been directed towards realizing and mastering the physical world in which he moves. It is indeed, as some are beginning dimly to perceive, the soul within him which has all along been using the body for its own ends on the physical plane, but the soul has been working from behind the veil, unrealized and unseen. The Waking-State has overlaid and obscured the Dream-State. When he has mastered, as in the course of his evolution he must master, the psychical world within him, man will find that there is another & deeper self which is overlaid and obscured by the

psychical, — the Sleep-world within or as it is called, the causal self. At present, even when he admits the existence of the soul, he sees nothing beyond his psychical self and speaks of soul and spirit as if they were identical. In reality, there are three spirit-states, spirit, soul and body, the sleep-state, the dream-state and the waking-state. Body has overlaid and obscured soul, soul overlays & obscures spirit, spirit in its turn obscures & overlays the pure self from which & towards which the circle of evolution moves.

Creation, then, has been a downward evolution which has for its object to create a body fit for an upward evolution into the region of pure spirit. It is in this direction that the future of human evolution lies. When man has mastered the physical world and its forces, when the earth is his and the fullness thereof, he must turn his efforts towards mastering the world within himself. Instead of allowing the soul to use the body for its own ends, he must learn to master both soul and body and use them consciously for the purposes of the spirit, that Eternal Will & Wisdom which at present operates in secrecy, veiled with darkness within darkness and seeming even to be blind and hidden from itself. In the end he will be master of spirit, soul and body, a Jivanmukta using them at will for cosmic purposes or transcending them to feel his identity with the Self who is pure and absolute existence, consciousness and bliss.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 222-32)



## ‘THE BEGINNING OF A NEW INNER PERIOD . . .’

**March 3, 1914**

As the day of departure draws near, I enter into a kind of self-communion; I turn with a fond solemnity towards all those thousand little nothings around us which have silently, for so many years, played their role of faithful friends; I thank them gratefully for all the charm they were able to give to the outer side of our life; I wish that if they are destined to pass into other hands than ours for any length of time, these hands may be gentle to them and know all the respect that is due to what Thy divine Love, O Lord, has brought out from the dark inconscience of chaos.

Then I turn towards the future and my gaze becomes more solemn still. What it holds in store for us I do not know nor care to know; outer circumstances have no importance at all; my only wish is that this may be for us the beginning of a new inner period in which, more detached from material things, we could be more conscious of Thy law and more one-pointedly consecrated to its manifestation; that it may be a period of greater light, greater love, of a more perfect dedication to Thy cause.

In a silent adoration I contemplate Thee. . . .

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 87)*

## “PART OF THE WORK YOU HAVE COME TO DO . . .”

I HAVE received your note [. . .] and it didn't surprise me, because just about a month ago I received what seemed like an SOS from your mother, telling me your father was rapidly declining. I have done what I could, mainly to bring in some tranquillity, some calm, some inner peace. But I haven't done. . . . You see, there are always two possibilities when people are so seriously ill: they can be helped to die quickly, or else made to linger on for a very long time. When I have no outer or inner indications, all I ever do is apply the consciousness for the best to happen to them (the best from the soul's standpoint, of course).

Do you know whether your father has expressed any wish?

*According to my mother's letter, he says he no longer particularly cares to live, that his days are so miserable. . . .*

But he still doesn't want to pass away? Is he suffering a great deal?

*He's suffering.*

*(Mother remains silent for a moment, then says:)*

Over the years I have had a considerable number of experiences in this realm, and my first action is always the same: send the Peace (I do this in all cases, for everyone) and apply the Force, the Power of the Lord, for the best thing to happen. Some people are very sick, sick to the point where there is no hope, where they cannot be cured, where the end is coming; but they sense that their souls must still need to have certain experiences, so they hang on — they don't want to die. In such cases I apply the Force for them to last as long as possible. In other cases, on the contrary, they are weary of suffering, or indeed the soul has finished its experience and desires to be liberated. In such a case, if I am sure of it, sure that they themselves are expressing the desire to depart, it's over in a few hours — I say this with certainty because I've had a considerable number of experiences. There is a certain force which goes out and does what is necessary. I haven't done either of these things for your father — neither to prolong his life (because when people are suffering it's not very kind to prolong their lives indefinitely), nor to finish it, because I didn't know — one can't do either without knowing the person's conscious wish.

As for your mother, she must have been thinking of me, for otherwise she wouldn't have come in that way — she would have come through you (it's different when things come through you). But she came to me directly, so I thought that for

some reason she must have remembered me. I don't know. And I looked and said to myself (it came just like that), “Now that she will be left all alone, why doesn't she come here?” I haven't done anything about that, either, one way or the other.

*That's odd — the same thought has been coming to me these last three or four days: why doesn't she come here?*

It didn't come from me, you understand; it didn't stem from a construction made by me: it came from outside. “Why doesn't she come here?” I wondered.

*The same thought came to me three or four times.*

Then she is thinking about it — perhaps not consciously, but in her subconscious. It happened some time ago. I even spoke to X about it and said that someone over there was calling you. Did she tell you?

*No.*

That your mother was pulling on you.

*She had Z write to me.*

As I said, I have done nothing, neither one way nor the other. So don't do anything. You know, from time to time when people are very sick, something comes out of them to indicate their will. But one has to be present, one has to hear it.

*(silence)*

There was an experience like that quite recently. A's mother was ill — old and seriously ill. Seeing her declining, A wrote to me: “If the time has come, make it happen quickly — don't let her suffer.” Then I saw very clearly that there was still something in her which didn't want to go; and when I applied the Force for the best to happen she suddenly began to recover! It must have coincided with a kind of inner aspiration in her — no more fever, she was feeling well. And A began preparing to come back here. “If she's recovering,” he said, “there's no longer any point in my staying!” The same evening she had a relapse and he sent me a telegram. Meanwhile (it was evening) I had gone upstairs to ‘walk’; suddenly The Will came (which is a very, very rare thing), The Will: “Enough, now it must finish — it's enough as it is.” Within half an hour she was dead.

These things are very interesting. They must form part of the work I have come on earth to do. Because even before encountering Theon, before knowing

anything, I had experiences at night, certain types of activities looking after people who were leaving their bodies — and with a knowledge of the process; I didn't know what I was doing nor did I seek to know, yet I knew exactly what had to be done and I did it. I was around twenty.

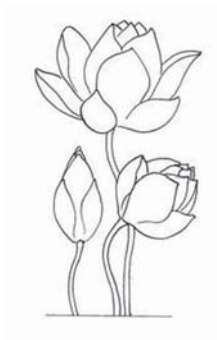
As soon as I came upon Theon's teaching (even before meeting him personally), and read and understood all kinds of things which I hadn't known before, I began to work quite systematically. Every night, at the same hour, I was working to construct — between the purely terrestrial atmosphere and the psychic atmosphere — a path of protection across the vital, so that people wouldn't have to pass through it (for those who are conscious but without knowledge it's a very difficult passage — infernal.) I was preparing this path, doing this work (it must have been around 1903 or 1904, I don't remember exactly) for months and months and months. All sorts of extraordinary things happened during that time — extraordinary. I could tell long stories. . . .

Then, when I went to Tlemcen, I told Madame Theon about it. "Yes", she told me, "it is part of the work you have come on earth to do. Everyone with even a slightly awakened psychic being who can see your Light will go to your Light at the moment of dying, no matter where they die, and you will help them to pass through." And this work is constant. Constant. It has given me a considerable number of experiences concerning what happens to people when they leave their bodies. I've had all sorts of experiences, all kinds of examples — it's really very interesting.

*June 24, 1961*

THE MOTHER

(From a conversation with a disciple)



## THE WORKING OF THE GRACE

You have posed me the question:

“What is the interrelation between the Mother and Her Grace? I have searched for a clear answer in the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as in your books and *Mother India*. On the one side the Divine Grace seems quite independent and separate; on the other side it appears to me to be the most important instrument of the Mother and a part of Her.”

You quote a number of passages from the Mother and then conclude:

“It appears to me that, on the one hand, I have to surrender exclusively to the Mother, and on the other hand to give all my thanks to the Divine Grace. Not conceivable? Surely a pragmatic question.”

I would say that the division you see in the quotations is also pragmatic or practical, depending merely on the theme to be developed. To me there is no Divine Grace which is not an outflow from a Divine Person either directly through an inward intervention or by way of help through an outward agency.

In general the working of Grace has two aspects. One is the inscrutable touch beyond all concept of merit and demerit. It does not seem to be in consideration of anything done by one. It just falls like a sudden beam of light which has in view some purpose of eternity to be fulfilled in a passage of time — some purpose which appears to run secretly behind or below the quivering or quiet moments that make up the life that we consciously know to be ours. This beam can fall as plausibly on a so-called sinner as on an apparent saint. It is something for which we cannot trace a reason. If we could, it would be Justice and not Grace.

Perhaps not inconsistently I may recall the Mother once replying to the query why we didn't always find justice being done in the Ashram. She simply said: “This is not a place of Justice. It is a place of Grace. If justice were to be done, who would deserve to be here?” By “here” was meant the life in the presence of the Incarnate Divine.

Now for the other aspect of the Grace — the one with which you are concerned. It can also be connected with the Mother's reply I have just quoted. The Ashram has been a creation of the Divine Personhood become human flesh and blood. The Grace which acts in response to our cry for help is the same Personhood, essentially divine yet with a human mystery within it capable any time of becoming flesh and blood like ours. So I would say that for us the Divine Grace is best figured as that inextinguishable splendour which has assumed the world-guiding countenance of Sri Aurobindo and that ever-overflowing love with which the Mother's face has taken up the travails of our groping world. The one to whom you, as you say, “have to surrender exclusively” is no other than the giver of “the Divine Grace” which,



according to you, has to be the receiver of all your “thanks”.

Those who do not belong to the group called together out of millions by the Grace in the first aspect of inexplicable choice may envisage the Saviour Strength under any guise — sustainer Rama or enchanter Krishna, compassionate Buddha or all-merciful Allah’s mediator Mohammed, beneficent Kwanon or Holy Mary the eternal intercessor. Even the habitual unbeliever who, when he finds himself helpless, instinctively turns to he-knows-not-what, is bound to feel the vague vastness of some being for whom he has no name.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

*(Life-Poetry-Yoga Vol. 2, The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 1995, pp. 254-55)*

What is the integral Yoga?

*It is the way of a complete God-realisation, a complete Self-realisation, a complete fulfilment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature — and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 358)*

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of October 2010)

**Monday, 19 April 1926**

*This whole week I tried to withdraw into the silent mind, but without much success. I have not yet returned to the point where I was before the arrival of X. But that great peace is there, behind; I have the impression of a transparent atmosphere. I wonder whether this is not the experience the Christian mystics describe as the “glassy sea” and the Japanese as the “Crystal Palace”?*

There are two principal forms under which one becomes aware of it: one is like the feeling of a transparent motionless sea and the other like that of an ethereal expanse.

*Last time you spoke to me about psychic knowledge and its character of truth. Does this knowledge concern facts, beings and events of the manifested world or simply metaphysical truths?*

The word “metaphysical” suggests mental knowledge, but in psychic knowledge there is a nearness, a concrete reality very different from intellectual speculation.

To say that it brings material knowledge would be wrong — that is not its field. It transforms the being into a being of truth, a flame of aspiration for the truth. Psychic knowledge would rather be a contact, a feeling. When one says that the heart knows better than the head, one expresses something that comes near to it, although there is a gulf between emotion, feeling, and the psychic. The psychic being receives the truth but does not create it, as opposed to the supramental. There is a difference between the two.

The faculty of recognising the truth at first sight comes from intuition, one of the forms of the lower supramental knowledge. The true, unerring knowledge is knowledge by identity.

*Steiner<sup>1</sup> distinguishes three degrees of occult knowledge: imaginative, inspired and unitive; the last, which cannot err, is probably knowledge by identity.*

The first form of intuition is cloaked in mental forms that distort it. Moreover, the mind is not satisfied with what it receives and it crystallises everything around its

1. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), German philosopher and educationist.

own additions. There is a little that is true and much that is false.

Besides, the mind learns to pass off its data under the guise of intuitions. When the being begins to ask for intuitive knowledge, the personality sends its desires and prejudices disguised as intuitions. Thus at the beginning intuitive knowledge is not very sure; then it develops, but even before it is brought to perfection other modes of knowing develop.

There are four grades in intuition, which is the elementary form of supramental truth:

Intuition proper	Sporadic and irregular, supplying isolated elements. It gives the impression of remembering a latent, past or subconscious knowledge
Discernment	Here there is a process, a non-intellectual activity that accepts certain elements and rejects others.
Inspiration	Something comes from outside and unfolds within. Like a voice that speaks in you.
Revelation	Like a vision.

I thought you would like to join us in the evenings, once or twice a week.<sup>2</sup> Which day suits you?

*Gladly. For me any day is suitable.*

I will let you know later the days on which you may come.

\* \* \*

### **Monday, 26 April 1926**

*This week my meditation was better, deeper and more regular. I feel the Force descending into the Anahata and Muladhara centres and even into the legs. At times my legs become stiff. Also a greater calm which, if I could apply it directly to the mind, would quiet the whole mind by its very descent. Once I happened to see flashes of light.*

2. Sri Aurobindo met regularly in the evening with some of his disciples. Their informal conversations later became known as the "evening talks".

You say your legs become stiff. Do you feel the Force descending into the legs?

*At least I become conscious of my legs; there is a working of the Force there.*

If you don't feel the Force descending there, but are only conscious of your legs, it may be that the Force trying to descend is encountering an obstacle and this is the cause of the stiffness you feel. When the Force descends and presses down, one is unable to move for some time after the meditation — it is such a pressure. However, one can remove this inability to move by applying the Force itself. But if there is stiffness, perhaps there is struggle.

The calm you speak of, what is it?

*The experience is not complete. I know that I could make this Force act to calm the mind, but this has not been done yet.*

All this work is necessary on every plane, in order to make possible the opening and possession of the whole consciousness.

*I want to say something about smoking. I used to smoke. When I came here I stopped smoking. But when the Xs came, gradually I started again, just now and then. Then I stopped once more. Lately, I have not smoked for ten days. But the desire has come back very strongly. I would really like to get rid of it, for I am not its master.*

If the desire is simply nervous it can easily be managed, but if it finds a support in the vital and the mind it is more difficult.

In principle there are two methods. The first is to cut off everything abruptly — to make a firm resolution and by an act of will refuse consent; when the desire comes, to withdraw from it and let it have its play below, unless one is able to throw that out too. The desire becomes weaker and weaker. The other method is to give the desire a little satisfaction when it comes and then to reject it. To give it a little Bhoga. But one has to be careful to make this only a means to arrive at rejection. Not to indulge it, because without rejection the resistance is unending.

These are the two methods used by Yogis.

*I have fought for several years, more or less, but I don't seem to have come to any result. I want to be free from desire. Then smoking becomes a matter of indifference.*

*This is my experience in the case of sex. I had to struggle very hard for several years; then the desire suddenly vanished and left me quiet. Still, I know it isn't dead and that if circumstances were different it could wake up and come to life again.*

That always happens when one fights it out. As for myself, I smoke a little,<sup>1</sup> but for me it is all the same and my mind is just as calm when I don't smoke.

*But in my case I have become the slave of tobacco; that is why I want to free myself from it. Anyway, I am going to do my best.*

\* \* \*

### **Monday, 3 May 1926**

*Nothing new in my sadhana. The mind does not quiet down, though I feel the Force descending into me. It is no longer, as at the beginning, vibrating waves going straight to the Muladhara. It is now a calmer Force which flows gently and penetrates into me.*

Where does this Force come from? From above?

*If I localise it in space, I would say that its origin is above the head. I try, moreover, to unite with this Force at that spot.*

Where is your consciousness?

*In the head.*

At the top of the head?

*When I am able to disengage myself and forget my body and the sensations, my consciousness can be centred outside; but that is extremely difficult for me.*

It is not necessary to forget one's body. If your consciousness were established at that spot, you could continue to receive sense impressions, but you would look at them from there.

*I would see them as outside myself?*

At least as different from the calm zone, which would be like an outer layer of your consciousness.

*At present I am identified rather with this outer layer and I observe the calm inner layer. But I am trying to open myself as best I can to this Force. Where is the difficulty — in the mind or in the physical?*

1. Sri Aurobindo would give it up altogether.

It is in the mind. But often a certain amount of time is needed to obtain the first result. You have only to persevere.

*In my efforts to bring about this separation, I cause movements in the nervous fluid, so I often have neuralgia.*

It is no use making these efforts. It is rather through a calm will that this separation comes. When one makes efforts, headaches or other little disorders often appear.

The mind will not always be calm, but there will be a region that is always peaceful, inaccessible to movements, which only touch the outer part.

\* \* \*

### **Monday, 10 May 1926**

*No great change. My mind seems to be more and more outside myself and I can look at its activities impassively. It tries to take advantage of everything to cling to its old way of feeling and acting, but even its sudden jerks no longer disturb me as they used to do before.*

To gain this calm, which is based on the perception of the immutable Purusha, is the beginning of realisation.

*A few days ago I had an experience during the night. I woke up about 12.30 and while coming back into my physical consciousness, the memory was transformed into a dream. I was driving a car on a grand wide road. In the car were several people, among others the Mother and X. The Mother was guiding me past ambushes, which lay everywhere along the road. Vehicles were passing in all directions, people on foot were lying in wait to fire at us. "Watch out for this; watch out for that", she was saying. I had a revolver near at hand.*

*It seems to me that this symbolises a passage through hostile forces. In this passage, I remember that at one moment X looked at me and said, "He's drowning, he's drowning!" Suddenly I realised that I was being dragged away by these forces. At once I called the divine Force, which descended through the Sahasrara right down to the two lowest chakras. With the help of this Force, I repelled the hostile forces and set myself afloat again. A bit later I woke up. But for some time I was aware that the hostile forces were trying to break through the wall and I repelled them in the same way. The two lowest centres were vibrating rapidly.*

Carriages, horses and other symbols of movement indicate progress in occult evolution. This is a symbol of the vital plane.

*Does the fact that I woke up mean that I was not able to sustain the effort?*

Not at all. If you had not awakened, you would probably not have kept any memory of it.

*Quite true.*

*The evening talks on science and occultism interest me very much. For a long time, this was one of my ideals — to work for the union of science and occultism. But a time came when I had to give up my ideals, like all the rest, to the Lord of the Yoga. But it is possible that a time may come when I could work for it again.*

Indeed, in Yoga one must give up everything, all ideals as well as all desires. A time comes when what is true in the being — not what is mental but what is deeper and is to be used by the Divine — a time comes when this is awakened. This happens when the Force comes down into the physical plane. What was mental or vital is rejected, but the true forms of action remain.

*(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.

The French text and the English translation first appeared in the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* starting in 1969.]

*There are three forms in which the command may come, the will and faith in thy nature, thy ideal on which heart and brain are agreed and the voice of Himself or His angels.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 459)*

# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

*(Continued from the issue of October 2010)*

### Chapter X

#### The Daily Routine of Spiritual Life

*Philippe had now been in Pondicherry for five years.*

*On the material plane he had become the right arm of the Mother and he busied himself successfully with the development and the financial independence of the Ashram.*

*His humane qualities, skills, and his dedication to the common cause, had also been noticed by the Governor's office, which began to employ him for the jobs traditionally carried out in the major cities by the administration but due to the lack of public means these had to be delegated to others. He served as assessor at the Court of Assizes in 1932. Because of his training as a civil engineer he was asked to design the public park of the city of Pondicherry, replacing the structure of Dupleix's fort. In the same way, in 1949 he would organise the Electricity Board which would take over the municipal distribution; he became its director and laid down its specifications. Similarly, during the negotiations for the restitution of the French Territories in India, it was proposed, according to archival records of the French Consulate, to have Philippe's participation in the talks between the two countries. This idea was rejected by the Quai d'Orsay because as a consequence it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for him to continue to live in Pondicherry.*

*His spiritual work continued and he met the Mother everyday, and probably Sri Aurobindo also. Repeatedly, he wrote about the happiness he found in his progress and the confidence that he had regarding his future.*

*He resumed exchanging with his father books and comments on his readings: Romain Rolland, Le Roy, Keyserling, René Guérin, Lakhowski, Bergson or Maurice Magre were the authors they discussed. Sending his father a copy of the Conversations with the Mother proved in contrast, to be a faux pas because these conversations were meant only for the disciples of the Ashram and therefore were hardly likely to win Paul over.*

*During this time the economic crisis was sweeping over the world. Paul questioned his son on the position of the Ashram on these events, and Philippe replied: "It is absolutely useless to spread oneself all over the world in order to*



preach a new religion, to do philanthropic and social works or to introduce a new form of government. This has never served any great purpose, because it has not changed humanity . . . A mystic for whom the inner world is as real, if not more, as the outer world, certainly does not see things in the same way as the ordinary man who does not accept any reality other than the sensible world . . . Everything that happens is observed, studied, but held at a distance from the inner life, so as not to allow the waves of disharmony to trouble the inner life. Egoistic attitude, it may be said! But how? Could anybody bring to the world the peace and the light which it lacks, by letting himself be invaded by its wild agitation? . . .” *The argument, even though well-wrought, could not alter the opinion of his family!*

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, October 9, 1930

My dear Maman,

Here are the photographs I spoke of in my letter last week. You can see the building where I am going to live soon, but it is not yet quite complete. The repair workshop where I work is also situated here and it will be properly equipped. All these overlook the courtyards and the gardens, some aspects of which you can see in the photographs. It is only a small corner of the block of houses which belong to us.

And have you found some accommodation? Yes, it must be very unpleasant to shift and it would be a lot of work and trouble for you. And I am sorry too because I could easily picture you in the old setting that I knew. Now your surroundings will be unknown to me. If only you could find an apartment as well-situated as the one in Rue Pigalle! Probably you will have compensations: lift, central heating, etc. Talking of central heating, I think that, having returned from India, Monsieur Dandelot must have been very cold during the meal you invited him to this winter.

Has Papa read Romain Rolland’s books on India? Naturally, they are neither well-written nor deeply thought-out, but all the same they carry interesting and little known information. I think that the French are among those who know the least about other people . . . and sometimes they have the most fantastic ideas about them (this is not a personal allusion, I speak very much in general, without any innuendo!); I have often experienced it. What does the average Frenchman know of India, of Japan or of China? Does he not confuse the Chinese with the Japanese although they are opposite of each other? And the majority of the recent books on India, by Croisset, Dekobra, etc., are ridiculous to say the least.

Just to give you an idea of the difference of the climates: we are just beginning to get tomatoes, it has been very hot till now. Flowers and fruits are in abundance . . . At

present it is ten o'clock in the evening, the thermometer shows 29° C. It is pleasant . . .

I embrace both of you very affectionately.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 2, 1930

My very dear Parents,

Papa's letter has just reached me, exactly at the moment when I myself wanted to write to you so that during the end of the year festivities you would have a tangible evidence of my love. But letters say little, very little; words are powerless to express what one wishes to communicate directly from soul to soul.

For one who is certain that his real being is not limited by time and space, the separation from those whom he loves does not have the same anguish as that felt by the others. Yes, certainly, the physical presence is important, that alone brings the fullness of contact and exchange, but it is not indispensable and absence, for example, should be much less painful than the vexations of the ideal or of the aspirations.

Papa's letter shows me, like many others, that he still has an enduring and persistent aspiration towards the spiritual truth. And, constantly, the mind counters it with the "fruit" of his experiences, what he knows or rather what he thinks he knows. The voice of reason! But it errs as often as the other voices which try, each for itself, to sweep man away.

You have a strong resentment against Theosophy because it is the indirect cause of our separation. You can see how far from it I am now. But, to reject everything by decrying or simply by asserting that one can know nothing of these matters is also dogmatic and leads to another falsehood. Theosophy is full of errors and falsehoods, but it nevertheless contains a portion of truth; it is an attempt at a mental formulation of occult truths. If one wishes to arrive at truth, one must know how to pass through the test of falsehood. If I had not done what I have done, I could never have gone through and learnt to separate the true from the false. Yes, I would have avoided, for me and for you, some suffering, but I would not have taken **one** step towards the spiritual truth. Sri Aurobindo has confirmed it to me quite often.

Therefore do not regret anything. If the aspiration is sincere and ardent, all experience, even the mistake, is used like a rung towards perfection. For man Truth is dynamic rather than static. It is in a continuous effort to attain and manifest it that lies the spiritual base of human life.

Regarding material occupations, we are very far from the Christian notions which voluntarily look for humiliation in base and despicable tasks. He who seeks

to humiliate himself in this fashion establishes still another classification among the different occupations. He does not differ much from one who chooses a pleasant occupation. Both choose, prefer, demand. For the true mystic, it is the task that receives the inner sanction which must be done, be it base or refined, easy or difficult, pleasant or painful — it has no importance.

But let me not continue on this subject because I am writing a letter and not a dissertation on mysticism. It is so difficult for me to talk about my life, my work, my thoughts without being obliged straight away to explain how our point of view is other than what is normally prevalent among the most cultured peoples. The latter always act by rules: this is good, this is bad, this is true, this is false, this is beautiful, this is ugly. It is what the Hindus call the reign of “dualities”. For us, all the values are reversed; all that disappears. What matters exclusively is the contact with the inner being who alone decides if something should be done or not. It is easy to say but difficult to realise.

Two days back we had quite a cyclone. Unfortunately the damage has been considerable, especially among the trees and it is pitiful to see uprooted trees of all species piled up and laid in the same direction. Many houses too have been damaged, above all in the villages where the huts are built of clay and palm leaves. It seems that Madras has suffered even more and is completely cut off from the rest. Now fine weather has returned, 30° in the shade!

I could not finish this letter yesterday and, this morning, I learn that as all communication by land has been disrupted, the mail for Europe has to be sent to Madras this afternoon by a French ship. So there is no time to add anything to my letter. I hope that it will, nevertheless, reach you before Christmas and I load it with my loving wishes for the New Year.

My kindest regards and sweet remembrances to the whole family, and for the three of you, my best thoughts and loving kisses.

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. The enclosed leaf is an *ashwattha* leaf, the *ficus religiosa*, the Bo or Bodhi tree. It is under one of these trees that the Buddha attained illumination, and it is sacred in the whole of India.

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 29, 1930

Very dear Parents,

Yesterday I received your letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> December; it brought me your thought and your good wishes almost at the time when mine would have reached you.

Regarding the books, I shall be very happy to have them here and I thank you for thinking of sending them to me. How often have I regretted not having with me my course books of the X or of the civil engineering, for example! And I would have asked you long ago to send them to me had it not been for the inconvenience that I would thus have caused you. But here is a solution which would reduce it to a minimum. You will have to get the packing done by a professional packer: solid cases lined with tar paper for transport by sea, and have them sent as quickly as possible to Monsieur Pierre Joffre at the Marseille-Arenc station. At the same time, intimate P. J., 16 rue de la République, Marseille that this consignment is meant for the Arya Office, Pondicherry. This gentleman is an import-export agent who makes our purchases from the market in Marseille. I am writing to him from my side, he will take care of everything from Marseille onwards.

All the books could be useful to me and are worth the shipping: books on occultism, on science and others.

I sympathise with you for the inconvenience you have had, having to shift at the height of winter, but have you found anything suitable? Your letter leaves me in doubt. And yet it must be difficult to find an apartment right away and you would have foreseen the eventuality of your eviction. Is Albert living with you? I am eager to know which neighbourhood you have chosen — if at all there was a choice. Could you but find a little greenery and silence!

We are about to enter the New Year. I hope it will be calm, peaceful and happy for you. My loving thought is with you, very close in spite of the distance.

I embrace you affectionately. Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, March 24, 1931

Very dear Parents,

The two cases of books have reached me safely and I thank you for them. They have come quite quickly, and just for your information, the freight charges have come to about 300 F<sup>1</sup> of which more than two-thirds for journey from Paris to Marseille. It is a shame that for the passengers this proportion is not maintained and

1. About 150 Euros.

that one cannot travel from Marseille to Pondicherry at half the price of travelling Paris to Marseille. I would have loved to have my collection of stereoscopic war photos, but it occurred to me very late and we shall wait for another occasion.

Have you shifted residence? I often think of your day-to-day life and I ask myself where you are living now. Where does Albert live? I do not think that he lives with you but then I do not know much about him.

Here the physical life continues in the fine period of tropical climate. January, February and March are the three most pleasant months; they are truly lovely: even temperature and not too hot, oscillating between 26 and 30°, fine weather, light breeze, vegetables of all kinds. This year, we have a lot of tomatoes, lettuce, cabbages, celery, etc. May will mark the resumption of the hot season, too hot for all these vegetables, and a little tiring due to the steam-room humidity. So far I have borne it very well and there is no reason why it should change; there are Europeans who have lived in Pondicherry for ten to twenty years and who are absolutely fine. The climate is not as debilitating as that of Indochina.

As for our inner life, that too is following its normal course. From time to time I make new inner discoveries and, little by little the wealth, the beauty of the world of the life divine which we are endeavouring to bring down and manifest on the earth reveals itself to my inner perception. The more we advance, the more the certitude of success is established, and at the same time, the more our goal becomes clearer — the **total** transformation of the ordinary human nature. It is not an amelioration of the human faculties that we are aiming at, but rather an entirely new way of their working. I could say that the difference between the divine life and the human life is greater, more radical than that which separates the man from the animal, for example.

In Le Roy's book, which Papa had sent me, there is something like a philosophical justification of our yoga. On several occasions, Le Roy points out that there is no reason to think of the human reign as the ultimate, the final summit of terrestrial evolution. According to all probability, it is nothing but a rung, a temporary phase in the immense series, and the creative impulse will push the evolutionary wave further.

Le Roy even observes that man is probably nothing but an absolutely transitory link because he does not have the qualities of inner perfection which, for example, the animal or the vegetal kingdoms possess. It is a period of transition, unstable, ill-balanced (page 54).

Then he tries to guess the characteristics of the next stage. There he does not go very far, and for good reason: his timidity is well justified. He calls it the spiritual man, which is not so bad.

For Le Roy, there are periods when the evolution is almost stationary, and others, on the contrary, when it is condensed, concentrated: it is when it crosses from one period to another. The transformation from one species to another is done at an accelerated pace, so great that it may give the appearance of a sudden leap and

that the traces of the transitory period easily disappear. I think this thesis is very correct; it explains the many obscure points of the theories of evolution; it has also some similarities with the recent theories of physics which state that certain configurations are stable and that the passage from one to the other is done with a sudden jump because the intermediate configurations are unstable and cannot last.

For us, as for Le Roy, and for many others, we are on the eve of the birth of a new evolutionary phase. The time has come when this evolution takes this special accelerated character and when the consciousness is preparing to manifest, from among its innumerable possibilities, a new one.

It is not surprising that the transformation which occurred almost automatically up to the human level, demands now a conscious collaboration on the part of man: that is yoga!

Naturally I do not think of basing all our effort on these considerations which remain highly intellectual and more or less debatable. They are nevertheless interesting, aren't they?

There is another thing noteworthy in this book. For example, what he calls **biosphere** and **noosphere** are almost — even the names are identical — what we call **vital plane** and **mental plane**, at least in the relation they have with the most external consciousness.

I would be interested to read the next book which he announces in this one. Has Papa read it and is it interesting? (on thought, intuition and the means to distinguish the true from the false!)

At present I do not have any new photos. I hope to send you those of our new buildings when they are finished. We have ongoing work for two or three years, and a vigorous work it is: eighty to ninety workers on the construction sites.

I am shortly expecting quite a big consignment of machine tools for our workshop and I have already made plans to overhaul two cars completely. When one knows how to integrate work with one's inner life and make use of it for the yoga to which it brings a decisive help, the work is a blessing.

I embrace you very affectionately.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, June 7, 1931

My very dear Papa,

I have received your letter and the book by Le Roy<sup>2</sup> which you have sent me; I thank you for both of them. I am particularly happy that you are staying on in Rue

2. It is probably about a subsequent book, one written after the one that Philippe commented on in his letter of March 24.

Pigalle and thus avoiding the problems of shifting. This old residence in the heart of Paris has a lot of charm and I am used to see and to think of you living there.

When you receive this letter, you will probably be far from Paris. Where? La Minelle no longer seems to attract you or hold you as before; besides I well understand the reasons for this change. Perhaps you will be in Vichy or in a spa town? Evidently, Pondicherry would not be the place to pass one's summer vacation! Today it is 39.5° C in the shade. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, it is still 38° C. I do not suffer from the heat and everyday I take a ride in the car, and often a long walk, in addition to the exercise that I get in the workshop where I am very busy at the moment.

Soon, not doubt — I mean in a few years — one will be able to come to Pondicherry from France in a week. And perhaps you will have the curiosity of taking a leap — a flight — to here. The son — a former 'polytechnician' — of the one whom here we call the Mother, has promised her that he will come here as soon as an air service connects us to France. And Mother's brother, also a former 'polytechnician' who is the governor of Brazzaville, Monsieur Alfassa, has just returned from Congo to Paris in eight days. But will the colonies not lose their attraction by losing their mystery and their remoteness?

I have not yet read Le Roy's book, of course. We could discuss it later. *The Problem of God* is a title that frightens me a little: philosophy must give way totally before the mystical experience, but I must not say anything before reading the book.

Maman has sent me a letter from Cap-d'Ail which made me very happy. I have not yet replied to her because I wanted to send her some of my photos; they have not come as yet. I am only sending you some very recent rather bad test pieces.

I am glad that Albert is successful in his industrial venture. In fact it is now time that he gets married if he wishes to give you grandchildren for you to raise them and see them grow up.

I embrace you very lovingly.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

*(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.)

## METRICAL NUANCES IN SRI AUROBINDO'S BHAVĀNĪ BHĀRATĪ

*Bhavānī Bhāratī* is a 99-verse Sanskrit poem composed by Sri Aurobindo some time between 1904 and 1908. He did not give any title to it nor did he revise it, for it was, unfortunately, confiscated by the Calcutta police soon after its composition. It was in the year 1985 that Sri Aurobindo Ashram recovered it and published it for the first time, with an appropriate title — *Bhavānī Bhāratī*.

So far, all those who have read it and written about it have thought that all the verses of *Bhavānī Bhāratī* are in the metre called *upajāti*. This is a mixed variety of metre belonging to the eleven-syllable group, *triṣṭubh*. While carrying out my study on the metres, especially on *upajāti*, I found that all the verses in *Bhavānī Bhāratī* are not in the same metre, though all belong to the *triṣṭubh* group. Then I started scanning each line of every verse of *Bhavānī Bhāratī*, and my study confirmed that 17 out of the 99 verses are in the metre *indravajrā*, one in *upendravajrā* and the remaining 81 in *upajāti*.

The metre *indravajrā* has eleven syllables in each line and the arrangement of syllables by short (s) and long (l) thereof is as follows: lls lls sls ll. And one finds this scheme in the following verses of *Bhavānī Bhāratī*: 7, 10, 14, 18, 19, 24, 28, 40, 41, 42, 45, 55, 64, 71, 79, 84, and 86. The metre *upendravajrā* is similar to that of *indravajrā* with one exception, that the first syllable here is short instead of long. So the scheme for *upendravajrā* is as follows: sls lls sls ll. Verse number 63 of *Bhavānī Bhāratī* is in this metre.

The *upajāti* is a mixed variety of metre in which one finds a mixture of the schemes of *indravajrā* and *upendravajrā* in the same verse. But this mixture can give rise to various kinds of *upajāti*. As per Bhattanarayana, a commentator of the *Vṛttaratnākara* by Bhattakedara, the combination of *indravajrā* and *upendravajrā* gives rise to fourteen different kinds of *upajāti*. For example if the first line of a metre follows the scheme of *upendravajrā* and the other three follow the scheme of *indravajrā* then this *upajāti* is called *kīrti*. All the fourteen types are listed below with their names:

(In the scheme given below, इ stands for *indravajrā* and उ stands for *upendravajrā*.)

उ इ इ इ	कीर्तिः <i>kīrtiḥ</i>	इ उ इ इ	वाणी <i>vānī</i>
उ उ इ इ	माला <i>mālā</i>	इ इ उ इ	शाला <i>śālā</i>
उ इ उ इ	हंसी <i>haṁsī</i>	इ उ उ इ	माया <i>māyā</i>
उ उ उ इ	जाया <i>jāyā</i>	इ इ इ उ	बाला <i>bālā</i>



उ इ इ उ आर्द्रा *ārdrā*  
 उ उ इ उ प्रेमा *premā*  
 उ इ उ उ ऋद्धिः *ṛddhiḥ*

इ उ इ उ भद्रा *bhadrā*  
 इ इ उ उ रामा *rāmā*  
 इ उ उ उ बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ*

When I scanned the lines of *Bhavānī Bhārati* to see how many varieties of *upajāti* Sri Aurobindo has used, I discovered that he has used all the fourteen varieties of *upajāti* in this small poem.

Here are fourteen verses from Sri Aurobindo's *Bhavānī Bhārati* to illustrate the fourteen varieties of *upajāti*.

1. कीर्तिः *kīrtiḥ* उ इ इ इ  
 अनन्तशक्तचृशद्धिमशेषमूर्ति  
 को वक्ष्यतीमां तव सर्वशक्ते ।  
 तेजस्त्वमेतद्बलिनानां बलञ्च  
 त्वं कोमलानामपि कोमलासि ॥

*anantaśaktryuddhimaśeṣamūrtim  
 ko vakṣyatīmāṁ tava sarvaśakte  
 tejastvametadbalināṁ balaṁ ca  
 tvam komalānāmapi komalāsi*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 88*

2. वाणी *vāṇī* इ उ इ इ  
 सान्द्रं तमिस्रावृतमार्तमन्धं  
 ददर्श तद्भारतमार्यखण्डम् ।  
 गूढा रजन्यामरिभिर्विनष्टा  
 माता भृशं क्रन्दति भारतानाम् ॥

*sāndram tamisrāvṛtamārtamandham  
 dadarśa tadbhāratamāryakhaṇḍam  
 gūḍhā rajanyāmaribhīrvinaṣṭā  
 mātā bhṛśaṁ krandati bhāratānām*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 33*

3. माला *mālā* उ उ इ इ  
 नरास्थिमाला नृकपालकाञ्ची  
 क्व सा कराली क्षुधिता च काली ।  
 नग्ना च घोरा विवृतास्यभीमा  
 यस्या विरावैः सहसोत्थितोऽस्मि ॥

*narāsthimālā nṛkapālakāñcī  
 kva sā karālī kṣudhitā ca kālī  
 nagnā ca ghorā vivṛtāsyabhīmā  
 yasyā virāvaiḥ sahasotthito'smi*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 85*

4. शाला *śālā* इ इ उ इ  
 देहि क्रतून् देहि पिपासुरस्मि  
 जानीहि दृष्ट्वा भज शक्तिमाद्याम् ।  
 शिरांसि राज्ञां महतां तनूश्च  
 भोक्तुं नदन्ती चरतीह काली ॥

*dehi kratūn dehi pipāsurasmi  
 jānihi dṛṣṭvā bhaja śaktimādyām  
 śirāṁsi rājñāṁ mahatāṁ tanūśca  
 bhoktum nadantī caratīha kālī*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 26*

5. हंसी *hamsī* उ इ उ इ  
 दशायुधाढ्या दशदिक्खगम्या  
 पातासि मातर्दशबाहुरार्यान् ।  
 सहस्रहस्तैरुपगुह्य पुत्रान्  
 आस्से जगद्योनिरचिन्त्यवीर्या ॥

*daśāyudhāḍhyā daśadikṣvagamyā  
 pātāsi mātardaśabāhurāryān  
 sahasrahastairupaguhya putrān  
 āsse jagadyoniracintyavīryā*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī, 90*

6. माया *māyā* इ उ उ इ  
 रक्तप्रवाहैरपि नास्मि तृप्ता  
 शतैः सहस्रैरयुतैरजानाम् ।  
 प्रदत्त भित्त्वा हृदयानि रक्तं  
 सम्पूजयन्त्येवमजां करालीम् ॥

*raktapravāhairapi nāsmi tṛptā  
 śataiḥ sahasrairayutairajānām  
 pradatta bhittvā hṛdayāni raktam  
 sampūjayantyevamajān karālīm*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī, 27*

7. जाया *jāyā* उ उ उ इ  
 सुखे निमग्नः शयने यदासं  
 मधोश्च रथ्यासु मनश्चचार ।  
 स चिन्तयामास कुलानि काव्यं  
 दारांश्च भोगांश्च सुखं धनानि ॥

*sukhe nimagnaḥ śayane yadāsam  
 madhośca rathyāsu manaśchacāra  
 sa cintayāmāsa kulāni kāvyam  
 dārānśca bhogañśca sukham dhanāni*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī, 1*

8. बाला *bālā* इ इ इ उ  
 शक्तिः परा कोटिषु मानवानां  
 मन्युश्रितानां भवसि प्रबुद्धा ।  
 आर्यान् विपन्नानवतीर्य पासि  
 युगे युगे युध्यस आर्यमातः ॥

*śaktiḥ parā koṭiṣu mānavānām  
 manyuśritānām bhavasi pravṛddhā  
 āryān vipannāvātīrya pāsi  
 yuge yuge yudhyasa āryamātaḥ*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī, 58*

9. आर्द्रा *ārdrā* उ इ इ उ  
 कवे विलासिन् शृणु मातृवाक्यं  
 कालीं करालीं भज पुत्र चण्डीम् ।  
 द्रष्टासि वै भारतमातरं तां  
 घ्नतीमरातीन् भृशमाजिमध्ये ॥

*kave vilāsin śṛṇu mātṛvākyaṁ  
 kālīm karālīm bhaja putra caṇḍīm  
 draṣṭāsi vai bhāratamātarām tān  
 ghnatīmarātīn bhṛśamājimadhye*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī, 30*

10. भद्रा *bhadrā* इ उ इ उ

सिन्धून् हिमाद्रिञ्च सुसौम्यभासा  
प्रकाशयन्ती सुदृढप्रतिष्ठा ।  
तिष्ठ प्रसन्ना चिरमार्यभूमौ  
महाप्रतापे जगतो हिताय ॥

*sindhūn himādrim ca susaumyabhāsā  
prakāśayanti sudṛḍhapraṭiṣṭhā  
tiṣṭha prasannā ciramāryabhūmau  
mahāpratāpe jagato hitāya*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 99*

11. प्रेमा *premā* उ उ इ उ

सनातनान् रक्षति धर्ममार्गान्  
पुनः सहस्रांशुकुलार्यजन्मा ।  
लक्ष्मीः पुनः साप्यचला स्मितास्या  
समुज्ज्वला राजति भारतेषु ॥

*sanātanān rakṣati dharmamārgān  
punaḥ sahasrāmśukulāryajanmā  
lakṣmīḥ punaḥ sāpyacalā smitāsyā  
samujjvalā rajati bhārateṣu*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 94*

12. रामा *rāmā* इ इ उ उ

प्रीतिर्दया धैर्यमदम्यशौर्यं  
श्रद्धा तितिक्षा विविधाश्च विद्याः ।  
अनन्तरूपे त्वमसि प्रसीद  
चिरं वसार्ये हृदि भारतानाम् ॥

*prītirdayā dhairyamadamyashauryaṁ  
śraddhā titikṣā vīvidhāśca vidyāḥ  
anantarūpe tvamasi prasīda  
ciraṁ vasārye bhuvī bhāratānām*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 98*

13. ऋद्धिः *ṛddhiḥ* उ इ उ उ

समाकुलं भाविभिरास्यवर्यै-  
र्ब्रह्माणमद्राक्षमथाभ्ररूपम् ।  
सहस्रमक्षीणि ददर्श तस्मिन्  
प्रतीक्षमाणान्यभयं जनन्याः ॥

*samākulaṁ bhāvībhirāsyavaryair-  
brahmāṇamadṛākṣamathābhrarūpam  
sahasramakṣīṇi dadarśa tasmīn  
pratīkṣamāṇānyabhayaṁ jananyāḥ*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 49*

14. बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* इ उ उ उ

सुप्तेषु पुत्रेषु रणोत्सुकेषु  
निशाचरः शोणितमार्यमातुः ।  
पिबन् विनर्दस्यबलान् बली को  
विहंसि चाण्डाल कृतान्तभक्ष्य ॥

*supteṣu putreṣu raṇotsukeṣu  
niśācaraḥ ṣoṇitamāryamātuḥ  
piban vinardasyabalān balī ko  
vihansi cāṇḍāla kṛtantābhakṣya*

*Bhavānī Bhārati, 43*

*Bhavānī Bhāratī* being an invocation to the Supreme Mother in her most powerful, terrible and terrifying form, all the three types of metres used here are most appropriate to bring out the spirit of the poem. And these metres are most suitable for emoting heroism, power, anger, war, intense devotion etc. One really appreciates Sri Aurobindo's choice of words not only in describing the contents of the poem but also the harmonious and beautiful manner in which he has set them into the metrical patterns. It is a joyful experience to recite the verses of *Bhavānī Bhāratī* and feel the intensity of its rhythmic movements as captured in the metrical patterns of *indravajrā*, *upendravajrā* and *upajāti*.

SAMPADANANDA MISHRA

*Two things are needed if thou wouldst follow the steep and difficult way of Yoga, the need and will within thee and the call of the Spirit.*

*The need is the need of the soul, awakened or awaking or striving to come to the surface. For all other may be transitory or false; but the soul's need is lasting and true.*

*Thy soul's need of divine light and the spirit's perfection can alone bear thee across the darkness of the many nights through which thou must pass, beyond the open or hidden pitfalls of the road, past the dangers of the precipice and the morass, through the battle with giant forces and the clutching of hands that mislead and the delusions of the night and the twilight, through false light and illusive glamour, triumphant over the blows and ordeals and nets and temptations of the gods and on and up to the immeasurable summits.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 373)

# THE EXAMPLE OF CLAY

## 1. Vidyananya's Commentary

AMONG the post-Shankara teachers Vidyananya is the foremost. He is the author of many important works in the field of Vedanta. His work entitled the Pancadasi is a classic known for its depth and comprehensiveness. It is a manual of Advaita. It is not only a systematic exposition of the tenets of Advaita but also a cogent presentation of the teachings of the Upanishads in the light of those tenets. In one of its chapters Vidyananya tries to establish through the example of clay that Brahman is real and the world projected from It is illusory. This is a fundamental tenet of Advaita. The example is originally given in the Chhandogya Upanishad (6-1-4) by Uddalaka to his son Shvetaketu.

Shvetaketu returns home after twelve years of study under a competent teacher of the Vedas. He has mastered all the Vedas and is very proud of his achievement. Finding that his achievement is not complete, Uddalaka asks Shvetaketu: "Did you not ask for that instruction by which the unheard becomes heard, the unperceived becomes perceived, and the unknown becomes known?" He replies that this was not taught by his teacher.

What is this instruction? Uddalaka explains it through examples. One of them is clay. This is as follows: By one clod of clay (*ekena mṛtpiṇḍena*) all made of clay (*sarvammṛṇmayam*) becomes known. To it a statement about the modification (*vikāra*) and another about the clay (*mṛttikā*) are added — *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam; mṛttiketyeva satyam*. Thus there are three statements. The meaning of the first will be clear only when the other two statements are rightly grasped. The second and third point out that while the modifications are illusory (*vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam*), the clay is real (*satyam*). This leads to the question why they are so regarded. Vidyananya explains that the modifications are illusory because they are of the nature of *māyā* (13-38) and the clay is real because it is the locus of the modifications (Ibid.). If the clay is real, how is it possible to say that its modifications are of the nature of *māyā*? They must be as real as the clay. This objection cannot be raised. For, according to Vidyananya, prior to its production the effect does not exist in the cause; however, when the effect arises, it is produced from *māyā*. A non-existent effect cannot come into existence in any other way except through *māyā* (illusion). The appearance of the effect in this way is comparable to the elephant and others seen in a dream (*yadasadbhāsamānaṁ tanmithyā svapnagajādhivat*) (2-70). Actually, the elephant does not exist in the mind of the dreamer. It exists elsewhere. However, it is witnessed in the dream i.e. in the mind of the dreamer. From this the elephant is inferred to be a mere

illusory experience (*mithyā*). This is the appropriateness of the metaphor. Now we pass on to the next question about the clay. It is said to be real because it is the locus of the modifications. How can the locus be real while the modifications are illusory? Vidyaranya says that it is real because its nature is always the same — before the creation of the effect, while the created effect is in existence, and after the disappearance of the effect from its manifest existence (*vyaktakāle tataḥ pūrvamūrdhvamapyekarūpabhāk*) (13-44). This is how he has justified the reality of the clay and the illusoriness of its modifications.

In this connection Vidyaranya mentions another point about the modifications of clay. Though scripture views them to be illusory (*vikāro nāmadheyam*), they are not viewed to be so by common people (*janāḥ*). They cognise them to be real. This is a contradiction. Vidyaranya removes the contradiction in favour of the scripture by pointing out that as the common people lack in discrimination (*vicāravikalā janāḥ*) (13-33), their cognition must be set aside as erroneous.

What is the outcome of this discussion? What is meant by the words “all made of clay become known”? There is clay and there are modifications of clay resting on the clay. By knowing the clay, it is cognised to be changeless and its modifications to be projections of *māyā*. The point is that the purport of the scripture is not conveyed by the knowledge of the modifications (*śrutau naiva nānātvasya vivakṣayā*) (13-60) as by that of the clay.

By giving the example of clay the ultimate aim of Uddalaka is to speak about Brahman and the modifications of Brahman viz. the world (13-16). In Brahman the world does not exist before its creation or after its destruction. However, it exists only after its creation. This means that the world is an illusory appearance in Brahman. That it is illusory is conveyed by an apparently simple formula — by knowing Brahman all modification of Brahman is known. The goal of human life consists in realising Brahman which becomes never otherwise (*kūṭasthaṁ brahma nānyathā*) (13-100) and abandoning the world which is an illusory modification.

## 2. An Analysis of the Commentary

Maya is said to be of the nature of existence (*bhāvarūpa*) (2-47). For it is inferred from the existence of the world in Brahman. There are two premises from which the existence of Maya is inferred. (i) Before creation the world does not exist in Brahman. It comes into existence only after its creation. (ii) The world which now exists in Brahman is an illusory creation, because it is not derived from Brahman. The illusory world must be from a cause other than Brahman. And this cause is Maya, the power from which illusory creations appear. Maya has another description which says that it is of the nature of non-existence (*abhāvātma*) (Ibid.). It means that it has no essence of its own (*niḥsāra*) which contains all in a latent

state. Therefore its creations proceed not from latent existence but from imagination (*kalpanāśakti*). A magician creates birds without eggs, plants without seeds, or flowers without creepers. No material cause is required for his creations. He creates all through mere imagination. This is why Maya is often compared to him and thought to be, like him, capable of achieving what is not possible of achievement (*aghaṭana ghaṭanā paṭiyasi*). In this respect Maya is unlike Prakriti which produces all from the material hidden in its essential being (*svabhāva*). Generally, the supporters of the theory of Maya state it to be the material cause of the world. But this is just a figurative statement. Strictly speaking, Prakriti alone is fit to be the material cause of the world, not Maya. For Prakriti alone is possessed of the essential being, not Maya.

If we examine the words of the Upanishads, we find that they speak of the creation of the world from Brahman. But there is no evidence in any of the texts to say that the world thus created is an illusory appearance. This is patent. Some try to produce counterevidences to deny the above observation. Let us consider two of them. (i) A text from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (4-10) says that the Lord of the world is to be known as Mayin (a conjurer). From this it follows that the world created by Him is of the nature of Maya (illusion). Thus the world is indirectly mentioned by the Upanishad to be illusory. The conventional sense of the word Mayin definitely refers to a conjurer. However, if we carefully study the evidence, we note that the word is made to give up its conventional sense. In the word Mayin the stem is *māyā*. And from the stem, *māyin* gives the sense of a possessor or holder of *māyā*, without prejudice to its conventional sense. Since the stem is used in several senses, one is free to give up the sense of illusion and adopt any suitable sense from them. This is what the seer of the Upanishad attempts to do. He says, "Know Maya to be Prakriti." By Prakriti is meant the material cause, the cause which produces the effects from the state of unmanifest existence. Hence Maya is to be known not as devoid of essence (*niḥsāra*) but as having latent existence in which the effects lie hidden and wait for their manifestation. Having thus redefined the word Maya, the seer proceeds to the next command which goes thus: "Know the holder of Maya to be the great Lord (whose Maya produces not illusions but real forms from hidden effects)." The great Lord is thus the creator of the real world. From this it is clear that the first evidence has turned out to be fruitless. (ii) We shall come to the second evidence. It is from the Katha Upanishad (2-1-10 and 11). It says that Atman (there) and the world (here) are one and inseparable, because while Atman is manifest as the world, the world remains unmanifest as Atman. Therefore there is absolutely no existence for the Many apart from Atman (*neha nānasti kimcana*). In this context the following line occurs: he who sees as if there are the Many here (*ya iha nāneva paśyati*) goes from death to death i.e. transmigrates. The words "as if there are the Many here" are quoted to prove the contention that the world is an illusory appearance. What the line intends

to say is this: the world of plurality stands unseparated from Atman; however, the mortal sees the world otherwise; he sees as if the world exists independent of Atman. This perception of the mortal is false, not the world of plurality. Like the previous one, the present evidence also fails to produce the desired result. Therefore our original observation about the world in the Upanishads stands vindicated.

Now we are prepared to come to the main point in our discussion. Vidyaranya maintains two views about the world. First, the world does not pre-exist in Brahman; second, after creation it exists in Brahman as an illusory appearance, because it is not possible for the non-existent to assume existence except through illusion. From these two views he interprets the texts on Brahman and those on the world created from Brahman. To him the world presented in them is illusory. In the previous discussion we have examined two evidences, one from the Shvetashvatara and another from the Katha, and proved that they do not speak about *illusory* world. Now we shall produce two other evidences and prove that the world spoken by them is *real*. (i) In the Chhandogya Upanishad (6-2) it is said that in the beginning the world was (*idam agra āsīt*) really one with Brahman (*sadeva*). (ii) Likewise, the Mundaka Upanishad (1-1-7) asserts that the world is born from the Imperishable (*akṣarāt sambhavitīha viśvam*). From the two evidences it is clear that the world is real, because it has pre-existed in Brahman and also because it is born from the state of pre-existence in that imperishable Brahman.

However, there is a reason why Vidyaranya thinks that the world appears in Brahman through illusion. Everywhere the Upanishads proclaim Brahman to be imperishable (*avyaya*) and immutable (*akṣara*). Unless Brahman undergoes transformation and loses thereby his original nature, it is not possible for the world to appear from Him. From this Vidyaranya concludes that the Upanishads overcome the difficulty through the assumption of Maya. With the power of illusion, Maya produces the world without causing damage to the imperishable nature of Brahman. However, he cannot uphold his conclusion without abandoning the other texts where the pre-existence of the world in Brahman is affirmed in clear terms. They imply that the world is created from Brahman through transformation. As a result, Vidyaranya's method of interpretation must be given up as opposed to the Upanishads.

We have abandoned Vidyaranya's theory of Maya. But the original problem remains unsolved. If the texts on creation are obscure, their obscurity must be removed only through the light of other texts. In this task logic is absolutely necessary, but its role is secondary. For the authority of scripture is greater than that of logic. In this connection the Mundaka text (1-1-6) comes in handy. It helps us to remove the obscurity of the creation-texts.

The Mundaka (1-1-6) speaks of a higher reality than the Imperishable. It is called That (*tat*) which is exceedingly subtle (*susūkṣmam*). In view of the gross beings (*bhūtas*), the Imperishable (*avyaya*) is subtle. In view of the Imperishable,



That is exceedingly subtle. If the Imperishable is free of the limitations of the gross beings, That exceeds even this freedom possessed by the Imperishable. However, by the absolute freedom That does not stand separated from the Imperishable and the world of gross beings. On the contrary, That is present in both of them (*sarvagatam*). That is indeed imperishable, but by the imperishability That is not prevented from producing the world. Thus That is simultaneously *avyaya* and *bhūtayoni*. This is how the wise see That (*paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ*).

That is called elsewhere the supreme Imperishable (*parātparam*) (Mundaka, 3-2-8). It produces the world through transformation without ceasing to be imperishable. Imperishability and transformation are simultaneously possible for That. For they are not opposites. In the state of absolute freedom one permits the other. This is the real theory of transformation enunciated in the Upanishads — the theory of transformation of the highest Imperishable (*parāvyayapariṇāmavāda*).<sup>1</sup> Vidyaranya knows the existence of the imperishable Brahman, but not of the supreme Imperishable. This is why he clings to the theory of Maya which has caused extensive damage to the Upanishads. A correct understanding of them is possible only when this theory is banished from the scholar's mind.

### 3. Atman and the World

In metaphysical discussions the role played by examples is very important. What is subtle and, therefore, difficult to comprehend is made comprehensible through concrete instances. They are taken from things known to people whose intelligence is meagre and ordinary. But unfortunately the example itself is made unintelligible by commentators whose motive is to justify their own preconceived views. Uddalaka's clay example, as explained by the commentators, is one such instance.

(i) By one lump of clay all that is made of clay becomes known. By itself this proposition is clear. Since clay is present in the lump and the things that come from the lump, it is possible to pass from one to other, from the source to the products. However, the correct import of the above proposition is to be determined in relation to the other two propositions — (ii) *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam*; (iii) *mṛttiketyeva satyam*. The link between the first and the next two is provided by the words *vikāra* (modification) and *mṛttikā* (clay).

According to Vidyaranya, clay in proposition (iii) means the locus (*ādhāra-mṛdvastu*) (13-38) which undergoes no transformation and produces no clay-things (*ekarūpabhāk*) (13-44). In proposition (ii), by modification of clay is meant the appearance of clay-things such as pot in the locus through the action of Maya

1. It is different from both *brahmapariṇāmavāda* and *brahmavivartavāda*. For both are founded on partial truths. But each finds its own completeness in *parāvyayapariṇāmavāda*. Hence this theory is more comprehensive than either of the two former theories.

(*māyāmayatvena vikārah*) (13-38). In the light of these elucidations Vidyaranya determines the correct import of the first proposition. Its import is this: By knowing a clod of clay which is changeless all that is made of clay is known to be an illusory creation of Maya.

In this connection two points deserve attention. (a) Vidyaranya has resolved the contradiction between the cognition of the common people and the teaching of the scripture by attaching a greater authority to the latter. As a result, the former is rejected as erroneous.

The clay and its modifications belong to the domain of physical things and come under the authority of perception (*pratyakṣa*). Apart from this, there is another domain, the domain of supraphysical things which comes under the authority of scripture (*śruti*). In principle no conflict between the two authorities is possible, for their domains are exclusive of each other. If a conflict arises between the two, then it must be resolved without prejudice to their mutual autonomy. When the scripture happens to speak about a subject that actually comes under the domain of physical things, it would speak about it without causing injury to the authority of perception. It would restate the revelations of the senses and not contradict them.

From this discussion it becomes clear that Vidyaranya has removed the contradiction between the cognition of the common people and the teaching of the scripture not only by pushing the scripture beyond its legitimate limit of authority but also by causing deliberate damage to the authority of perception. This is certainly indefensible. But then how to get rid of the error of contradiction without overlooking the testimonies of perception and scripture? There is only one way of doing it and it is by attributing the error to our understanding of the scripture and putting the correct and proper meanings into its words — *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam* and *satyam*.

(b) Vidyaranya points out that in giving the formula of knowing the many from the one, Uddalaka's intention is to teach not of the many (*naiva nānātvasya vivakṣayā*) (13-60) but of the one which alone is the aim of human life (*pumarthaṁ syāt*) (13-56). His view of Uddalaka's intention about the modifications of clay is a direct result of his other view that scripture denies the testimony of perception and looks upon the modifications as illusory. It is a case of one mistake culminating in another mistake. It means that the first is surely a mistaken view. From this we are compelled to conclude that his interpretation of Uddalaka's formula itself is responsible for these mistakes.

A comparison between the original text and the meanings assigned to its words by Vidyaranya brings to light serious discrepancies. (i) He has driven a wedge between the clay and the effects that lie in it in an unmanifest state. He has taken away the effects and named the clay as the immutable locus (*ādhāramṛdvastu*) (13-38) where they are non-existent (*asat*) (2-70). This is not only a gross distort-

tion of the original word but in contradiction to the Brihadaranyaka (1-4-10, 1-4-11 and 1-4-17) and Chhandogya (6-2-2) texts. They speak in unmistakable terms that the effect pre-exists in the cause. After distorting the original sense of the cause, Vidyananda has converted the unmanifest state as the power of Maya (*acintya-śaktirmāyaiṣa avyākṛtābhidhā*) (13-65) from which the effects arise not as real creations but as illusory appearances. This contradicts the texts like the Mundaka (1-1-7) where the birth of the effect (*viśvam sambhavati*) from the cause (*akṣarāt*) is proclaimed. The word *sambhavati* is significant. It signifies birth of something which pre-exists. Hence the effect is a real manifestation. In the birth of the effect the action of Maya is absolutely irrelevant.

(ii) We have found how Vidyananda has mutilated the original words of the Upanishad. As a result, the first proposition has become disjointed. In the view of the Upanishads the cause and the effect are indivisible. But Vidyananda has divided the two as if they are opposites. The reason for doing so is to be found in his understanding of the second and third propositions. For his reading of them is not in harmony with the spirit of the Upanishads in general. The words *nāmadheyam* and *satyam* are wrongly understood by him. He takes *nāmadheyam* to be standing for illusory appearance and *satyam* to be a substratum which undergoes no transformation. If we insist on unfolding from them meanings not inharmonious with the teachings of other Upanishads, particularly the Brihadaranyaka and the Mundaka, it is definitely possible to grasp the intended teaching of the first proposition. For nowhere do they teach that the effect is non-existent in the cause or that it is an illusory appearance from the cause.

(iii) A cursory glance at the first proposition clearly shows that Uddalaka has two kinds of knowledge in view — knowledge of the one and knowledge of the many. But Vidyananda says that Uddalaka is interested only in the first, for this alone constitutes the goal of human life (*pumartham*) and not the second. The reason for his assertion is his preconceived view of causation according to which the cause is real while the effect is a mere illusion. There are definitely two forms of knowledge and both are to be attained. The distinction between the two is so clearly pronounced that no one can lose sight of it. While the first is the means (*ekenamṛtpiṇḍena*), the second is the end achieved by the means (*sarvammṛṇmayam vijñātām syāt*). The first is essential knowledge and the second is comprehensive knowledge elsewhere referred to as the highest attainment (*param*) (Taittiriya, 2-1-1).

Now we have arrived to the crucial part in our discussion — what do the second and third propositions actually say? Let us reproduce the text under discussion: *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam; mṛttiketyeva satyam*. Before we proceed we shall make two preliminary observations. First, the word *vikāra* means a modification of clay. It is a modification of something which pre-exists in the clay. This means that it is a real modification from the clay. Hence it cannot be called *vācārambhaṇam nāmadheyam*. Second, the word *satyam* cannot imply that

the clay undergoes no transformation. From this it is evident that the words *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam* and *satyam* are not correctly understood by Vidyaṛanya. Though we have already established this point through a detailed analysis, we now present the same point through a *prima facie* view of the above words. Now we shall go back to our main discussion.

The word *vikāra* refers to the modification of clay. The words *nāmadheyam vācārambhaṇam* emphasise the relation of the name to the language consisting of words. Hence *vikāro nāmadheyam vācārambhaṇam* asserts that the modification is of the nature of the name produced from the words of the language. By this assertion a comparison is intended. The name is a word and the word is derived from the language. Hence the name is a derivation from the language. When the language is known, the name is known to be its own word. For it was implicit in the language. To the language and the name are respectively compared the clay and the modification of clay. Just as the name is derived from the words of the language, so also the modification is produced from the clay, its material cause. As the language is the means of knowing the name, so the clay (*mṛttikā*) is the right means (*satyam*) of knowing the modification. From this comparison two points emerge. (i) The clay-things, before their creation, pre-exist in the clay; therefore, when created, they are created from their pre-existent state in the clay. (ii) By knowing the clay, the clay-things are known to be modifications of the clay itself, for they had their pre-existence in the clay.

By taking *nāmadheyam* to be a comparison given in respect of *vikārah* Uddalaka's example is found to be quite intelligible and instructive. Like the language and the name, the clay and the modification of clay belong to the same order of existence. They do not present themselves as two opposites, one as real clay and the other as illusory modification of clay, as in the system of interpretation of Vidyaṛanya. The name derived from the language (*vācārambhaṇam*) is never thought to be an illusory appearance by the knower of the language. For it is an expression of what was already there in the words of the language. In the same way the relation of the modification of clay to the clay is to be understood. This is the pure and original teaching of Uddalaka.

How does the clay undergo modification and yet remain unmodified in its original nature? For Uddalaka this question is irrelevant. There is a lump of clay and there are many clay-things that have come out from the lump. Though the clay-things are numerous, they are known by merely knowing a single lump of clay. This is the main point of Uddalaka's teaching. All other points connected with his teaching do not engage his attention. However, the question is not unanswerable. For the clay both change and changelessness are simultaneously possible without any contradiction. The pot rises from the clay. The presence of clay in it is an evidence that the pot is a modification from the clay and not from any other cause. Likewise, the clay in the pot has not deviated from its original nature.

This is a parallel evidence that this nature is not damaged by the rise of pot from it. If there is a question whether the pot is real like the clay, the answer is in the affirmative. For it pre-existed in the clay and has not abandoned its oneness with the clay in the process of transformation of its pre-existence.

In giving the example of clay Uddalaka's ultimate aim is to teach of Atman and the world. Before creation the world existed in Atman. It was in an unmanifest state. It was so completely united with Atman that it was as if non-existent (*asat*) (Taittiriya, 2-7-1). The word *asat* is used here as a figure for absolute union. When the world is released from the unmanifest existence, it is cognised to be a real manifestation of the essence of Atman. For it had pre-existed in Atman. As the world has no other cause than Atman, the question of its being an illusory creation cannot arise. The clay-things are known from knowing the clay. Likewise, all in the world become known by knowing Atman.

There is no dichotomy between Atman and the world. For the world too is Atman, Atman self-extended in names and forms. Knowledge of Atman is not an end in itself; it is a means to another knowledge — knowledge of the world. If Atman is sought for its own sake, then the world is neglected — it becomes *aśrutam*, *amatam*, and *avijñātam*. This is incomplete knowledge. If it should become *śrutam*, *matam*, and *viññātam*, it is possible only through complete knowledge. As the Upanishads are not unanimous about the ideas of means and end, we shall leave them aside and give attention to what the sages have said about complete knowledge. They now and then stress that complete knowledge alone is worthy of pursuit. The Katha Upanishad is a case in point. It says that Atman (there) and the world of plurality (here) are one and inseparable (2-1-10). However, the mortal separates the world and sees as if it exists without Atman (*nāneva paśyati*). In reality the world of plurality has no existence independent of Atman (*neha nānāsti kimcana*) (2-1-11). As the mortal's cognition of the world is contrary to the fact, he goes from death to death (Ibid.). From these words it is clear that the correct view consists in seeing both Atman and the world as one (*ekadhaivānudraṣṭavyam*) (Brihadaranyaka, 4-4-20).

In the Isha Upanishad the same point is stated differently. It speaks about *vidyā* (knowledge of the one) and *a-vidyā* (knowledge of what is other than the one viz. knowledge of the many or the world) (verse 9). He who pursues Avidya to the neglect of Vidya goes to darkness (*tamaḥ*), whereas he who pursues Vidya to the neglect of Avidya goes to greater darkness (*bhūya tamaḥ*). The point is that both Vidya and Avidya must be attained. He who attains both (*ubhayam saha*) (verse 11) overcomes his ego (*mṛtyu*) through embracing the many and enjoys immortality (*amṛtam*) (Ibid.) through living in the one. It is worthy of note that the Isha does not stop with its instruction but goes further and adds how exclusive pursuits produce undesirable results. In this respect the teaching of the Isha is more comprehensive and insistent. The law by which Atman and the world are

held together is referred to by Yajnavalkya as the law of the Imperishable (*anucchit-tidharmā*) (Brihadaranyaka, 4-5-14).

Uddalaka's example is very simple and most appropriate. Vidyananda's interest is to make Uddalaka a spokesman of the theory of Maya. In this connection he has used all his resources — his skill, scholarship, and personal experience. Yet the words of Uddalaka speak only what is intended by him, not otherwise.

N. JAYASHANMUGAM

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*The complete use of pure reason brings us finally from physical to metaphysical knowledge. But the concepts of metaphysical knowledge do not in themselves fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. They are indeed entirely satisfactory to the pure reason itself, because they are the very stuff of its own existence. But our nature sees things through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as idea and as fact and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience. But the truths which are now in question, are of an order not subject to our normal experience. They are, in their nature, "beyond the perception of the senses but seizable by the perception of the reason." Therefore, some other faculty of experience is necessary by which the demand of our nature can be fulfilled and this can only come, since we are dealing with the supraphysical, by an extension of psychological experience.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 67-68)

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2010)*

On the issue of whether Hitler and Stalin were entirely against his work, Sri Aurobindo said:

Spiritually Stalin and Hitler will never tolerate any kind of work like ours. Spirituality and liberty of conscience are impossible in their regime.

(23 May 1940, *TW*,<sup>1</sup> p. 659)

Later he said:

Stalin will at the very outset liquidate — this is the Russian term — all Sannyasins and religious institutions. As for Hitler, he will ask us to accept him as the head; and factories and industries will be run by the Germans. There will be thorough Nazism. . . . (16 June 1940, *TW*, p. 718)

Sri Aurobindo was concerned that Hitler's expansionist policy would have serious consequences for India. He observed,

It is a very simple thing to see that Hitler wants world-domination and his next move will be towards India. (*TY*,<sup>2</sup> p. 137)

On another occasion he said:

If England didn't stand in the way Hitler would settle first with Russia, then proceed to Asia and then to India. (20 July 1940, *TW*, p. 815)

Sri Aurobindo had referred to the dark Adventurers:

Always the dark Adventurers seem to win;  
Nature they fill with evil's institutes,  
Turn into defeats the victories of Truth,  
Proclaim as falsehoods the eternal laws,

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

2. Nirodbaran: *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000 edition; abbreviated to *TY*.

And load the dice of Doom with wizard lies;  
 The world's shrines they have occupied, usurped its thrones.  
 In scorn of the dwindling chances of the Gods  
 They claim creation as their conquered fief  
 And crown themselves the iron Lords of Time.

(*Savitri*, pp. 225-26)

When pressed about the fate of India's freedom, Sri Aurobindo commented:

Indian freedom? India will inevitably be free if Hitler and Stalin are removed.  
 Otherwise I can't give a guarantee. (16 May 1940, *TW*, p. 638)

Nirod-da relates that once when the disciples were dismayed that Stalin was threatening England and almost joining hands with Hitler, Sri Aurobindo said:

"Is the Divine going to be cowed by Stalin?"

When, seeing Hitler sweeping like a meteor over Europe, a sadhak cried in despair to the Guru, "Where is the Divine? Where is your word of hope?" Sri Aurobindo replied calmly, "Hitler is not immortal." (*TY*, p. 125)

On 27 May 1940 the Mother had uplifted our spirits by stating:

Don't worry about Hitler. No asuric force can stand eternally against the divine force and the hour of his defeat is bound to come. (*CWM*, Vol. 15, p. 43)

However Japan was the bulwark for Sri Aurobindo. He said:

. . . Japan's aim is to turn all the Europeans out of Asia. So if she joins the Axis it will be only to suit her present position and purpose.

(*After a while*) I don't want the Japanese to go down in the fight against the Chinese because they may be needed as a counterbalance against Germany or Russia when, in case England goes down, they try to come to Asia. That is the only chance for India. While they fight each other, India can prepare herself, provided people like Jinnah and Bose are not there.

N: But, if England goes down, Japan may herself grab India.

Sri Aurobindo: She may. But out of the three evils, she may be the best and I don't think she will annex India. She may start some Government as in Manchuria. . . . She won't like the "barbarians" taking possession of Asia.

(17 July 1940, *TW*, p. 810)



On the issue whether Hitler was as great as Napoleon. Sri Aurobindo replied:

What? How can he be compared with Napoleon? He can't stand any comparison with Napoleon. Hitler is a man of one idea; he has no other capacity or activity except that he is also a house-painter, while Napoleon had many sides: he was not only a military general, but also an administrator, organiser, legislator and many other things. It was he who organised France and Europe, stabilised the French Revolution. Besides being a legislator he established the bases of social laws, administration and finance which are followed even today. He is not only the greatest military genius in history but one of the greatest men, with manifold capacities. Hitler is a man of one idea, with no intellect, which he applies with strong force and violence; he has no control over his emotions. He hesitates in his policies which some call cautiousness. And all his power comes from the Asura by whom he is possessed and guided while Napoleon was a normal human being acting through the power of his brain which reached the highest development possible in a human being.

(13 December 1940, *TW*, pp. 956-57)

When a disciple mentioned that Napoleon was reputed to be immoral, Sri Aurobindo stated:

If you mean that he was not chaste, it is true. As I said, he was a normal human being with enormous many-sided powers and capacities which very few people have possessed. (*Ibid.*, p. 957)

With regards to the American suicidal policy of non-participation in the war, a disciple asked if America joined the war, whether it would be too late, Sri Aurobindo replied:

They are all too late in everything. (11 June 1940, *TW*, p. 705)

It was suggested that America could enter the war if Hitler sank a US ship to which Sri Aurobindo observed:

Hitler will never do that. The Asura who guides him knows very well what would happen then. (17 June 1940, *TW*, p. 723)

When a disciple said that America could fall a victim, Sri Aurobindo affirmed:

Of course. But Hitler won't turn so soon towards America. He will turn first towards the Balkans and, if Stalin comes in the way, march into Russia. After gaining Asia and Africa he will turn towards America. . . .

(24 May 1940, *TW*, p. 659)

He later said:

. . . If Hitler had a navy, then after defeating England he would have gone straight for America. The present state of America's army would have been a great opportunity for him. (28 July 1940, *TW*, p. 820)

On the issue of Roosevelt's intentions if he was assured of his presidency, Sri Aurobindo noted:

Then he would have declared war at once. He is too clever a politician to do it now. After he is renominated by the Democratic Party at the end of June, he may declare war. If Washington had been destroyed by the Germans, then —  
(14 June 1940, *TW*, p. 711)

To Britain's delight, on 7 December 1941, in a savage attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, the Japanese Air Force severely crippled America's Naval fleet. In addition 2,403 died and 188 planes were destroyed. An outraged America declared war against Japan and her ally, Germany. Reportedly it was the first time since the war began that Churchill had sound sleep, secure in the knowledge that the Americans would now be joining hands with the Allies. Nirod-da writes in his book:

. . . When America joined the Allies and Hitler attacked Russia there was no doubt that behind both these movements, Sri Aurobindo's divine diplomacy played a great part just as his intervention or what he called the Divine Intervention saved England from invasion by Hitler. . . (*TY*, p. 140)

Sri Aurobindo's acumen, insight and vision on political affairs and military warfare and strategy is unparalleled. It is all the more remarkable since access to information gained largely through the radio and newspapers was limited. But Nirod-da says:

. . . he always kept in touch with all world-movements through outer and inner means. . . . (*TY*, p. 121)

Once when Nirod-da asked him whether he had any latent military capacity in him, he succinctly replied:

Not in this life. (*TY*, p. 140)

Conceivably Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had constantly intervened in innumerable events during the war, some known but most of them unknown. Once Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see. (*SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 378)

In another letter he wrote:

History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. (*Ibid.*, p. 49)

The rationalist, materialist, atheist or sceptic — thinking his limited intelligence, knowledge and consciousness is sufficient to analyse and explain life's infinite phenomena, experiences and mysteries — may scoff at the idea of a saint, living in isolation or seclusion, waging war against an anti-divine force like Hitler.

Quoted below are three aphorisms of Sri Aurobindo reflecting how will-power can be exercised without any physical instrumentation and that too over vast distances.

Thou thinkest the ascetic in his cave or on his mountaintop a stone and a do-nothing? What dost thou know? He may be filling the world with the mighty currents of his will & changing it by the pressure of his soul-state.

That which the liberated sees in his soul on its mountaintops, heroes and prophets spring up in the material world to proclaim and accomplish.

The Theosophists are wrong in their circumstances but right in the essential. If the French Revolution took place, it was because a soul on the Indian snows dreamed of God as freedom, brotherhood and equality.

(*CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 460)

In a letter Sri Aurobindo briefly writes on the effects of spiritual force:

. . . If you have the spiritual force, it can act on people thousands of miles away who do not know and never will know that you are acting on them or that they are being acted upon — they only know that there is a force enabling them to do things and may very well suppose it is their own great energy and genius.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 480)

Before concluding the article I would again like to highlight Churchill's pivotal role during the war. Sri Aurobindo himself had acknowledged that he was undoubtedly a great war leader. On 23 October 1940 he noted that Churchill's speech was magnificent and went on to say:

. . . Churchill is the second great man given by his family to England at times of crisis. [*The other was the Duke of Marlborough who won an important victory over the French in August 1704.*] (23 October 1940, TW, p. 946)

Earlier, on 17 July 1940, Sri Aurobindo acknowledged that Churchill made a fine speech by stating:

Yes, he was inspired. (17 July 1940, TW, p. 808)

Despite adversity, Churchill's grittiness and doggedness never flagged. He was a man of action who believed in making the impossible possible, if the cause justified that action.

On 29 October 1941 he said:

This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never — in nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

In *Thoughts and Glimpses*, Sri Aurobindo had written:

Impossibility is only a sum of greater unrealised possibles. It veils an advanced stage and a yet unaccomplished journey. (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 200)

The Mother spoke on an unchangeable will:

But if you *really* want it, *nothing* in the world can prevent you from doing what you want. It is because one doesn't know how to will it. It is because one is *divided* in one's will. If you are not divided in your will, I say that nothing, nobody in the world can make you change your will. (CWM, Vol. 6, p. 347)

The Mother too had spoken about the importance of strengthening the will:

To avoid all weakening and backsliding, there is one important point you must know and never forget: the will can be cultivated and developed just as the muscles can by methodical and progressive exercise. You must not shrink from demanding the maximum effort of your will even for a thing that seems of no importance, for it is through effort that its capacity grows, gradually acquiring the power to apply itself even to the most difficult things. What you have decided to do, you must do, whatever the cost, even if you have to renew your effort over and over again any number of times in order to do it. Your

will will be strengthened by the effort and you will have only to choose with discernment the goal to which you will apply it. (CWM, Vol. 12, p. 22)

The Mother also spoke about the significance of perseverance and endurance:

It is by *persevering* that one conquers difficulties, not by running away from them. One who perseveres is sure to triumph. Victory goes to the most enduring. Always do your best and the Lord will take care of the results.

(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 163)

Writing of Churchill's leadership skills, Lord Ismay, Churchill's Chief of Staff, says in his memoirs,

. . . he [Churchill] made the people see themselves as he portrayed them. The great qualities of the British race seemed almost dormant until he aroused them. But when he spoke they were ready to follow him wherever he said and to make any sacrifice.

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

### *The Marbles of Time*

*Institutions, empires, civilisations are the marbles of Time. Time, sitting in his banqueting hall of the Ages, where prophets and kings are the spice of his banquet, drinking the red wine of life and death, while on the marble floor at his feet are strewn like flowers the images of the same stars that shone on the pride of Nahusha, the tapasya of Dhruv and the splendours of Yayati, that saw Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib and the Egyptian Pharaohs, Pompey's head hewn off on the sands of Egypt and Caesar bleeding at Pompey's sculptured feet, Napoleon's mighty legions thundering victorious at the bidding of that god of war on the field of Austerlitz and Napoleon's panic legions fleeing disordered with pursuit and butchery behind them from that last field of Waterloo, — Time, the Kala Purusha, drunk with the fumes of death and the tears and laughter of mortals, sits and plays there with his marbles. There are marbles there of all kinds, marbles of all colours, and some are dull and grey, some glorious with hearts of many colours, some white and pure as a dove's wings, — but he plays with them all equally and equally he thrusts them all away when he has done with them. Sometimes even, in his drunkenness, he hurls them out of his window or lifts his mace and deals blows here and there smashing into fragments the bright and brittle globes, and he laughs as they smash and crumble. So Time, the god, sits and plays for ever with his marbles.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 379)

## THE NOTION OF PROGRESS IN DARWINIAN THEORY

*(Continued from the issue of October 2010)*

### **Richard Dawkins — Saw-toothed Progress**

DAWKINS, who describes himself as a “dyed-in-the-wool” Darwinist (some colleagues refer to him as a dyed-in-the-wool reductionist), offers an ‘adaptationist’ definition of progress. Rather than select an attribute and then end up with the right tail every time, progress must be explained in terms of better adaptation to the environment as a function of time. His definition of progress then is

a tendency for lineages to improve cumulatively their adaptive fit to their particular way of life, by increasing the number of features which combine together in adaptive complexes. (Richard Dawkins, *The Devil’s Chaplain*, Houghton Mifflin, 2003, p. 208)

The definition is also accepted by Ernst Mayr. (*What Evolution Is*, Basic Books, p. 215)

Dawkins elaborates further:

This, to repeat, takes progress to mean an increase, not in complexity, intelligence or some other anthropocentric value, but in the accumulating number of features contributing towards whatever adaptation the lineage in question exemplifies. By this definition, adaptive evolution is not just incidentally progressive; it is deeply, dyed-in-the-wool, indispensably progressive. It is fundamentally necessary that it should be progressive if Darwinian natural selection is to perform the explanatory role in our world view that we require of it, and that it alone can perform.

*(The Devil’s Chaplain, p. 211)*

So a species’ evolutionary history will randomly meander if the environment is a “passive space” and the only things that ever change are the variables affecting weather (rainfall, temperature etc.). If these changes alone constitute the environment and if they are completely random (as they usually are over the short-term) then the evolutionary history too will be random. But environment is not just the climate but also includes other members of the same species as well its enemies (predators) and its food (prey, including edible plants). These, unlike the climate, evolve. In fact if

the climate is stable over long periods of time, these other evolving entities, which are the most significant part of the individual's environment, are the main factors that drive evolution. However, progress defined as "an evolutionary arms race" is a short-to-medium-term trend since such driven co-evolution, while it can last for many generations, eventually comes to an end. Dawkins points out that climate, howsoever hostile it may be, will not necessarily have a tendency to get worse but the living enemies over an evolutionary timescale have exactly that tendency.

### **Co-evolution — The Arms Race**

Natural selection is usually described as an eliminative process. Since it weeds out the unfit, it's a process that involves reduction. But we usually do not realise that it can be an enormously creative process as well. Dawkins states:

natural selection can only subtract but mutation can add. There are ways in which mutation and natural selection together can lead, over a long span of geological time, to a building up of complexity that has more in common with addition than subtraction. (*Ibid.*, p. 169)

The arms race is the improvement in one lineage's equipment to survive (or prey) in direct response to another lineage's equipment to prey (or survive). It is improvement in one lineage driving the improvement in another (and vice versa) when the two lineages (it really need not be two, the co-evolutionary chain can constitute several lineages) form the most significant part of each other's evolutionary environment.

Any improvement in the weaponry of tactics of the predator (viz. running speed, capacity for camouflage) is tracked by the prey (better warning calls, speed etc.) and vice versa. Such mirrored improvements lead to a positive feedback and often go into a vicious spiral. Another such arms race is between the marine snails and the snail-eating crabs:

marine snails, for instance, protect themselves against snail-eating crabs by evolving stronger shells as well as all sorts of structural elaborations of the shell and make it more difficult for the crab to crush them. The crabs, in turn, develop stronger claws, which induce the snails to grow tougher shells and so on. (E. Mayr, *op. cit.*, 2001, pp. 210-11)

Arms races lead to progress in the short and medium term (in terms of geological time) since they usually come to an end either due to extinction of one party (in which case the other party will hit a plateau or even regress) or due to "economic" reasons. Sometimes both parties may go extinct due to a natural catastrophe and

then the arms race will begin anew amongst their successor lineages. Moreover, since undue diversion of limited resources (e.g. continuous improvement in running speed) eventually starts to hurt somewhere else, sooner or later, the attribute (running speed) will reach a plateau. Further improvement will come only at the cost of other investments that are necessary for survival e.g. making extra milk for the cubs. Moreover there are physical limits to improvements in animal “technology” e.g. ability to execute high jumps or improve dive time (hold one’s breath).

The arms race does not lead to progress in the global sense since it is punctuated by extinctions, plateaus and sometimes by regresses; however, in the short phase that these races happen, they are progressive and appear as

only a saw-tooth succession of small progresses terminated by extinctions. Nonetheless, the ramp phase of each saw-tooth was properly and significantly progressive. (Richard Dawkins, *A Devil’s Chaplain*, p. 214)

Dawkins signs off by saying:

if you let the animals bring their own definition you will find progress, in a genuinely interesting sense of the word, nearly everywhere. (*Ibid.*)

### **Evolution of Evolvability**

Evolution of Evolvability is a term that Dawkins uses to postulate the idea that over geological time life has made important breakthroughs that improve its ability to evolve further. These represent watershed events in the evolutionary history of the Earth and lead to the enrichment of the evolutionary processes and life forms.

In order to explain how a breakthrough in embryology can help evolution, Dawkins takes the example of Kaleidoscopic Embryology. Different lineages possess different embryologies and the point Dawkins makes is that in the case of certain embryologies the variations that the embryology is capable of producing will be evolutionarily more promising than variations produced by other embryologies. Better may be taken to mean

more likely to throw up a great radiation of new forms, as the mammals did after the dinosaurs went extinct. (Richard Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, Penguin 1996, p. 205)

The basic premise is that organisms possessing symmetric bodies (left-right symmetry using 1 mirror or more complex symmetries like that of starfish) have an evolutionary advantage over those who do not. In other words, it is desirable that



the left and right sides of an organism develop like mirror images along the mid-section or be reflected along the mirror planes if the organism has a 4-way or higher symmetry. The reason for this is that “the best plan for the left side (best in terms of natural selection) will most likely also be the best plan for the right side as well”. Moreover symmetry allows the beneficial mutations to get mirrored across all the points of symmetry (e.g. a mutation that sharpens the edges of a starfish gets mirrored 10 times, on the 5 limbs and on both sides of a limb, which has left-right symmetry). An asymmetrical organism after getting a lucky mutation on the left side will have to wait for another mutation to get the change on the right side whereas a symmetrical organism will get mutations on both sides along the plane of symmetry.

From this it follows that those embryologies that are unconstrained and can produce both symmetric and asymmetric forms result in wasteful effort when asymmetric forms are produced. On the other hand, Kaleidoscopic Embryologies which are “constrained” to produce symmetrical forms (the argument also holds for embryologies that produce repeating segments repeated along a line, as in the case of insects) are more efficient since they do not produce forms that have a limited evolutionary future. This is not ordinary Darwinian evolution but a case of higher-level evolution that impacts evolvability.

In conclusion Dawkins writes:

The origin of the chromosome, of the bounded cell, of organised meiosis, diploidy and sex, of the eukaryotic cell, of multicellularity, of gastrulation, of molluscan torsion, of segmentation — each of these may have constituted a watershed event in the history of life. Not just in the normal Darwinian sense of assisting individuals to survive and reproduce, but watershed in the sense of boosting evolution itself in ways that seem entitled to the label progressive. It may well be that after, say, the invention of multicellularity, or the invention of metamerism, evolution was never to be the same again. In this sense there may be a one-way ratchet of progressive innovation in evolution.

*(A Devil's Chaplain, p. 217)*

### **Ernst Mayr — Progress in Lineages**

Ernst Mayr, hailed as the Darwin of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adopts an adaptationist definition suggested by Dawkins for discussing progress. According to him, structural complexity, dominance of Earth by a group or emancipation from environment (Huxley, 1942) are all invalid criteria for any discussion on progressiveness. His definition of progress is the criteria for evolutionary success itself and progress essentially a successful passage through the sieve that natural selection represents, for

the gist of every selection event is to favour individuals that have succeeded in finding a progressive answer to the current problems.

(Ernst Mayr, *op. cit.*, p. 215)

These answers include development of multicellularity, development of specialised organs, endothermy, warm-bloodedness, parental care, large central nervous system etc. "The summation of all of these steps is evolutionary progress." However the process is subject to natural selection and is not teleological in any sense.

In his book, *Towards a New Philosophy of Biology*, he discusses two of the above progressive steps ("which have objective validity") as a yardstick for judging evolutionary progress. The first is "parental care" which was made possible by internal fertilisation. Parental care allows an additional channel, a non-genetic one for the transfer of information from parent to child. Such information which includes behavioural training, passing on of food preferences (e.g. from the mother via feeding) etc. is of critical importance in the struggle for survival. The need to store such information in turn creates selection pressure for improved storage system and leads to an "enlarged central nervous system" (Ernst Mayr, *Towards a New Philosophy of Biology*, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 251-52). Both post-natal care and brain enlargement along with speech lead to the rise of culture as we know it today and which sets man apart.

The second criterion that qualifies as evolutionary progress, is the successful emergence of new species. Each incipient species is an evolutionary experiment, a leap for evolution but a leap into the unknown. There is no way to know upfront

whether the new niche it enters is a dead end or the entrance into a large new adaptive zone. . . . The evolutionary significance of species is now quite clear . . . The species are the real units of evolution, as the temporary incarnation of harmonious, well-integrated gene complexes. And speciation, the production of new gene complexes capable of ecological shifts, is the method by which evolution advances. Without speciation there would be no diversification of the organic world, no adaptive radiation and no evolutionary progress.

(*Ibid.*, p. 253)

The reason speciation constitutes progress is that every new species must displace a pre-existing one and hence must represent some improvement over the previous species, some advantage favoured by natural selection.

## Morality and Ethics

While Mayr has argued against a teleological interpretation of Darwinism and has time and again pointed out that any such claim is incompatible with good science and the search for final causes (finalism) is futile, he does accept that certain trends in evolution can be deemed progressive. Other than the two cases cited above, it is interesting to see how Mayr differs from ultra neo-Darwinists regarding morality and ethics.

Altruism in the natural world has been always a topic for intense debate, partly since the apparent difference in the extent and quality of altruistic behaviour (and the related codes of ethics and morality) between *Homo sapiens* and rest of the natural world is so drastic that it was often used to claim a special place for man. This prompted an intense debate between those who view altruism as a cultural artifact (and hence unique to human and primate species) and others who view it primarily as an extension of kin and reciprocal altruism found among social animals and hence prefer an explanation in terms of fitness and survival.

It has often been seen that among social animals (which are usually found in kin-based groups), when a member spots a predator, it warns the rest of the group by calling out, thereby increasing their chances of survival while reducing its own. Such altruistic behaviour has been the subject of several studies and the standard interpretation is that such a caller, while reducing its own chances of survival, is nevertheless helping the survival of its genotype. Hence such behaviour is strictly speaking egoistical and not altruistic. It helps the caller's kin group (which includes offspring, siblings, cousins etc.) to survive and reproduce better *vis-à-vis* other such kin groups present in the area. The other form of altruism — called inclusive fitness altruism — found in the natural world is reciprocal, e.g. the relation between crocodile and the birds that clean the reptile's teeth. It's a case where both benefit from each other and no true altruism is involved.

It has been argued by some that all human ethics and morals can be explained by the above two varieties of altruism — inclusive fitness altruism and reciprocal altruism — and that is all there really is. The raw egoistical instincts have over the ages picked up a veneer of moral and ethical codes but below that veneer all our behaviour can be explained in terms of fitness and survival.

Mayr points out that a full discussion of ethics gets into issues related to choice and free will which are best handled by philosophers, but even looking at humans purely biologically, he does not subscribe to the above hypotheses. At a certain point in the evolution of humans, the close-knit kin groups enlarged to include non-related members and gradually into a larger social group. Such an extension of kin group and the resultant extension of altruism to genetically unrelated group members has been observed in certain primate species. Initially such a shift would have been based on inclusive fitness altruism probably since increased group size would have

led to better stake for limited resources of food and shelter but gradually, as the size increased and the brain's capacity for decision-making too increased, it would have been replaced by true ethics based on free will and decision-making. This transition from egoistic altruism to true ethics as per Mayr, is the most important step towards humanisation and its role in evolution has not yet been sufficiently stressed. Hence, according to Mayr:

... the moral norms according to which the members of a group decide whether a particular action is either right or wrong are not a result of biological evolution but of cultural evolution. (*Ibid.*, p. 81)

Mayr further stresses the role of leaders in bringing about this change, the implication being clear, that while so far evolution has depended on the interplay between chance and necessity but now with our species having established a true social culture, any further change can be brought about through ideas and leadership. He writes:

Genuine ethics is the result of the thought of cultural leaders. We are not born with a feeling of altruism towards outsiders, but acquire it through cultural learning. It requires the redirecting of our inborn altruistic tendencies towards a new target: outsiders. (*What Evolution Is*, p. 259)

### **A Pause for Punctuated Equilibrium**

Recall that Gould, after establishing that the extreme right tail is a passive result of evolutions (and bacteria are the true representatives of the life on Earth), had further, disallowed the *Homo sapiens* claim to any special status even within the right tail. His position is that the appearance of humans in the right tail is nothing but a lucky lottery ticket. The source of this claim lies in his theory of Punctuated Equilibrium and the many issues that it stirred in the Darwinian cauldron. It remains to this day, more than 25 years after it was proposed, the most hotly debated and rancorous issue in evolutionary biology. A discussion of the theory, its representations and misrepresentations, its growth, metamorphosis and critique will probably fill up several library shelves; but in brief the specific suggestion that leads to the "lottery ticket" suggestion is this.

Darwin (and those who strictly adhere to Darwinian tenets) emphasises the gradual nature of evolutionary change, which occurs slowly with natural selection acting on every new generation. Thus, natural selection, acting through micro-evolutionary steps results in macro-evolutionary changes like the origin of new species. Darwin was well aware that the fossil records depicting such changes were almost

non-existent at his time. This however, did not change the nature of the explanation since it was widely believed that the fossil record is imperfect since fossilisation is a chance process. This status quo prevailed (though alternative mechanisms of speciation were suggested by Mayr and others). However, in 1972, in a landmark paper S. J. Gould and Niles Eldredge suggested that the fossil record may not be so patchy after all. In short, they suggested that fossil records show a particular species continuing unchanged for millions of years (stasis) and then the fossil record is marked by “sudden” appearance of new species and disappearance of the existing species. This is not due to imperfection in the fossil record but represents the true picture; it is the mode in which evolutionary change occurs. For very obvious reasons this suggestion led to a lot of initial hostility and sparked several debates especially on the rates of evolutionary change, species selection (or species turnover rate), the role of natural selection vs. chance, mechanisms of speciation, macro-evolution vs. micro-evolution etc.

Till Gould and Eldredge upset the cart, natural selection was seen as the primary factor that shaped evolution and was seen as the force that was responsible for both micro- and macro-evolutionary phenomena (I am not suggesting that this is untrue, but stating Gould’s point of view). However take the scenario that led to the extinction of dinosaurs. No one can suggest that, till the meteor struck, they were not well adapted for life on Earth. They were honed into perfection by millions of years of natural selection and were the dominant life forms on Earth (with the exception of bacteria). But they went extinct in one geological blip (when the meteor struck). Mammals, which then succeeded them, made full use of the vacant niche and prospered. So were the mammals selected by natural selection or were dealt a lottery ticket by the fateful meteor? Gould has questioned the efficacy of natural selection in explaining every evolutionary change (but has not questioned natural selection itself) and has consistently argued for “plurality” in evolutionary theory, in this case the plurality of explanations by using both natural selection and chance (lottery tickets dealt out by nature in the form of extinction events which have occurred periodically).

### **Robert Wright — A Critique of Chance**

Wright, a journalist and writer on evolution (his famous work on Evolutionary Psychology is *The Moral Animal*) wrote a scathing critique of Gould’s version of progress in an article in *The New Yorker*. (“The Accidental Creationist”, in the issue of December 13, 1999)

Wright’s contention is expressed with a typical journalistic panache:

. . . there's a difference between saying it took great luck for you to be the winner and saying it took great luck for there to be a winner. This is the distinction off which lotteries, casinos, and bingo parlors make their money. In the game of evolution, I submit, it was just a matter of time before one species or another raised its hand (or, at least, its grasping appendage) and said, "Bingo!"

Wright here is referring to a major divide amongst evolutionary scientists — whether the evolution of intelligence is a predictable outcome of Darwinian evolution or not. In other words, if we rewound the tape of life and started off at the beginning, would intelligence evolve again? And the related issue — how predictable is the evolution of self-conscious intelligence?

So while Gould's lottery may wipe off most lineages (it's like playing an extreme version of Russian roulette with 5 out of 6 slots loaded), does that mean that the properties that the species embody too get eradicated? Wright argues that natural selection's genius has resulted in the same technologies being re-invented again and again during the course of evolution. Most of these are sensory technologies since natural selection is partial to them:

Why is natural selection so attentive to sensory technologies? Because they facilitate adaptively flexible behaviour. And what else does that? The ability to process all this sensory data and adjust behaviour accordingly. In other words: brains — that is, intelligence as an abstract property. It is natural selection's demonstrable affinity for certain properties — its tendency to invent them and nurture them independently in myriad species — which renders trivial Gould's truism about how bad luck can wipe out any one species or group of species. The fates of particular species may depend on the luck of the draw. But the properties they embody were in the cards — at least, in the sense that the deck was stacked heavily in their favour. (Robert Wright, *Non Zero*, <http://www.nonzero.org/newyorker.htm>)

In Wright's view the appearance of intelligence is a given in a world where the invention of sensory technology is the key to differential survival. Living beings are at the very basic level a physical entity that propagates. Any physical entity will interact with the environment and other physical entities through touch, smell, sight and sound. Natural selection is bound to select mutations which result in development of sensory technology since the ability to sense the environment (the dim shape of a predator or a prey, the direction of light, sound waves from other bodies travelling through a fluid) is the key to survival and propagation. Dawkins argues on similar lines when writing about the utility of small changes in the direction of a complex structure like the eye. In response to creationists' contention (trying to question the evolution of complex organs via natural selection), "What use is half an eye", he explains that the

difference between total blindness and blurry partial vision can be a matter of life and death for an animal. It may not help it to see, but at a critical juncture it may allow it to sense the presence of a predator. So animals with blurry vision will reduce their chance of predation by a fraction and hence will be favoured by natural selection. Just being able to detect the direction of the light has all sorts of evolutionary advantages. (Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker, Making Tracks Through Animal Space*, Penguin 1991). Similarly 6% vision is better than 5% and so on. There is no denying the fact that advances in sensory technology are the key to survival.

Intelligence then starts off as a basic command centre to meaningfully process sensory data from various sources and via various organs and enable an informed decision-making thereby increasing the odds of survival. As the species branch off and the struggle gets more intense the technologies too advance and become sophisticated. Extinction does not change the basic physical character of the world and the aftermath of any such event will see the rise of same trends in evolution.

He writes:

If we define it (intelligence) broadly enough — as the processing of information to orchestrate adaptively flexible behaviour — then it appeared too early, at the very base of the tree of life, to have kept getting reinvented later, in the tree's branches. (Even *E. coli* bacteria “know” enough to find new environs if their surroundings are low in carbon.) Still, greater intelligence is something that has been invented billions of times. In all kinds of animal lineages — in mammals, fish, reptiles, insects, birds — there has been extensive growth in behavioural flexibility, and the growth has often come in small increments. Add up all those increments, and what do you have? A pattern. (*Ibid.*)

Thus for Wright, the birth of an intelligent self-conscious entity sooner or later is a near certainty, however many times one may rewind the tape of life. There are several evolutionary biologists who support this view and quite many who do not.

### **E. O. Wilson — The Peak of Biodiversity**

The well-known entomologist and the world's foremost authority on ants, E. O. Wilson, in his best-selling book on evolution, *The Diversity of Life*, offers an ecological view of progress which is close to that of Mayr. While evolution itself cannot have a goal, since goals imply a behavioural response of organisms, “are formulated as a part of their survival strategies” and are “ex-post-facto responses so life is ruled by the immediate past and the present, not by the future”, yet, if we look at the evolutionary history from the point of biodiversity we see that:

during the past billion years, animals as a whole evolved upward in body size, feeding and defensive techniques, brain and behavioural complexity, social organisation and precision of environmental control — in each case farther from the non-living state than their simpler antecedents did.... Progress, then, is the property of the evolution of life as a whole by almost any conceivable intuitive standard, including the acquisition of goals and intentions in the behaviour of animals. It makes little sense to judge it irrelevant. Attentive to the adjuration of C. S. Pierce, let us not pretend to deny in our philosophy what we know in our hearts to be true. (E. O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, p. 187)

Wilson points out that notwithstanding extinction episodes, the biodiversity trend in the past 600 million years has been upward and now in the present epoch we may be seeing the peak of biodiversity. While it is estimated that 99% of all species that have occurred on Earth are now extinct, the fact remains that post every mass extinction, the diversity thrusts upward and Wilson's conjecture is that no "phyla" has ever gone extinct. It is almost as if life offered a self-topping credit card that not only replenishes whatever is lost, it adds to the balance. In Wilson's definition of progress, as in the case of Mayr, the very nature of life is progressive.

### **Christian de Duve — A Meaningful Life**

Christian de Duve, who won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1974 for his work on the structural and functional organisation of the cell, warns against overplaying the role of chance when dealing with evolution. Simply because the mutations that provide the variation leading to differential survival and propagation of lineages are random events does not imply that the entire evolutionary mechanism is random. In that sense, de Duve is closer to the views of Ernst Mayr who stresses that in the two-step process it is only the first step that is dominated by chance.

de Duve points out that

evolution does not operate in a world of infinite possibilities in which only a throw of dice decides which possibility will become reality. (Christian de Duve, *Vital Dust*, Basic Books, 1995, p. 294)

His reasoning, briefly stated, is that mutations are random events but not all areas of the genome are equally sensitive to mutagenic agents and neither are all genetic mutations equally significant. The environment and the body plan also play a crucial role in the direction of evolutionary change, for:



Pre-existing body plans limit the possibilities of viable change. Once a direction has been taken, the possible scope of future change narrows . . . (*Ibid.*, p. 295)

Hence evolution goes through a funneling process where previous changes set the direction for further changes. Chance mutations continue to offer possibilities of change but only a few mutations will really result in changes. This is exactly how so many lineages share the same body plan and is the reason we see lineages at all. Moreover environment is the big factor that selects by allowing certain paths and blocking others. de Duve favours a view of evolution where the central trunk of life is shared across most organisms and this central trunk has not come across by mere chance. Chance plays a bigger role in “variation along a central theme”. He writes:

. . . the history of life on Earth allows less leeway to contingency and unpredictability than current fashion claims. Just as the proverbial forest is hidden by its trees, the tree of life itself is hidden by its luxurious canopy. The realm of contingency lies mostly in the millions of the outer twigs and branches, where chance was given full scope to play innumerable variations with whatever blueprint was provided by the parent limb. (*Ibid.*, p. 296)

de Duve favours a view where life is not seen as an accident, never to be repeated, but as the very commonplace manifestation of matter and the Universe is suffused with it. Moreover the drive towards larger brains, intelligence and conscious thought is bound to manifest wherever life is present simply due to the selective advantages that such a development offers. His conclusion is that both Life and conscious thought are a fundamental manifestation of matter and while the life forms may vary, they will, over the course of evolution, come to possess, faculties that allow them to sense, act and communicate. The universe generates and supports life and in turn life supports thought.

*(To be continued)*

SAHASTRARASHMI

## LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of October 2010)

### 9. Images for the Imageless

WHAT a pother it has been for all the great philosophers to concretise the Absolute!

But where would our poetry and imagination be if man had given up all attempts to know the unknown? There would be no science, no philosophy, no art, no poetry, no progress! To limit the limitless as a perceptible image, to contain the vasts of consciousness in a representation however vague! The Tamil poet Thayumanava (18<sup>th</sup> century) tries his best:

What is the One that glows all over  
Without any absence anywhere;  
That which is full of Ananda;  
And is filled with grace; that has willed  
The universes to remain within  
The space of its grace;  
What is that one which has grown  
As the life of life? Which remains beyond  
Mind and speech? About whom  
A million religions argue,  
“Our god”, “my god”!  
Which is macro of everything,  
A consciousness all-capable,  
Is image of happiness, eternal;  
It is unbound by night and day;  
That is close to my thoughts,  
Looking upon everything as that space  
Of silence; to That, let us offer salutations!<sup>1</sup>

Thayumanava is sure of one thing. This is an image of total happiness, *paripurna-ānanda*.

Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Delight of Existence’. And the coming down of this *paripurna-ānanda* marks the opening steps of evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo:

1. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

An involution of the Divine Existence, the spiritual Reality, in the apparent inconscience of Matter is the starting-point of the evolution. But that Reality is in its nature an eternal Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence: the evolution must then be an emergence of this Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence, not at first in its essence or totality but in evolutionary forms that express or disguise it.<sup>2</sup>

Fine. But what is this Delight of Existence? Can it be seen, felt, or articulated? I asked my father during one of our morning walks to the Ramakrishna Beach at Waltair. He did not reply immediately. We reached the sands and sat down watching the sun rise on the Bay of Bengal. Half a century ago, the beach was a vast stretch with hardly any building but plenty of fishermen's huts. Some children from the huts had come out to play on the sands. While they ran around in a game, one child stood alone playing with a piece of rag. It threw the cloth up, waved it or when it flew away ran behind it and was totally absorbed with her rag. "Not a care in the world and look at the unselfconscious smile on her face," Father said. "This, this is the Delight of Existence. When you are just happy, no more!"

As we read *The Life Divine* we realise the need for graspable images like the happy child that give us some idea of the Absolute. We learn to cultivate a kind of double vision that does make imaging the imageless possible. Sri Aurobindo first teaches us how traditional Vedantic knowledge has dealt with the subject "by exceeding the evidence of the senses and piercing beyond the walls of the physical mind."<sup>3</sup>

But our nature sees things through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as idea and as fact and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience.<sup>4</sup>

With this self-confidence that all of us are born with an innate ability to create the image for that which we seek to concretise, we also learn that we have already unfurled our aspiration to overcome the limitations imposed by the physical:

For instance, it is possible to develop the power of appreciating accurately without physical means the weight of an object which we hold in our hands. Here the sense of contact and pressure is merely used as a starting-point, just as the data of sense-experience are used by the pure reason, but it is not really the sense of touch which gives the measure of the weight to the mind; that

2. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 710.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 21, p. 66.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

finds the right value through its own independent perception and uses the touch only in order to enter into relation with the object.<sup>5</sup>

Well, do I go for the balance or measuring cup every time I make *sambhar* or *chutney*? The hand moves automatically taking in various amounts of *dal* or salt or ginger and the outcome is never too unsatisfactory! It is thus that without our realising it, Sri Aurobindo sprinkles with a prodigal hand in our consciousness possibilities of recognising the imageless Absolute. He encourages us to go on further. If we can make use of the sense-experience to gain knowledge which has no connection with the sense-organs, we can use our Mind for thought-transmission too! The extension of our faculties, physical and otherwise, are endless. The attempt to extend our faculties calls for yoga. By this means we can extend our frontiers of “the knowledge of the universe”. Apparently the new experiences will come as images to help our comprehension and slowly we move from the known to the unknown, and thereby making the unknown a known entity. Is it quibbling? No! All are of the same One; we are not able to see it as the Whole, for we are like the Queen of Aswapati.

When the word of fate is uttered by Rishi Narad indicating the time-limit imposed on the life of Satyavan, Savitri’s mother wants her to choose another young man as her life’s companion. On Savitri’s refusal, the Queen feels frustrated. Was it for this that she had brought up her only daughter with love and care? Was her darling girl destined for a dark future? Is not life a meaningless round of senseless games stopped at random by a blind force?

A great Illusion then has built the stars.  
But where then is the soul’s security,  
Its poise in this circling of unreal suns?  
Or else it is a wanderer from its home  
Who strayed into a blind alley of Time and chance  
And finds no issue from a meaningless world.  
Or where begins and ends Illusion’s reign?  
Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream,  
Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance.<sup>6</sup>

Rishi Narad’s answer to the Queen is really Sri Aurobindo’s revelatory word of comfort and inspiration to all of us who are unable to achieve the whole view regarding the Absolute.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

6. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 442.

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?  
 Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives:  
 He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,  
 A Light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross.  
 A darkness stands between thyself and him,  
 Thou canst not hear or feel the marvellous Guest,  
 Thou canst not see the beatific sun.  
 O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,  
 Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.<sup>7</sup>

Ignorance is also a concept which does not have an image, but Sri Aurobindo is not daunted. Ignorance is a "brilliant curtain"! Covering ourselves with these colourful curtains of material life, have we not become ignorant too? Tapasya for a total vision, then. And sure enough, a time will come when we would be able to go beyond this partial vision and apprehend the totality of existence imaged as something that is recognisable for our perception. This intimation that draws us to the intuitive consciousness is not as easy as it sounds but it would be the first step towards total comprehension of the One Existent:

At the most in the phenomenon of self-awareness or behind it, we get sometimes a glimpse of something immovable and immutable, something that we vaguely perceive or imagine that we are beyond all life and death, beyond all change and formation and action. Here is the one door in us that sometimes swings open upon the splendour of a truth beyond and, before it shuts again, allows a ray to touch us, — a luminous intimation which, if we have the strength and firmness, we may hold to in our faith and make a starting-point for another play of consciousness than that of the sense-mind, for the play of Intuition.<sup>8</sup>

A door that opens and sends a ray upon us and shuts again? Rather interesting but not easily intelligible, perhaps. Or, so I thought. Till I could find this exact image in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Following a story-line is always much easier than pursuing a line of reasoning dealing with concepts. This is one of the reasons why I find it is "easier" to read *Savitri* than *The Life Divine*. Here was the King Aswapati performing yoga for a boon from the Goddess Savitri. 'The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds' is a mass of intricately-webbed images including the one that has come down to us from traditional lore, the Two-in-one creative force of Purusha-Prakriti. Aswapati recognises this image in his meditative mood and presently he becomes aware of the Supreme Mother who is the source of this twin force. As Aswapati goes deeper

7. *Ibid.*

8. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 73.

into his mind, he feels the divine presence of the Supreme Mother but it is not tangible enough for him to have something to hold on to, when he has to return to earthly life as usual. It is then that Sri Aurobindo shows us a fleeting picture of a lady raising her veil.

Mute in the fathomless passion of his will  
 He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.  
 Then in a sovereign answer to his heart  
 A gesture came as of worlds thrown away,  
 And from her raiment's lustrous mystery raised  
 One arm half-parted the eternal veil.  
 A light appeared still and imperishable.<sup>9</sup>

Before he can take in completely her beauty, absorb “the ravishing enigma of her eyes” and retain “the mystic outline of a face”, the veil is dropped back in its place. This is an image that is so much with us all the time in India, and teaches us that perhaps, in the old Rajasthani lady swinging her deep-red skirts, carrying a huge pot of water on her half-veiled head or the young bride flushing with joy and re-adjusting her bridal veil in front of the *havan*, it is actually the Divine Mother who is gazing at us. But we are no aspirants like Aswapati and let the mystic moments go by.

In one sense, living with *The Life Divine* could be as long as one's life and as difficult as the yoga of Aswapati. The journey's end keeps retreating but the desire to know, to understand and even seek to live the philosophy in this masterpiece of Sri Aurobindo continues to beckon us all our lives.

A Being intimate and unnameable,  
 A wide compelling ecstasy and peace  
 Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,  
 Approached and faded from his soul's pursuit  
 As if for ever luring him beyond.  
 Near, it retreated; far, it called him still.  
 Nothing could satisfy but its delight:  
 Its absence left the greatest actions dull,  
 Its presence made the smallest seem divine.<sup>10</sup>

This is enough to convince Aswapati that what is generally known as the Absolute is not Unknowable. What is vaguely identified as the One can be caught in the net

9. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 295.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

of thought which rises to the plane of intuition. Sri Aurobindo shows us a fleeting picture of a lady raising her veil. And what was it that happened in that mystic moment between raising the veil and dropping it back?

Abolishing the signless emptiness,  
 Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,  
 Piercing the limitless Unknowable,  
 Into the liberty of the motionless depths  
 A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.  
 The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak  
 Imaged itself in a surprising beam  
 And built a golden passage to his heart  
 Touching through him all longing sentient things.<sup>11</sup>

Yet another perfect image, the only image of the Absolute that is possible for a human being to understand.

The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak  
 Imaged itself in a surprising beam<sup>12</sup>

It takes us back to the description in *The Life Divine* about the door which occasionally opens within us

. . . upon the splendour of a truth beyond and, before it shuts again, allows a ray to touch us, — a luminous intimation which, if we have the strength and firmness, we may hold to in our faith and make a starting-point for another play of consciousness than that of the sense-mind, for the play of Intuition.<sup>13</sup>

In *Savitri* this image of light occurs in various forms till we come to the ‘Book of Double Twilight’. The “surprising beam” becomes a mass of light that consumes Death itself:

A pressure of intolerable force  
 Weighed on his unbowed head and stubborn breast;  
 Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,  
 Light was a luminous torture in his heart,  
 Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves;  
 His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze.<sup>14</sup>

11. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 73.

14. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 667.

One of the delights of living with *The Life Divine* has been these unexpected linkages and then for several days it has been a daze of having “achieved” something. The images keep rising in our inward eye, while reading the book. As when that eel-like term “consciousness” needs to be explained to the uninitiated. Instead of worrying myself about the subtle differences in nomenclature, I feel at peace when Sri Aurobindo gives images to the imageless concepts, leading me from the known to the unknown. Of the energy that flows as man’s thoughts and actions:

This energy is a movement of Consciousness-Force concentrated on a temporal stream of inward and outward workings. But we know that behind this stream of energy there is a whole sea of consciousness which is aware of the stream, but of which the stream is unaware; for this sum of surface energy is a selection, an outcome from all the rest that is invisible. That sea is the subliminal self, the superconscient, the subconscious, the intraconscient and circumconscient being, and holding it all together the soul, the psychic entity.<sup>15</sup>

Quite a verbal gymnastics, but Sri Aurobindo was not interested in creating a spectacle of words. Here is a logical image when he describes consciousness as the sea. An inexhaustible entity, the ocean. As inexhaustible is consciousness. All the riches imaginable are found in its depths as also all the horrors we can imagine. As for the “temporal stream”, that is “the natural, the superficial man”. Man thinks he is acting but actually it is the inexhaustible consciousness that is in control of the situation. Man’s actions may be entangled with ignorance as streams do get enmeshed with the thick growth of creepers. But not his consciousness which is like the huge ocean steadily sending out waves.

And that sea, the real self, the integral conscious being, the integral force of being, is not ignorant; even the wave is not essentially ignorant, — for it contains within itself all the consciousness it has forgotten and but for that it could not act or endure at all, — but it is self-oblivious, absorbed in its own movement, too absorbed to note anything else than the movement while that continues to preoccupy it. A limited practical self-oblivion, not an essential and binding self-ignorance, is the nature of this exclusive concentration which is yet the root of that which works as the Ignorance.<sup>16</sup>

This image has clarified to me a common usage in Tamil which speaks of a realised person as an *alai adangiya samuthiram*, “the sea whose waves have grown still”. Where is *ajnāna* (ignorance) for one who is not bothered by the complications of

15. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 605.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 605-06.



external living? One who is not haunted by the past and is always pressing towards the future with faith in the Divine? One who never worries if milk has boiled over on the gas stove or a message has been received that a dear relation is struck down in an accident? For such souls, it is always the thought, “what is to be done next?” Then he gets down to the job. But the waves keep coming, that is the problem. I have found that even without the wretched television set at home, I get bombarded by waves as I walk on the roads. The advertisement hoardings pull your attention by literally forcing your eyes upon them. And always there is a mike-set blaring the lecture of some party screaming at another, politics being what it is in India. There is a constant attempt to make the consciousness murky, bewildered, rudderless. I try to still the waves by trying to remember the sequence of lines in *Savitri*:

A bull-throat bellowed with its brazen tongue;  
 Its hard and shameless clamour filling Space  
 And threatening all who dared to listen to truth  
 Claimed the monopoly of the battered ear;  
 A deafened acquiescence gave its vote,  
 And braggart dogmas shouted in the night  
 Kept for the fallen soul once deemed a god  
 The pride of its abysmal absolute.<sup>17</sup>

That explains why Ignorance holds us in thrall. The waves cannot be stilled by the average man going about his daily chores. He must needs get victimised by the waves. Hopefully the waves but belong to the surface. The still deeps of our consciousness are safe.

Sri Aurobindo, however, does not leave us exposed to the disturbing waves, if we do not wish to be sucked into that whirlpool. Our slavery and redemption are both in our hands. So how do we escape the battering waves, rise above them and keep them still? Though we continue to be the weak “superficial man”, we can seek the “the power of exclusive concentration” in our chosen field. What a simple and absorbing explanation of the process we have here!

The actor in moments of great intensity forgets that he is an actor and becomes the part that he is playing on the stage; not that he really thinks himself Rama or Ravana, but that he identifies himself for the time being with the form of character and action which the name represents and so completely as to forget the real man who is playing it. So the poet forgets himself, the man, the worker, in his work and is for the moment only the inspired impersonal energy which works itself out in formation of word and rhythm; of all else he is oblivious.<sup>18</sup>

17. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 216.

18. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 609.

This is how unknown to ourselves we are drawn into the operative part of the Aurobindonian philosophy that blazons forth: “All life is Yoga.” Yoga for each one of us gets its own image. For the sculptor at Sravanabelagola it was the figure of Adinatha; for the German author Goethe hunched over his notebook in the library, it was Dr. Faustus; for Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary it was Mount Everest. Approached thus, the Absolute ceases to be an unknown, unknowable concept. It becomes a realised experience. The impersonal energy is now at work shaping a very personal icon and for the nonce we have no thought for anything else. Like the master-archer Arjuna who could only see the eye of the bird on the branch high up in the tree. For the time being, his brothers, cousins, the teacher Drona himself did not exist. That is yoga, union with the Sea of Consciousness.

But am I limiting the Absolute by using such images like Arjuna shooting down the bird? Obviously not, if I am to understand Sri Aurobindo. The Absolute is Absolute, *Purna* and nothing can lessen the waters of this universal consciousness. It contains life, mind and all that we know and all that we are not aware of as yet. It is time for me to go to my task of churning the curds. Living in this ancient house where generations of ancestors have been leading a ritualistic life that needed butter churned at home for being offered to the icon of Krishna worshipped by them, I continue the tradition. I tie the churning rod loosely to the erect rod set in a corner of the kitchen, place a pot of curds and water and begin churning. “Chalak, chalak”, the rhythmic sounds fill the room as I think of the cycle of Krishna legends. This scent of fresh buttermilk and the musical “chalak, chalak” made by the rod churning the buttermilk is a rich experience denied to the housewives of today who wield their mixies that screech loudly as weird jackals in the forests at night. The hands go forward and back and I am torn between the image of Yashoda tying Krishna with the churning rope and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo that assures me that churning curds too can be yoga. And then the truth suddenly strikes me: Where I had seen only white liquid before, what are these tiny blobs moving around? From whither have they separated themselves to be shaped into tiny balls by me? Perhaps the Absolute is the Sea of Consciousness from where I draw to myself an iconic shape, this volume of *The Life Divine*! Did the volume shape itself when Sri Aurobindo churned the Sea of Consciousness by the churning rod of his yoga?

Images for the imageless? My eyes fall upon a few lines in the opening chapter of the book, underlined by my father with a blue pencil long ago, an assurance that the Next Future is a thing decreed:

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God?<sup>19</sup>

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

19. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

## LEAFING THROUGH MEMORIES — STORIES TOLD FROM THE HEART

SOME books are written from the mind and some books are written from the heart. *Moments Eternal*<sup>1</sup> by Priti Das Gupta is a book that is written straight from the heart. But, make no mistake — it is also full of reflections that are beyond the ordinary. As a reading experience this volume leaves a deep impression on the reader. There are very few books which offer so intimate an account of the daily life of the Ashram in the middle of the last century and also so close a view of the Mother's interactions with those who were around her.

The contents of *Moments Eternal* are not entirely new to the reading public. Readers of *Mother India* will remember that it had been serialised chapter by chapter some years ago. For those who are not regular subscribers of the magazine, however, the publication of this book comes as a pleasant surprise because to them the story has remained incomplete, remembered only in bits and pieces. For those who may have read all the serialised chapters, reading the text once again in book form will be quite a different experience. On the one hand there is a certain pleasure in reading the various chapters in a continuous sequence, one after the other, because it allows the reader to remain in that atmosphere for as long as he wants to; on the other hand the anecdotes are so fascinating that one can reread them after a lapse of time and discover something new.

The book has a long story of its own. Priti Das Gupta wrote these reminiscences in Bengali and they were first serialised in the Bengali magazine *Srinwantu*. One can see that the chapters were written as individual essays, in a thematic manner, each standing on its own. Much later they were translated into English by Maurice Shukla and they appeared in *Mother India*. It is these translated chapters that have now been put together as a book.

On the surface, it would seem that in this substantial volume of nearly three hundred pages Priti-di is talking about her own life, her family and the Bengal she left behind when she came to Pondicherry. But in reality she is talking about that path which a human being takes when he or she lives only for the Divine. The book is an extraordinary collection of facts and a storehouse of information. There are stories of life in Bengal, anecdotes of life in the Ashram, episodes from the Indian Freedom Movement and eyewitness accounts of how the Mother actually guided the individual souls in their progress. Interwoven with these facts are Priti-di's own interpretations and reflections which come at times from the depths of her devotion,

1. *Moments Eternal* by Priti Das Gupta, translated from the Bengali by Maurice Shukla, published by Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry, 2009, 291 pp.

at times from the point of view of a dispassionate observer and at times from her intuitive mind.

This book brings back an era that has vanished. The places are still there but the people are gone forever and it seems as if the stories are out of an imaginary world where everything is in an ideal state. This epoch which comes alive before our eyes existed more than sixty years ago when there were no distractions and people did not pack their lives with endless activities. Although the outer world of the devotees and disciples who populate these stories was much simpler, there was an intensity of emotions in them which we do not find in our present times.

Today we have come to that inevitable juncture when those who had lived in very close proximity to the Mother are no more among the living and those who are coming to this path have little idea about the Mother's day-to-day life. To those who are young today, the Mother is something of an abstract idea, a person in a picture, the author of a book, a figure out of mythology. It is hard for them to believe that she was one of us, a loving human mother and an affectionate friend. It is especially difficult for many to see her as someone who could be full of plans and projects, fun and cheerfulness, someone who could crack jokes and laugh along with the young and the old. This book brings to the reading public this very human aspect of the Divine Mother.

There was a time when one could, in the course of the day, in a casual manner, get to hear stories of how the Mother participated in the day-to-day activities of the Ashram or about what she had said in a particular situation. Over the years, many such stories have come down to us, retold by one generation to the next. However, a written account is precious to us because it is permanent and is also accompanied by the thoughts of the person who was part of these events. Not only the broad outlines but also the rich details give us a picture of the times. Those who lived those wonderful moments with the Mother probably took it for granted and thought that what they knew was common knowledge and that there was no particular need to record those events, activities or conversations. But now many facts are lost and many anecdotes only vaguely remembered because the details have slipped away in the oral retellings. What was then considered a part of everyday life for those early *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* has now become part of history.

There are not too many reminiscences of the early *sadhaks* and *sadhikas*; among them this one stands out because these are stories of a young woman who was privileged to be close to the Mother and whose point of view is quite her own. The details that she notices would not have been perceived by many others. Her style remains simple, free of all pretensions and very clear. One gets the feeling that one is sitting next to Priti-di and listening to her tale, one can almost hear her laughter when she recounts something funny and her gasp when she talks of her mistakes.

Priti-di was a very shy person and was not the type who would attract attention to herself in any way. She was not at the centre of any group, nor the head of any

department. She was a teacher at the school and did her work in a very dedicated manner, carrying around her an atmosphere of affection and kindness. Generations of former students remember her as one of the best French teachers without whose skills of passing on the intricacies of French grammar they would never have known how to speak or write French correctly. In her later years, being hard of hearing she was not part of any collective activities. She had a few good friends and kept mostly to her little circle. One would not have imagined that there was so much within her heart.

Although at first one does not remember it, an important point to consider is that this book is an English translation of the original Bengali. For those who are unfamiliar with the work of translation let it be said that it is not as easy as it may seem. Words in one language do not always have an exact equivalent in another. Going from Bengali to English is like crossing over from one side of the world to the other. Each language has its own music and its own flavour. It is quite difficult to go from a language which is sweet and with great emotional suggestions like Bengali to a language like English which is rational, although not as much as French, and has a different set of nuances, following a different approach to expression.

The work of the translator is a difficult one because while remaining accurate, he has to keep the suggestions behind the words intact as well. It is at the same time a rational as well as an intuitive activity. Many a word can be understood in different ways but a good translator must pick the corresponding one which is closest in meaning in the context. The translator of this book has had to find a way of saying things, for example very typically Bengali expressions, which can never really be translated and make the book appear as if it was written in English by the author.

The difficulty that the translator faces is the task of creating a final translated text which must have a natural flow and must not seem as if it has been taken from another language. The skill lies in not letting the effort show. The translator's skill can be judged from the way he has managed to translate even Bengali verses into English with rhymes. This is the result of his long experience in the translation of Bengali texts, such as Pranab-da's reminiscences, into English.

Such works of translation go a long way in allowing a wider circle of readers to have access to records which are written in any one Indian language. For example, many of the early *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* came from Bengal or Gujarat and some of them wrote about their life in the Ashram in their own mother tongue. As a consequence, those who do not read Bengali or Gujarati are not even aware of the existence of these texts and hence translations become the only way by which a larger number of readers can get to know these first-hand experiences. Not only is it important to have translations from an Indian language into English but also from one Indian language into another.

In the flow of time we have moved forward and reached a phase when we have to find the Mother in our own hearts. But there is a great comfort in knowing that she

had taken a human form and gone through difficulties, through the ups and the downs of life and that we can turn to her inwardly, perhaps even address her as we would a close and compassionate friend. It makes us feel that she will understand all our problems because in this book we see the Mother as the teacher, the healer, the friend, the one who brings solace and the affectionate human mother. For those who are coming to the path of Integral Yoga now this book is a wonderful introduction.

In *Moments Eternal* Priti-di not only tells us so many interesting facts about the Mother but also shows us how to love her. And Maurice Shukla deserves all our appreciation for making it possible for us to read her collection of unforgettable memories.

SUNAYANA PANDA

If we want to have conversations with God (of course within us), is it possible?  
If yes, on what condition?

*God does not indulge in conversation.*

Does God ever become angry with us? If yes, when?

*When you believe He is angry.*

If we shed tears for God, does He ever shed a tear for us?

*Surely He has deep compassion for you, but His eyes are not of the kind that shed tears.*

The Mother

21 September 1964

(*Words of the Mother – II*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, pp. 23-24)