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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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O WILL OF GOD

O Will of God that stirrest and the Void
Is peopled, men have called thee force, upbued
Upon whose wings the stars borne round and round
Need not one hour of rest; light, form and sound
Are masks of thy eternal movement. We
See what thou choosest, but 'tis thou we see.

I Morcundeya, whom the worlds release,
The Seer, — but it is God alone that sees! —
Soar up above the bonds that hold below
Man to his littleness, lost in the show
Perennial which the senses round him build;
I find them out and am no more beguiled.
But ere I rise, ere I become the vast
And luminous Infinite and from the past
And future utterly released forget
These beings who themselves their bonds create,
Once I will speak and what I see declare.
The rest is God. There's silence everywhere.

My eyes within were opened and I saw.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 520)

THE KARMA YOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of April 2010)

Chapter I.

The Law of Renunciation.

IV. God in Man and in all Creatures.

BUT when the Karmayogin has seen the Lord surrounding all things with His presence and all things existing only as transitory manifestations, idols or images in this divine Reality, what follows? It follows that just as this tree or that mountain exists only as an image or manifestation in the divine Reality, so also all creatures, men included, are merely images or manifestations in the same divine Reality. In other words what is real, living, eternal in you and me, is not our body, nor our vitality & its desires, nor our mind, nor our reason and understanding, but just the divine presence which pervades me and you as much as it pervades the tree and the mountain. And it is not the body, vitality, mind, reason or understanding which constitutes the presence of the Lord within us; for my body differs from yours, my vitality differs from yours, my mind differs from yours, my reason and understanding differ from yours: they differ even from themselves according to time and circumstances; but the Lord is one and unchanging. There must therefore be something deeper hidden within us than any of these things, something which is alone real, living and eternal. This something is called in the Vedanta the Self; it is Brahman or the Lord within each of his creatures. The Self is in the microcosm what Sacchidananda is in the macrocosm; it is the great pure luminous existence, self-conscious and self-blissful, which acts not, neither desires, but watches the infinite play of Prakriti in the life of the creature It informs. And just as by the power of Avidya Sacchidananda takes the semblance of a mighty Will or Force, Isha, creating endless multiplicity and governing, guiding and rejoicing in the interplay of worlds, so by the same power this Self or Witness in Man takes the semblance of a sublime Will creating for itself action and inaction, pleasure & pain, joy & sorrow, victory & defeat, guiding, governing & rejoicing in the activity of the apparent creature it informs, but unaffected and unbound by his works. This Will, which the Vedanta calls Ananda or Bliss and not will, must not be confused with mere volition or desire, for volition belongs to the outer & apparent man and not to the inner and

real. This Self is in me, it is also in you and every other being and in all it is the same Self, only the Will or Shakti manifests in different degrees, with a different intensity and manner of working and so with different qualities & actions in each separate creature. Hence the appearance of diversity and divisibility in what is really One and indivisible.

This divisibility of the Indivisible is one of those profound paradoxes of Vedantic thought which increasing Knowledge will show to be deep and far-reaching truths. It used to be implicitly believed that human personality was a single and indivisible thing; yet recently a school of psychologists has grown up who consider man as a bundle of various personalities rather than a single, homogeneous and indivisible consciousness. For it has been found that a single man can divide himself or be divided into several personalities, each living its own life and unconscious of the other, while yet again another personality may emerge in him which is conscious of the others and yet separate from all of them. This is true; nevertheless, the *man* all through remains one and the same, not only in body but in his psychical existence; for there is a deeper substratum in him which underlies all these divided personalities and is wider than all of them put together. The truth is that the waking personality is only the apparent man, not the real. Personality is the creation of memory, for memory is its basis and pedestal. If the pedestal, then, be divided and put apart, the super-structure also must be in the same act divided and put apart. But the waking memory is only a part, a selection of a wider latent memory which has faithfully recorded all that happens not in the man's present life only, but in all his past. The personality which corresponds with this latent unerring memory is the true personality of the man; it is his soul, one infinite and indivisible, and its apparent divisions are merely the result of Avidya, false knowledge, due to defective action of the waking memory. So the apparent division of the divine Self into many human selves, of the indivisible Paramatman into many Jivatmans, is simply the result of Avidya due to the action of the Maya or self-imposed illusion of Isha, the great Force who has willed that the One by this force of Maya should become phenomenally manifold. In reality, there is no division and the Self in me is the same as the Self in you and the same as the Self up yonder in the Sun. The unity of spiritual existence is the basis of all true religion and true morality. We know indeed that as God is not contained in His universe, but the universe is in Him, so also God is not contained within a man. When the Sruti says elsewhere that the Purusha lies hidden in the heart of our being and is no larger than the size of a man's thumb, it simply means that to the mind of man under the dominion of Avidya his body, vitality, mind, reason bulk so largely, the Spirit seems a small and indistinguishable thing indeed inside so many and bulky sheaths and coverings. But in reality, it is body, vitality, mind & reason forming the apparent man that are small and trifling and it is the Spirit or real man that is large, grandiose & mighty. The apparent man exists in & by the real, not the real in the apparent; the body is in the soul, not the soul in the body. Yet for the convenience

of language and our finite understanding we are compelled to say that the soul is in the body and that God is within the man; for that is how it naturally presents itself to us who use the mental standpoint and the language of a finite intelligence. The Lord, from our standpoint, is within all His creatures and He is the real self of all His creatures. My self and yourself are not really two but one. This is the second truth proceeding logically from the first, on which the Karmayogin has to lay fast hold.

V. Selflessness, the Basic Rule of Karma-Yoga

From the fundamental truth of one divine Reality pervading and surrounding all phenomenal objects and from its implied corollary, the identity of my Self with your Self, the Upanishad deduces a principle of action which holds good for all Karmayogins. "Abandon the world that thou mayst enjoy it, neither covet any man's possession." He that would save his soul, must first lose it. He who would enjoy the world, must first abandon it. Thus from an intellectual paradox the Upanishad proceeds to a moral paradox, and yet both are profound and accurate statements of fact. At first the reason revolts against an assertion so self-contradictory. If I put my food away from me, how can I enjoy it? If I throw away the sovereign in my hand, another may have the joy of it but how can I? I, Devadatta, am told to enjoy the world, yes, all that is in the world; yet I find that I have little enough to enjoy while my neighbour Harischandra has untold wealth. If I am to enjoy the world, how shall I proceed to my object? Not surely by abandoning the little I have, but by keeping fast hold on it and adding to it the much that Harischandra has. So would argue the natural man, rationally enough from his point of view, but so would not argue the Karmayogin. He will covet no man's possession, because he knows such terms as possession, mine, thine, to be false and illusory in the light of the secret tremendous truth he has got hold of, that there is nothing in this world real, desirable and worth calling by the name of bliss except Brahman, the eternal reality of things. Self-gratification and the possession of wealth and its enjoyments are transitory, illusory and attended with inevitable trouble and pain, but the enjoyment of one's identity with Brahman and the possession of Brahman are pure and undisturbed bliss. The more I possess of Him, the wider and nearer perfection will be my enjoyment. Brahman then is the only wealth the Karmayogin will covet. But how can we possess Brahman? By surrounding all things in the world with Him, by realizing Him in all things. If I am wealthy, the Lord is there in my wealth, but if I am poor, the Lord is there too in my poverty; because of His presence I can enjoy my poverty as much as I did my wealth. For it is not the wealth and the poverty which matter or are real, but only the feeling of the presence of the Lord in all things. That is one way in which I can enjoy the world by abandoning it; for the world is Brahman, the world is the Lord, and to him who has experience of it, all things are bliss, all things are

enjoyment. What ground then is there left for coveting another man's possessions? Harischandra possesses merely so much gold, estates, houses, Government paper; but I, Devadatta, in my cottage, possess the Lord of the Universe and am the master & enjoyer of the whole world. It is I who am rich and not Harischandra. That is the fulfilment of his discipline for the Karmayogin.

But let us go down many steps lower. I have not yet ascended the ladder, but am still climbing. I have not yet acquired the habitual consciousness of the presence of the Lord surrounding all things as the only reality for whose sake alone transitory phenomena are precious or desirable. How in this imperfect stage of development can the Karmayogin escape from covetousness and the desire for other men's possessions? By realising more & more the supreme bliss of a selfless habit of mind and selfless work. This is the way to his goal; this is his ladder. Unselfishness is usually imagined as the abnegation of self, a painful duty, a "mortification", something negative, irksome and arduous. That is a Western attitude, not Hindu; the European temperament is dominated by the body and the vital impulses; it undertakes altruism as a duty, a law imposed from outside, a standard of conduct and discipline; it is, in this light, something contrary to man's nature, something against which the whole man is disposed to rebel. That is not the right way to look at it. Unselfishness is not something outside the nature, but in the nature, not negative but positive, not a self-mortification and abnegation but a self-enlargement and self-fulfilment; not a law of duty but a law of self-development, not painful, but pleasurable. It is in the nature, only latent, and has to be evolved from inside, not tacked on from outside. The lion's whelp in the fable who was brought up among sheep, shrank from flesh when it was placed before him, but once he had eaten of it, the lion's instincts awoke and the habits of the sheep had no more delight for him. So it is with man. Selflessness is his true nature, but the gratification of the body and the vital impulses has become his habit, his second or false nature, because he has been accustomed to identify his body & vital impulses with himself. He, a lion, has been brought up to think himself a sheep; he, a god, has been trained to be an animal. But let him once get the taste of his true food, and the divinity in him awakes; the habits of the animal can please him no longer and he hungers after selflessness and selfless work as a lion hungers after his natural food. Only the feeling has to be evolved as a fulfilment of his nature, not painfully worked up to as a contravention of his nature. The man who regards selflessness as a duty, has not yet learned the alphabet of true altruism; it is the man who feels it as a delight and a natural craving, who has taken the right way to learn. The Hindu outlook here is the true outlook. The Hindu does not call the man who has risen above the gratification of desire a selfless man; he calls him आत्मवान्, the selfful man; that man is अनात्मवान्, that man has not found himself who still clings to the gratification of his body & vital impulses. Read that great drama of self-sacrifice, the Nagananda, and you will feel how different is the Hindu outlook from the Western; there self-sacrifice is not a painful and terrible

struggle but a glorious outpouring of the nature, a passionate delight. "It is only human nature," we say indulgently of any act of selfishness. But that is an error and thrice an error. It is not human nature, but animal nature; human nature is divine & selfless and the average selfish man is selfish not because of his humanity, but because his humanity is as yet undeveloped & imperfect. Christ, Buddha, these are the perfect men; Tom, Dick & Harry are merely animals slowly shaping into men.

VI. The Philosophical Justification of Altruism

The philosophical justification for this outlook is provided for in the fundamental position of Vedanta. सोऽहम्, I am He; Thou too art He; there is therefore no I and Thou, but only He. Brahman, Isha is my true self, the real Devadatta; Brahman, Isha is the true self of my neighbour, the real Harischandra. There is therefore really no Devadatta, no Harischandra, but my Self in the mental and bodily case called Devadatta and my Self in the mental and bodily case called Harischandra. If therefore Harischandra enjoys untold riches, it is I who am enjoying them; for Harischandra is my Self, — not my body in which I am imprisoned or my desires by which my body is made miserable, but my true self, the Purusha or real Man within me, who is the witness and enjoyer of all this sweet, bitter, tender, grand, beautiful, terrible, pleasant, horrible and wholly wonderful and enjoyable drama of the world which Prakriti enacts for his delectation. Once I experience this truth, I can take as much pleasure in the riches of Harischandra as if I myself were enjoying them; for I can thenceforth go out of my own self and so enter into the self of Harischandra, that his pleasure becomes my own. To do that I have simply to break down the illusory barrier of associations which confines my sense of self to my own body, mind & vitality. That this can be done, is a common experience of humanity, to which the name of love is given. Human evolution rises through love and towards love. This truth is instinctively recognised by all the great religions, even when they cannot provide any philosophical justification for a tenet to which they nevertheless attach the highest importance. The one law of Christianity which replaces all the commandments is to love one's neighbour as oneself, the moral ideal of Buddhism is selfless benevolence & beneficence to others; the moral ideal of Hinduism is the perfect sage whose delight and occupation is the good of all creatures (सर्वभूतहितरतः). It is always the same great ideal expressed with varying emphasis. But love in the sense which religion attaches to the word, depends on the realization of oneself in others. If, as Sankhya and Christian theology say, there are millions of different Purushas, if the real man in me is different and separate from the real man in another, one in kind but not in essence, there can be no feeling of identity; there can only be mental or material contact. From material contact nothing but animal feelings of passion & hatred can arise; from mental contact repulsion is as likely to arise as attraction. A

separate individual Self will live its own life, pursue its own gratification or its own salvation; it can have no ground, no impulse to love another as itself, because it cannot feel that the other is itself. The Vedanta provides in the realisation of a single Self and the illusory character of all division the only real explanation of this higher or spiritual love. Altruism in the light of this one profound revealing truth becomes natural, right and inevitable. It is natural because I am not really preferring another to myself, but my wider truer self to my narrower false self, God who is in all to my single mind and body, myself in Devadatta and Harischandra to myself in Devadatta alone. It is right because by embracing in my range of feelings the enjoyment of Harischandra in addition to my own I shall make my knowledge of the universality of Brahman an experience, and not merely an intellectual conception or assent; for experience and not intellectual conception is true knowledge. It is inevitable because that is my way of evolution. As I have risen from the animal to the man, so must I rise from the man to the God; but the basis of godhead is the realisation of oneself in all things. The true aim and end of evolution is the wider and wider realisation of the universal Brahman. Towards that goal we progress, with whatever tardiness, with whatever lapses, yet inevitably, from the falsehood of matter to the truth of spirit. We leave behind, first, the low animal stage of indolence, brutishness, ignorance, wrath, lust, greed and beast violence, or as we call it in our philosophy the *tamasic* condition and rise to various human activity and energy, the *rajasic* condition; from that again we must rise to the *sattwic* condition of divine equipoise, clarity of mind, purity of soul, high selflessness, pity, love for all creatures, truth, candour, tranquillity. Even this divine height is not the highest; we must leave it behind and climb up to the peak of all things where sits the bright and passionless Lord of all, lighting up with a single ray of His splendour a million universes. On that breathless summit we shall experience the identity of our Self not only with the Self of others, but with the All-Self who is the Lord and who is Brahman. In Brahman our evolution finds its vast end and repose.

VII. The Meaning of Renunciation

The Karmayogin therefore will abandon the world that he may enjoy; he will not seek, as Alexander did, to possess the whole world with a material lordship, but, as Gods do, to possess it in his soul. He will lose himself in his own limited being, that he may find himself illimitably in the being of others. The abandonment of the world means nothing less than this, that we give up our own petty personal joy and pleasure to bathe up to the eyes in the joy of others; and the joys of one man may be as great as you please, the united joys of a hundred must needs be greater. By renouncing enjoyment you can increase your enjoyment a hundredfold. That was ever the privilege of the true lover. If you are [a] true lover of a woman, it is her joys

far more than your own that make your happiness; if you are a true lover of your friends, their prosperity and radiant faces will give you a delight which you could never have found in your own small and bounded pleasures; if you are a true lover of your nation, the joy, glory and wealth of all its millions will be yours; if you are a true lover of mankind, all the joys of the countless millions of the earth will flow like an ocean of nectar through your soul. You will say that their sorrows too will be yours. But is not the privilege of sharing the sorrows of those you love a more precious thing than your own happiness? Count too the other happinesses which that partnership in sorrow can bring to you. If you have power, — and Yoga always brings some power with it, — you may have the unsurpassable joy of solacing or turning into bliss the sorrow of your friend or lover, or the sufferings and degradation of the nation for which you sacrifice yourself or the woes of the humanity in whom you are trying to realize God. Even the mere continuous patient resolute effort to do this is a joy unspeakable; even defeat in such a cause is a stern pleasure that strengthens you for new and invincible endeavour. And if you have not the power to relieve or the means to carry on the struggle, there is still left you the joy of suffering or dying for others. “Greater love than this has no man, that he should die for his friend.” Yes, but that greatest love of all means also the greatest joy of all. “It is a sweet and noble thing to die for one’s country.” How many a patriot in his last moments has felt that this was no empty poetical moralising, but the feeble understatement of a wonderful and inexpressible reality. They say that Christ suffered on the cross! The body suffered, doubtless, but did Christ suffer or did he not rather feel the joy of godhead in his soul? The agony of Gethsemane was not the agony of the coming crucifixion, the cup which he prayed might be taken from his lips, was not the cup of physical suffering, but the bitter cup of the sins of mankind which he had been sent to drink. If it were not so, we should have to say that this Jesus was not the Christ, not the Son of God, not the avatar who dared to say “I and my Father are one”, but a poor weak human being who under the illusion of Maya mistook his body for himself. Always remember that it is not the weak in spirit to whom the Eternal gives himself wholly; it is the strong heroic soul that reaches God. Others can only touch his shadow from afar. नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लभ्यो न च प्रमादात्तपसो वाप्यलिङ्गात्।

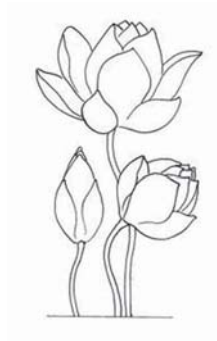
The abandonment of the world which is demanded of the Karmayogin is not necessarily a physical abandonment. You are not asked to give up your house and wealth, your wife, your children, your friends. What you have to give up is your selfish desire for them and your habit of regarding them as your possessions and chattels who are yours merely in order to give you pleasure. You are not asked to throw away the objects of your desire, but to give them up in your heart. It is the desire you have to part with and not the objects of the desire. The abandonment demanded of you is therefore a spiritual abandonment; the power to enjoy your material possessions in such spirit of detachment that you will not be overjoyed by gain, nor cast down by loss, is the test of its reality, — not the mere flight from their

presence, which is simply a flight from temptation. The Karmayogin has to remain in the world & conquer it; he is not allowed to flee from the scene of conflict and shun the battle. His part in life is the part of the hero, — the one quality he must possess, is the lionlike courage that will dare to meet its spiritual enemies in their own country and citadel and tread them down under its heel. A spiritual abandonment then, — for the body only matters as the case of the spirit; it is the spirit on which the Karmayogin must concentrate his effort. To purify the body is well, only because it makes it easier to purify the spirit; in itself it is of no importance; but if the soul is pure, the body cannot be touched by uncleanness. If the spirit itself is not stained by desire, the material enjoyment of the objects of desire cannot stain it. For if my spirit does not lust after new wealth or cling to the wealth I have, then my use of riches must necessarily be selfless and without blame; and having parted with them in spirit and given them into the treasury of God, I can then truly enjoy their possession. That enjoyment is clear, deep and calm; fate cannot break it, robbers cannot take it away, enemies cannot overwhelm it. All other joy of possession is chequered and broken with fear, sorrow, trouble and passion, — the passion for its increase, the trouble of keeping it unimpaired, the sorrow for its diminution, the fear of its utter loss. Passionless enjoyment alone is pure & unmixed delight. If indeed you choose to abandon riches physically as well as in spirit, that too is well, provided you take care that you are not cherishing the thought of them in your mind. There is another curious law of which many who follow the path of spiritual renunciation, have had experience. It is this that such renunciation is often followed by a singular tendency for wealth to seek him who has ceased to seek wealth. A strong capable will bent on money-making, will doubtless win its desire, but at least as often wealth, fame and success flee from the man who longs after them and come to him who has conquered his longing. Their lover perishes without winning them or reaches them through deep mire of sin or a hell of difficulty or over mountains of toil, while the man who has turned his back on them, finds them crowding to lay themselves at his feet. He may then either enjoy or reject them. The latter is a great path and has been the chosen way of innumerable saintly sages. But the Karmayogin may enjoy them, not for his personal pleasure certainly, not for his false self, since that sort of enjoyment he has abandoned in his heart, but God in them and them for God. As a king merely touching the nazzarana passes it on to the public treasury, so shall the Karmayogin, merely touching the wealth that comes to him, pour it out for those around him, for the poor, for the worker, for his country, for humanity because he sees Brahman in all these. Glory, if it comes to him, he will veil in many folds of quiet and unobtrusive humility and use the influence it gives not for his own purposes but to help men more effectively in their needs or to lead them upward to the divine. Such a man will quickly rise above joy and sorrow, success and failure, victory and defeat; for in sorrow as in joy he will feel himself to be near God. That nearness will deepen into continual companionship and by companionship he will grow ever liker God

in his spiritual image until he reaches the last summit of complete identity when man, the God who has forgotten his godhead, remembers utterly and becomes the Eternal. Selflessness then is the real & only law of renunciation; in the love of one's wider self in others, it has its rise; by the feeling of the divine presence in all earthly objects, it becomes rooted & unshakeable; the realization of the Brahman is its completion and goal.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 180-91)



‘MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY IN THE PEACE OF THY ILLUMINATION!’

February 22, 1914

WHEN I was a child of about thirteen, for nearly a year every night as soon as I had gone to bed it seemed to me that I went out of my body and rose straight up above the house, then above the city, very high above. Then I used to see myself clad in a magnificent golden robe, much longer than myself; and as I rose higher, the robe would stretch, spreading out in a circle around me to form a kind of immense roof over the city. Then I would see men, women, children, old men, the sick, the unfortunate coming out from every side; they would gather under the outspread robe, begging for help, telling of their miseries, their suffering, their hardships. In reply, the robe, supple and alive, would extend towards each one of them individually, and as soon as they had touched it, they were comforted or healed, and went back into their bodies happier and stronger than they had come out of them. Nothing seemed more beautiful to me, nothing could make me happier; and all the activities of the day seemed dull and colourless and without any real life, beside this activity of the night which was the true life for me. Often while I was rising up in this way, I used to see at my left an old man, silent and still, who looked at me with kindly affection and encouraged me by his presence. This old man, dressed in a long dark purple robe, was the personification — as I came to know later — of him who is called the Man of Sorrows.

Now that deep experience, that almost inexpressible reality, is translated in my mind by other ideas which I may describe in this way:

Many a time in the day and night it seems to me that I am, or rather my consciousness is, concentrated entirely in my heart which is no longer an organ, not even a feeling, but the divine Love, impersonal, eternal; and being this Love I feel myself living at the centre of each thing upon the entire earth, and at the same time I seem to stretch out immense, infinite arms and envelop with a boundless tenderness all beings, clasped, gathered, nestled on my breast that is vaster than the universe. . . . Words are poor and clumsy, O divine Master, and mental transcriptions are always childish. . . . But my aspiration to Thee is constant, and truly speaking, it is very often Thou and Thou alone who livest in this body, this imperfect means of manifesting Thee.

May all beings be happy in the peace of Thy illumination!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 81-82)

ON MANTRAS

I HAVE a whole stock of mantras; they have all come spontaneously, never from the head. They sprang forth spontaneously, as the Veda is said to have sprung forth.

I don't know when it began — a very long time ago, before I came here, although some of them came while I was here. But in my case, they were always very short. For example, when Sri Aurobindo was here in his body, at any moment, in any difficulty, for anything, it always came like this: "My Lord!" — simply and spontaneously — "My Lord!"¹ And instantly, the contact was established. But since He left, it has stopped. I can no longer say it, for it would be like saying "My Lord, My Lord!" to myself.

I had a mantra in French before coming to Pondicherry. It was

"Dieu de bonté et de miséricorde" [God of kindness and mercy],

but what it means is usually not understood — it is an entire programme, a universal programme. I have been repeating this mantra since the beginning of the century; it was the mantra of ascension, of realisation. At present, it no longer comes in the same way, it comes rather as a memory. But it was deliberate, you see; I always said "*Dieu de bonté et de miséricorde*", because even then I understood that everything is the Divine and the Divine is in all things and that it is only we who make a distinction between what is or what is not the Divine.

My experience is that, individually, we are in relationship with that aspect of the Divine which is not necessarily the most in conformity with our natures, but which is the most essential for our development or the most necessary for our action. For me, it was always a question of action because, personally, individually, each aspiration for personal development had its own form, its own spontaneous expression, so I did not use any formula. But as soon as there was the least little difficulty in action, it sprang forth. Only long afterwards did I notice that it was formulated in a certain way — I would utter it without even knowing what the words were. But it came like this:

Dieu de bonté et de miséricorde.

It was as if I wanted to eliminate from action all aspects that were not this one. And it lasted for . . . I don't know, more than twenty or twenty-five years of my life. It came spontaneously.

1. The words "My Lord" were said in English although the Mother was speaking in French.

Just recently one day, the contact became entirely physical, the whole body was in great exaltation, and I noticed that other lines were spontaneously being added to this “*Dieu de bonté et de miséricorde*”, and I noted them down. It was a springing forth of states of consciousness — not words.

Seigneur, Dieu de bonté et de miséricorde
Seigneur, Dieu d'unité souveraine,
Seigneur, Dieu de beauté et d'harmonie
Seigneur, Dieu de puissance et de réalisation
Seigneur, Dieu d'amour et de compassion
Seigneur, Dieu du silence et de la contemplation
Seigneur, Dieu de lumière et de connaissance
Seigneur, Dieu de vie et d'immortalité
Seigneur, Dieu de jeunesse et de progrès
Seigneur, Dieu d'abondance et de plénitude
Seigneur, Dieu de force et de santé.

[Lord, God of kindness and mercy
 Lord, God of sovereign oneness
 Lord, God of beauty and harmony
 Lord, God of power and realisation
 Lord, God of love and compassion
 Lord, God of silence and contemplation
 Lord, God of light and knowledge
 Lord, God of life and immortality
 Lord, God of youth and progress
 Lord, God of abundance and plenitude
 Lord, God of strength and health.]

The words came afterwards, as if they had been superimposed upon the states of consciousness, grafted onto them. Some of the associations seem unexpected, but they were the exact expression of the states of consciousness in their order of unfolding. They came one after another, as if the contact was trying to become more complete. And the last was like a triumph.

As soon as I finished writing (in writing, all this becomes rather flat), the impetus within was still alive and it gave me the sense of an all-conquering Truth. And the last mantra sprang forth:

Seigneur, Dieu de la Vérité victorieuse!

Lord, God of victorious Truth!

Like a triumph.

...

For the moment, of all the formulas or mantras, the one that acts most directly on this body, that seizes all the cells and immediately does this (*vibrating motion*) is the Sanskrit mantra:

Om namo bhagavate

As soon as I sit for meditation, as soon as I have a quiet minute to concentrate, it always begins with this mantra, and there is a response in the body, in the cells of the body: they all start vibrating. . . .

This is how it happened: Y had just returned, and he brought back a trunk full of things which he then proceeded to show me, and his excitement made tight, tight little waves in the atmosphere, making my head ache; it made . . . anyway, it was unpleasant. When I left, just after that had happened, I sat down and went like this (*gesture of sweeping out*) to make it stop, and immediately the mantra began.

It rose up from here (*Mother indicates the solar plexus*), like this:

Om namo bhagavate

Om namo bhagavate

Om namo bhagavate

It was formidable. For the entire quarter of an hour that the meditation lasted, everything was filled with Light! In the deeper tones it was of golden bronze (at the throat level it was almost red) and in the higher tones it was a kind of opaline white light:

Om namo bhagavate

Om namo bhagavate

Om namo bhagavate

The other day (I was in my bathroom upstairs), it came; it took hold of the entire body. It rose up in the same way, and all the cells were trembling. And with such a power! So I stopped everything, all movement, and I let the thing grow. The vibration went on expanding, ever widening, as the sound itself was expanding, expanding, and all the cells of the body were seized with an intensity of aspiration . . . as if the entire body were swelling — it became overwhelming. I felt that it would all burst.

I understood those who withdraw from everything to live that totally.

And it has such a transformative power! I felt that if it continued, something would happen, something like a change in the equilibrium of the body's cells.

Unfortunately, I was unable to continue, because . . . I don't have the time; it was just before the balcony [darshan] and I was going to be late. Something told me, "That is for people who have nothing to do." Then I said, "I belong to my work," and I slowly withdrew. I put on the brakes, and the action was cut short. But what remains is that whenever I repeat this mantra . . . everything starts vibrating.

So each one must find something that acts on himself, individually. I am only speaking of the action on the physical plane, because mentally, vitally, in all the inner parts of the being, the aspiration is always, always spontaneous. I am referring only to the physical plane.

The physical seems to be more open to something that is repetitious — for example, the music [we play on Sundays], which has three series of combined mantras.

The first is that of Chandi, addressed to the universal Mother. . . .

The second is addressed to Sri Aurobindo (and I believe they have put my name at the end). . . .

And the third is addressed to Sri Aurobindo: "Thou art my refuge." . . .

Each time this music is played, it produces exactly the same effect upon the body.

It is strange, as if all the cells were dilating, with a feeling that the body is growing larger . . . It becomes all dilated, as if swollen with light — with force, a lot of force. And this music seems to form spirals, like luminous ribbons of incense smoke, white (not transparent, literally white) and they rise up and up. I always see the same thing; it begins in the form of a vase, then swells like an amphora and converges higher up to blossom forth like a flower.

So for these mantras, everything depends upon what you want to do with them. I am in favour of a short mantra, especially if you want to make both numerous and spontaneous repetitions — one or two words, three at most. Because you must be able to use them in all cases, when an accident is about to happen, for example. It has to spring up without thinking, without calling: it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex. Then the mantra has its full force.

For me, on the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this mantra:

Om namo bhagavate . . . Om namo bhagavate . . .

all, all the time, all the time, all the time.

That is the normal state. It creates an atmosphere of an intensity almost more material than the subtle physical; it's like . . . almost like the phosphorescent radiations from a medium. And it has a great action, a very great action: it can prevent an accident. And it accompanies you all the time, all the time.

. . .

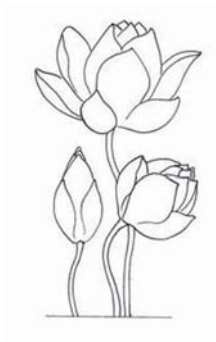
This one, this mantra, [*Om namo bhagavate*], came to me after some time, for I felt . . . well, I saw that I needed to have a mantra of my own, that is, a mantra consonant with what this body has to do in the world.

And it was just then that it came.

It was truly an answer to a need that had made itself felt. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Excerpt from a conversation with a disciple on 16 September 1958)



ON DIFFICULTIES

DIFFICULTIES are sent to us exclusively to make the realisation more perfect.

Each time we try to realise something and we encounter a resistance or an obstacle, or even a failure — what appears to be a failure — we should know, we should *never* forget, that it is exclusively, absolutely, to make the realisation more perfect.

So this habit of cringing, of being discouraged or even feeling ill at ease or abusing oneself, saying, “There, I’ve done it again . . .” All this is absolute foolishness.

Rather, simply say, “*We* do not know how to do things as they should be done, well then, let them be done for us and come what may!” If we could only see how everything that looks like a difficulty, an error, a failure or an obstacle is simply there to help us make the realisation more perfect.

Once we know this, everything becomes easy.

THE MOTHER

(From a conversation with a disciple on 6 October 1958)

“MUKTI” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

I was feeling since this morning that some poem would get written; but it was only in the evening on a lonely bench that the octave of the following sonnet was suddenly begun. The sestet I came home and wrote. What is the measure of success?

What deep dishonour that the soul should have
Its passion moulded by a moon of change
And all its massive purpose be a wave
Ruled by time’s gilded glammers that estrange
Being from its true goal of motionless
Eternity ecstatic and alone,
Poised in calm vastitude of consciousness, [2]
A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown!

Be still, oceanic heart, withdraw thy sense
From fickle lure of outward fulgencies.
Clasp not in vain the myriad earth to appease
The hunger of thy god-profundities:
Not there but in self-rapturous suspense
Of all desire is thy ~~plenipotence!~~ [1]
omnipotence!

[*Amal’s question written at the bottom of the sheet*]

[1] If you prefer “omnipotence” here, is it better to put “plenitude” in place of “vastitude” in line 7 [2]?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

[1] Omnipotence is better. [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “plenipotence”*]

[2] “Vastitude” is better than “plenitude” — but “plenitudes” (the plural) would perhaps be best. The singular gives a too abstract and philosophical turn — the plural suggests something more concrete and experienceable.

Congratulations! It is an exceedingly good sonnet — you have got the sonnet movement very well.

12 January 1934

* * *

MUKTI

What deep dishonour that the soul should have
 Its passion moulded by a moon of change
 And all its massive purpose be a wave
 Ruled by time's gilded glammers that estrange
 Being from its true goal of motionless
 Eternity ecstatic and alone,
 Poised in calm plenitudes of consciousness —
 A sea unheard where spume nor spray is blown!

Be still, oceanic heart, withdraw thy sense
 From fickle lure of outward fulgencies.
 Clasp not in vain the myriad earth to appease
 The hunger of thy God-profundities:
 Not there but in self-rapturous suspense
 Of all desire is thy omnipotence!

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

The Self is that aspect of the Brahman in which it is intimately felt as at once individual, cosmic, transcendent of the universe. The realisation of the Self is the straight and swift way towards individual liberation, a static universality, a Nature-transcendence. At the same time there is a realisation of Self in which it is felt not only sustaining and pervading and enveloping all things, but constituting everything and identified in a free identity with all its becomings in Nature. Even so, freedom and impersonality are always the character of the Self.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 347)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of April 2010)

Chapter Seven

The Impossible Return! (*Cont.*)

Tokyo, August 10, 1925

My dear Papa and Maman,

It is already a little more than a month since I have come back to Japan. I am thinking of staying here for about two months more and then of a few days with Albert before going to India. As you see my plans have not changed. I think that I ought to return, but I want to profit from the opportunity which has been offered to me to see India. It seems to me that India has a certain experience to give me, and, if it comes my way I must seize it.

In Japan I do not see anything for me at present. It goes without saying that it would be easy for me to live here, and I like the country and the people very much; but I feel that I have learnt the lesson that I had to learn and that from now on my path takes me elsewhere. I cannot say if I shall return to France directly or if I shall stay a few months in India, and from here, **I cannot know it**. If the **spiritual** and **material** opportunity to stay there presents itself, that is to say, if I see the possibility of staying there, and if, at the same time, I feel myself spiritually impelled, it is certain that I shall accept this opportunity. To neglect it would be absolutely contrary to the conception of life that I have made for myself, and I do not need to enter into long explanations so that you understand me.

I do not want to talk particularly of the Theosophical Society; I have already asserted that I am free from all schools and all persons, and I try to be impartial and open to all points of view and all influences. I shall go to Adyar because it is a good opportunity to see all the leaders of the Theosophical Society whom as yet I do not know, and to form my own opinion of them. India is vast and has probably much more spiritual force than we imagine.

I think that I had better explain myself to you frankly **without any ulterior motives**.

Also needless to say, I cannot stay somewhere unless I am in a position to live

there by my work, which is not all that easy. My purse being very light, I need to find many opportunities.

Albert has offered to lend me the money for the return trip. I think this suggestion comes from you, and I thank you for that. For my travels in China I have spent a great deal (more than 10,000 F¹) and at present I am poor. If I have to return by my own means, I would have to get a job in Japan to save enough money for the voyage. Since you are offering me this money, I can return immediately. Only, I have revealed my thoughts to you frankly, and, although I cannot give you all my ideas and the motives for my action, I am absolutely sincere. Would you still be willing to lend me the money for the voyage?

On my part, I promise you that the money that you will give me will not be used **for anything other than the voyage** (from Japan to India, and from India to France). The little that I shall have will suffice to live for about two months in India, and I shall try my best also to visit Benares and the Valley of the Ganges.

I have written several letters to Albert, but I have not heard from him for more than a year. I have sent my letters to the following address: Engineer of the Radiotelegraphic Service, Saigon. Has he received them? I do not know if I can count on him. Therefore, it will be best, in case Papa still agrees to advance this money to me under the above conditions, to send it to me telegraphically through the Franco-Japanese Bank and inform me by a short telegram (c/o The French Embassy, Tokyo).

The voyage from Japan to Marseilles costs almost £70 by second class. As I must change ship at Saigon, then at Colombo, with the detour to Madras and the railway journey, luggage and the unforeseen, I shall be happy to have about £100 at my disposal. (It is better to send pound sterling instead of franc or yen because that is what I shall need for the journey.) Send a little extra money for the things that Maman would like me to bring for her: Chinese shawl, for example, but neither dog nor fur (I do not know much about these things and, as with gemstones, I shall probably be cheated) specifying the amount earmarked for these purchases. A beautiful Chinese shawl costs between 1,500 and 2,000 F and one can have a very beautifully embroidered household kimono for 800-900 F.

There is a ship of Messageries Maritimes leaving Japan for Saigon around the 17th October, and I shall probably take that or the next one. I am keeping very well psychologically and physically and am waiting for your reply to take my decision. There is nothing much to do here in summer, and the general work resumes only in October; however, I am busy profiting as much as I can from this beautiful country before leaving it.

Perhaps you will still have time to send your reply to me by post, but it is not at all certain. I am sending a copy of this letter via Canada (a ship sails on the 14th) and one via Siberia.

1. Around 7,000 Euros.

I am expecting a letter from you in a short while, because I have not received any since my departure from China and meanwhile several letters have already reached me from France, as well as the book on the theory of the quanta and three Metapsychical Reviews which Papa has sent me. Thank you.

And very affectionate kisses from your

Signed: Ph. B. St Hilaire

* * *

November 10, 1925

My very dear Papa and Maman,

Do not hold it against me for not giving you my news; I did not have anything worthwhile to tell about my life in Japan and I was waiting to be able to tell you the exact date of my departure.

I left Japan on the first of November and in two days I will reach Saigon. This letter will continue on its way upto Marseilles² by the same boat.

I have received Papa's letter in reply to mine. I have really nothing to say about that because I understand his point of view which has not changed. Evidently, the letter was not what I had hoped for, but I do not complain about it. I realise that I was probably mistaken and I apologise for it. As for the cheque for 1,000 F, I thank you, but I shall not use it for my travels because the manner in which Papa has drafted this letter makes it seem like alms. It seems to me that it is better to use it for the gifts that I shall bring back from Japan. I do not want, if I happen to stay in India for a few months, that Papa should accuse me of **extracting** the money out of him. I have written frankly about my plans and my ideas, but obviously you have not read my letter with trust.

The money for my journey from India to France, that is another matter; I shall borrow it from Albert without hesitation because he is quite willing to **lend** it to me, because then I shall surely be able to pay it back to him shortly.

There is no change at all in my plans which are known to you already. I intend first to go to Pondicherry to meet Aurobindo Ghose, one of the great contemporary Hindu philosophers and yogis, then to go to Adyar to the Theosophical Congress at the end of December. I wish to form my first-hand opinion of the leaders of the Theosophical Movement.

2. From where it was actually sent on November 13, 1925 with a 30 centimes 'République Française' postage stamp.

But this plan is rather vague because everything depends on the opportunities that come my way. I have high hopes of seeing things both interesting and those which are necessary for me to decide on my future course of action. Life is so made that it always gives exactly what one needs. One must simply keep one's eyes open and not neglect the opportunities — which is difficult enough, I admit. We miss them much too often, through laziness, through egoism or through lack of discernment. At present I am very much interested in the direction my life will take in the next few months.

My language, no doubt, must seem to you hardly sensible. However, I am calm and detached, having calmly thought it out, weighing the pros and the cons with my reason. Only, I introduce in my judgment elements which you do not admit and therein lies all the difference. It is important to recognise that these do not stem from a disparity in the operation of the mind.

It is with a certain sadness that I left Japan which I love very much and the friends whom I also love. I have well understood the ideal of Japan and I like the nameless people who represent this ideal. Now I am going towards India, another country with ideals; I am curious about my impressions. In Shanghai I met my Japanese friends who welcomed me and showed me round the town. Moreover, I have now acquaintances almost all over the Orient.

I am happy that I will see Albert again after this long separation. No doubt that he too has changed. What has been the influence of the Orient on him? I suspect that Saigon is nothing more than a purely French colony without much originality of its own. Its reputation is of a place where one has a good time, but I speak before knowing the town properly (I have been here only for three days).

The weather is splendid. As yet, it has not been very hot.

That is all for today, I shall write to you on leaving Saigon.

I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe.

* * *

December 5, 1925

My very dear Papa and Maman,

I am writing to you from the ship *Azay-le-Rideau* which I boarded yesterday at Saigon.

I have just spent three weeks with Albert who received me very affectionately.

I was very happy to renew contact with him because his letters, rare and brief, hardly informed me about his progress and his ideas.

Physically, I found him in good health, although a little tired and pale, but he has become chubby and has begun to develop a paunch. Who would have said that of him? I think that his leave will do him good because the climate of Saigon is, in spite of everything, quite trying and debilitating.

As for his life, he has organised it sensibly and wisely, but the entertainment in Saigon is poor and the intellectual and artistic life, etc., nil. The majority of the people who live here have but one aim — to earn as much and as quickly as possible and to go away. This does not make for interesting day-to-day contacts or deep friendships.

Nevertheless, I have been surprised by Albert's development. Although he has not studied or pondered much on life and its problems, he has the right intuition that guides him well. Naturally, we talked and chatted a great deal, and though we are very different by nature, we understood each other perfectly.

Now I am on my way to Penang where I shall change ship for Pondicherry. I shall reach India around the 17th of December. As I have told you earlier, my plans are vague and depend on the circumstances. I feel the need of some other element to be able to decide my life definitely, and perhaps India will give me this thing, this element. Albert, whom you will see before me, will tell you about our conversations and what he would have understood of me. I shall keep you posted about my travels and my ideas. But I can hardly tell you where to write to me because I do not know where I shall be in two months.

Albert has very kindly offered to help me on my travels and I also thank Papa for all that he has done for me. If I am a little embarrassed to speak of it, it is because following Papa's last letter, I would not have expected it. Nevertheless, I thank you for this money, but I promise not to use it except for my return ticket to France from India. The cost of this ticket is around 5,000 Francs; I shall deposit the amount in a bank.

No, dear Papa and Maman, I do not beg for this money, even from you. When I had asked you for it by telegram, some years back, I had done something that seemed like mendacity and I was wrong. But now the case is different, I wrote to you clearly enough. If you had not sent me anything and if Albert too had refused to lend to me the cost of my voyage, I would have managed in some other way and I assure you that I would not have insisted. But it is true that the manner in which you look on me changes your help into alms, and that, I feel, just as you yourselves feel it. A little trust on your side would have avoided this unpleasant feeling, but trust cannot be forced and it is I who am the culprit because I could not inspire it in you. This painful feeling, perhaps you too have it, perhaps you unconsciously look on it as a punishment for me (!), as a price for the material help that you are giving me. That would be childish, mean-minded and undignified. But I would be wrong

to continue in this vein; please accept my frankness, I am not writing with any ill feeling, nor to hurt you.

I still have many things to tell you, but the ship is rolling so much since leaving Saigon that I am closing my letter. Albert will send you the photos taken when we were together.

I thank you for your affection which, in spite of these surface waves, is strong and clear, I know it, and I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Ph. B. St Hilaire

(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 permission.)

The best way to prepare oneself for the spiritual life when one has to live in the ordinary occupations and surroundings is to cultivate an entire equality and detachment and the samatā of the Gita with the faith that the Divine is there and the Divine Will at work in all things even though at present under the conditions of a world of Ignorance. Beyond this are the Light and Ananda towards which life is working, but the best way for their advent and foundation in the individual being and nature is to grow in this spiritual equality. That would also solve your difficulty about things unpleasant and disagreeable. All unpleasantness should be faced with this spirit of samatā.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 869)

GLIMPSES OF PAVITRA

From the Reminiscences of Pavitra and Mrityunjey

(Continued from the issue of November 2009)

Part 4

China, Mongolia: 1924-1925

Pavitra tells of his decision to leave Japan in order to live in a monastery in Mongolia.

A DELEGATION of Mongolian monks, lamas, came to Japan and visited the laboratories, the factory where I was working. I made contact with them because my research always brought me back to Asia, to Central Asia; as a place, a centre, under the peaks of the Himalayas. So I saw an opportunity there. I wondered if perhaps it was an indication that I should go to Tibet. So I got myself introduced to them. It wasn't very easy to talk with them, because we had no common language. There was an ex-officer of the former Russian army — he was Mongolian and he spoke neither English nor Chinese; but his wife spoke both Chinese and English, so through this intermediary we could converse! It wasn't easy! But gradually a possibility opened up to go and study for a time in their monastery, in that lamasery. It meant crossing northern China and going to what was called Outer Mongolia — that is, the part of Mongolia which was governed by China. That was in 1924. So I set off with a Mongolian lama who was a very sensible, open man. During that period I set myself to learn Mongolian, because of course I had to be able to talk to him a bit. How difficult it was to find a book to help me learn that language!

And I set off across northern China, Peking . . . I won't tell you about those experiences, those adventures, because there isn't time; but my attitude was more or less this: "I know that I am on my way to the Truth, towards the one who will lead me to the Truth. I don't know where he is, I don't know how to reach him. All I can do is to be absolutely alert and open for any sign I may receive. If I see a door opening in any direction, I will go through it. If I don't see anything, I will wait and watch." And even today I think that this was a good attitude.

Mrityunjoy speaks of Pavitra's journey to Mongolia and of his nine months with the Lamas.

So in the middle of 1924, Pavitra started his travels again towards the further unknown. He reached Peking at the beginning of July 1924. There he visited some of the important places, such as the Temple of Heaven (on July 8) and the Imperial Palace (on July 18). At this time he shaved off his beautiful black beard to accept the religion and even the dress of the Lamas. On July 20 he visited one of their famous temples and then crossed the waters of the Sha-ho into Mongolia.

The journey through China was hazardous and difficult. First, there was no proper road and many small rivers had to be forded. Pavitra sometimes crossed in a small boat, but his bags (some of which are still in his room) had to be taken over on the backs of mules or were carried by coolies who crossed on foot. Sometimes the rivers — waist-deep in places — were full of stones, quite big ones, which made the crossing still more difficult. Again, there was the possibility of encountering bandits, who were infamous for attacking innocent foreign travellers (like Pavitra), taking everything from them and sometimes even killing them. Pavitra had been specifically instructed by friends not to keep any money with him. He was obliged to carry a Post Office pass-book and draw money from Post Offices when he required it. But how difficult that was we have little idea, we who are living so near the Post Office!

By the Grace of the Divine nothing untoward happened to Pavitra; no bandits came and nothing was robbed. The physical difficulties of the journey he bore quietly, with calm determination. His childhood discipline, his military training, his service on the battle-front and his stay in Japan, — where he had experienced the calmness and fortitude of the Japanese people, — helped him like a reserve of strength.

Pavitra lived with the Lamas for nine months, practising the most austere Buddhism, sitting for long hours of meditation. He wore their particular dress and hat, and was completely clean-shaven. We can hardly imagine the hardships he underwent. In describing them, he would never exaggerate facts or distort them, so they sounded like an enjoyable story. But what conditions! For nine months of the year, the sun is rarely seen at the monastery. The people live on scanty food and tea; their diet consists of boiled herbs and onions, salt, some root-vegetables, a fermented soyabean soup, and bread the size of a brick — and just as hard to eat — Pavitra said; one had to soak it in hot water.

Then the smell. There were people in Mongolia who had never bathed in their lives. The extreme cold, far below freezing point, does not encourage them to bathe — nor does it prevent them from smelling horribly! To imagine that he lived among such companions and slept beside them, with nobody understanding his language, will make one realise how strong was his spiritual urge!

Pavitra describes his stay at the monastery.

I stayed there nine months — a whole winter in a cold country, but still I cannot say that I suffered from the cold. The monastery was very protected, completely isolated from the outside. During these nine months I didn't see a single European; a few Chinese merchants and then Mongolians. At times it was quite hard. One was alone, thrown entirely upon one's own resources, with one's difficulties and one's moments of despair.

But the dominant thing was: "My God, if only I knew what I am supposed to do on this earth — whatever it is, even sweeping the street — I will do it joyfully. But what is it that I am supposed to do on earth?" And you see, this had already been going on for three or four years. "What am I to do on earth? Where shall I find a clear indication?"

By that time I already knew of the existence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through mutual friends. I had even seen, before I left France, an issue of the French *Arya*; I had looked into it. I must say that it had not especially attracted my attention. I had read it, I had said, "Yes, it's interesting." But what I wanted was a *contact* with something. There had been the first chapters of *The Life Divine*, and then some passages on the Eternal Wisdom. I had seen that, it was really interesting, but, I tell you frankly, it hadn't touched me more than other things had.

When I was in Japan . . . I arrived there just after Mother had left. It was in 1920 and Mother had left just a few months earlier. So I had heard about her — we had mutual friends. I was interested in what I heard about her — very much so. That was why I decided to write. So I wrote to Pondicherry. I never got an answer! (*laughter*) Never. I wrote twice. No reply. I think that at that time they weren't replying much to letters! Perhaps . . . I hope that now we reply a little better.

So after that rather severe winter in Mongolia, I felt very clearly that this experience was over and that I should go elsewhere. Where? Well, to India. The time had come for me to go to India. Where? I didn't know. Since I was returning from Japan, I had to have some sort of destination, so for other people, for my family and friends, I said, "I am returning to Europe via India." But in my heart I knew that I would remain in India. But I couldn't say that because they would have asked me, "Where will you go?" "Oh, I don't know!" I had nothing material to base my inner certainty on, except, "In India I am sure to find what I am searching for." That was all.

Mrityunjoy recounts the journey through China to Japan.

It was while Pavitra was in Mongolia, as I mentioned, that he received the gift of a timepiece from his Japanese friends as a token of their remembrance and gratitude.

On his way back from Mongolia, he went to Jehol for some time, visiting on

14 August 1925 the Palace of Fuchung, the great statue of Buddha in Ta-ho-se, near Jehol, and the temple of the Five Hundred Arhats (*la hau-tau*), with its huge bronze statues all of the same type.

The return journey was very hard. Sometimes, as it happened on 21 August 1925, his caravan of three mules, carrying luggage, got stuck in the sand-dunes. And sometimes they fell sick. Pavitra just had to wait until they were able to go on. Even in these circumstances he never failed to take the opportunity of visiting lamaist temples. In Peking he visited one of their temples while a marriage ceremony was being performed. That was in August 1925.

Pavitra sailed to Japan and was welcomed by Viscount S. Soga, now an old friend of his. But Pavitra didn't want to remain long in Japan. In September, after seeing Mount Fuji, he set off for India. He was feeling some uneasiness inside, he said, and wanted to get away from Japan as soon as possible.

(To be continued)

PAVITRA AND MRITYUNJOY
(Compiled from their writings)

(Reprinted with some editorial changes from the
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Yes, even in ordinary life there must be a control over the vital and the ego — otherwise life would be impossible. Even many animals, those who live in groups, have their strict rules imposing a control on the play of the ego and those who disobey will have a bad time of it. The Europeans especially understand this and even though they are full of ego, yet when there is a question of team work or group life, they are adepts at keeping it in leash, even if it growls inside; it is the secret of their success. But in yoga life of course it is a question not of controlling ego but of getting rid of it and rising to a higher principle, so demand is much more strongly and insistently discouraged.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 861)

WHAT DOES TRANSFORMATION ESSENTIALLY MEAN?

THE word 'Transformation' in its common use means change of constitution — a change either in the form of a thing or in its consciousness or both. The potter moulds pots and images out of clay, the sculptor carves out statues from stone, the clay and stone undergo transformation. Storms, earthquakes, floods, wars and other catastrophes bring about a change in topography, the surface of the earth is transformed at places. Such changes mostly affect the objective forms of nature.

Social thinkers, scientists, philosophers, prophets and seers have contributed new ideas and theories and thereby reform the old ones in the domain of thought and thus modify to a certain extent, human conduct and social habits. Changes of this kind relate more to the psychological nature of man and society and can therefore be called subjective changes. Though changes of substance and appearance cannot be sharply divided into categories as they are interdependent and very often influence one another, yet their causes can be identified and the changes attributed to certain agencies.

But beyond and behind our common understanding and superficial perception, a transformation is always going on — a change which is universal and eternal and includes all the aspects of existence, the process of which is evolutionary in character. This takes place by the unfolding of the latent potentialities in the hidden nature of things and beings and by the working of forces inherent in them. Mother Nature has taken up this work from the very beginning of creation and has been doing it against heavy odds and difficulties. As a result an onward march of creation from plant to animal and from animal to man has been going on.

Man is infinitely higher than the plant and the animal. Plants and animals seem to be self-fulfilled according to their nature. Whereas it is not so for man: he has not yet attained the perfection of his own nature as plants and animals have done at their own level. Man, the mental being, has to establish the mental principles of truth, beauty and goodness in his own individual life as well as in his social life. Has he been able to do that perfectly? Is man's individual life or that of his society beautiful, harmonious, without corruption or degradation? Is it not rather, quite the contrary, full of discord, ill-will, selfishness and the most lamentable pettiness and ugliness?

On the other hand what do we find in the subhuman states leading up to the animal? Do we not see that they are most natural and direct, free from hypocrisy, corruption and the thousand other ills humanity has fallen a prey to? Subconscious and half-conscious instincts and impulses are the controlling principles in animal life. Instinctively and innocently they accept the hidden guidance and faithfully

obey its dictates and are ignorant of any ideal or ethical concept of life. So they are normal, natural, live harmoniously, satisfied, living according to their *dharma* and so have a poise of their own. Man does not seem to have achieved any poise or spontaneity or naturalness as yet. He is maimed, his life is artificial, devoid of directness and natural simplicity.

Why is it so? What is the root cause of his inability? Is there any way out for him or is this distorted condition his only destiny? A deeper look into man's nature and consciousness as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo may help to throw some light on the subject and then with a clear sight we may seek for the solution to the problem.

In fact, man's nature is not an undivided whole. It is a composite, a combination of different powers, forces and propensities. His conduct is governed by the balance between two powers. Firstly, and most importantly, the central will in his life, the inherent power of action that he possesses. Secondly, the influence he receives from the idea in his mind which gives to his life-force a conscious method and order. But the mind in man cannot wholly control or change the life-principle according to its own ideal, it can only modify it in an incomplete way. This incapacity of the mind is the root cause of man's abnormality and disharmony. Man has not become what he has to be, has not yet attained his true character, has not fully understood his *dharma*.

Many thinkers and social reformers have suggested a remedy: a natural living in conformity with the life-principle of subhuman types. But this is not meaningful for man to follow since it would mean going against progress and the evolutionary scheme of development. According to the law of evolution man has to go forward and not backward. The problem remains unsolved unless we look for our real self. Surely it is not mind or the intellect nor the magnified vital ego that constitute the real man. And none of these can give man the secure poise and spontaneity which he is destined to attain.

The double nature in man, — one part animal and the other rational, — is the root cause of his problem and the ensuing unease. Man and his rational thoughts and ideas are only superimpositions on life, and are incapable of transforming it according to their ideals. The rare individuals who appear to have effected a kind of transformation and who lead an entirely artistic and intellectual life have done so at the cost of impoverishment of their natural vital and physical life. The physical and vital principles can be checked or controlled by the mind's influence for a time being but in the long run they find a way to re-establish themselves or else they fall into quietude, leaving the individual and society empty of dynamic force and aspiration. Such results are not uncommon in history.

If, on the other hand, the mind is subordinated to physical and vital principles, the difficulties still arise, but come in a different manner. Our modern society is based on economic and commercial expansion and physical and vital comfort — a state which, in other words, is termed 'economic barbarism' by some. It entails the

possibility of powerful nations enjoying a domination of the world, while for the weaker nations it spells death and extinction. But before that actually happens, a nobler ethic or a purer reason may come to the forefront to provide a better organisation and more perfect order to the individual, the national and the international life. That too would be doomed to failure, unless the secret of the solution which is beyond the mental, ethical or intellectual, — however noble they might be, — is found.

The secret lies in the awakening in us of our true self, our psychic, spiritual and supramental self and in the pursuit of an ancient ideal, that is ‘the establishment of the kingdom of God’.

This pursuit must be integral and should not stop short midway, creating a separation between life and spirit, as was done in times past, by making an escape from the world or an embracing of asceticism, the only path towards that goal.

And perhaps that is one of the reasons why spirituality in the past often became the cause of weakness and a lack of energy and vigour in India and other Asiatic countries.

Herein comes the necessity of spiritual transformation which is also evolutionary in character, with this difference that whereas in its unaided usual course evolution takes an infinitely long time to effect a decisive change, with the conscious co-operation of awakened souls the expected change will come about more rapidly and more fully. Of course, this demands a conscious will to achieve it and the receptivity to a spiritual will from above which is essentially one with the aspiring will below.

To give up the unregenerated will and the instinctive movements of life, and to become obedient to the spontaneous will and inspiration from the spirit above and the central being within — that is the direction in which our endeavour must move. Up till now, there has been an unsuccessful attempt to impose the mental will upon the vital; this was bound to be unsuccessful because the mind is not our real self nor has it always the capacity to make the life obey its influence. It can arrange, organise, scrutinise and judge but it cannot transform. It must become an instrument of the spirit, realising its place in the intermediate region of our being: above the lower and outward planes on one side, and on the other, below the inner and higher ones.

The ideas from the mind-level are empty of the transforming power of the spirit and the essential and effective truth of our being. They have at best a borrowed light and a mutilated truth. So before they become effective they must be in contact with Real-Idea or Truth-Consciousness. What is needed is first a going up, a grasping of the truth and the conversion of mental idealism to spiritual realism. Then only can we, richly equipped with the true knowledge of our being and becoming, plunge deep into the obscure nether regions and make life obedient to the higher realities and the will of the spirit.

In short, this is how an unprecedented transformation can take place and it is

this that holds the key to a natural, harmonious and spiritual living for humanity.

This is only a brief and superficial observation on the subject.

For a deep and sound understanding one should undertake a thorough and systematic study of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

“Transformation” is a word that I have brought in myself (like “supermind”) to express certain spiritual concepts and spiritual facts of the integral yoga. People are now taking them up and using them in senses which have nothing to do with the significance which I put into them. Purification of the nature by the “influence” of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic change or a psycho-spiritual change — the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the Self or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness, dynamic as well as static, in every part of the being down to the subconscious.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 115-16)

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

(Continued from the issue of April 2010)

LET US NOW examine the events prior to the Second World War and study its two principal actors, Churchill and Hitler. Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1937 until May 1940. Chamberlain was a weak leader and is best known for his infamous appeasement of Hitler as part of his foreign policy. During the 1930s, Britain and France followed a policy of appeasement — they gave Hitler what he wanted in order to keep the peace and to stop him from going to war. It was based on the idea that what Hitler wanted was reasonable and, when his reasonable demands had been satisfied, he would stop. Neville Chamberlain was the British Prime Minister who believed in appeasement, in particular regarding his signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938, conceding the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia to Germany, and for his ‘containment’ policy of Germany in 1939. Right from 1932 Churchill gave repeated warnings against the appeasement policy as he considered Hitler a dangerous man.

Nirod-da relates:

... On seeing a photograph of Chamberlain and Hitler taken during their meeting at Munich, Sri Aurobindo said that Chamberlain looked like a fly before a spider, on the point of being caught — and he actually was caught! ... (Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*,¹ p. 124)

Sri Aurobindo remarked on 6 May 1940:

... This Chamberlain does not seem to want anybody with [an] individuality ... (Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*,² p. 621)

When asked on 10 July 1940, what Chamberlain would have done if he had been Premier instead of Churchill, Sri Aurobindo replied:

He would have committed twenty mistakes. (TW, p. 797)

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

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

On yet another occasion, (on 15 July 1940) when it was said that Chamberlain still had a big influence, he said:

That is because he looks after the class interest while Churchill sees what is good for England. (*TW*, p. 804)

In contrast to Chamberlain, Churchill was an imposing erudite personality and is considered the greatest war leader of modern times. Even before becoming the Prime Minister, Churchill had portents that some force was playing in him. He writes of what happened to him on the 3rd of September 1939, as he sat in the House of Commons listening to the debates after the first air raid siren had sounded over London:

As I sat in my place, listening to the speeches, a very strong sense of calm came over me, after the intense passions and excitements of the last few days. I felt a serenity of mind and was conscious of a kind of uplifted detachment from human and personal affairs. The glory of Old England, peace-loving and ill-prepared as she was, but instant and fearless at the call of honour, thrilled my being and seemed to lift our fate to those spheres far removed from earthly facts and physical sensation. I tried to convey some of this mood to the House when I spoke, not without acceptance.

*

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother declared openly that Churchill and de Gaulle were very open to their force, and Churchill declared publicly in his statement to the House of Commons on 13 October 1942, “. . . I sometimes have a feeling, in fact I have it very strongly, a feeling of interference. I want to stress that I have a feeling sometimes that some guiding hand has interfered. I have the feeling that we have a guardian because we serve a great cause, and that we shall have that guardian so long as we serve that cause faithfully. And what a cause it is!” (Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*,³ pp. 72-73)

Maggi continues about Churchill, implying that he was being guided by some higher force:

. . . he was nonetheless in touch enough with his subliminal self to put information he received into action. When the Duty Officer in the War Room reported an unusually heavy air raid on London, according to Lord Ismay,

3. Maggi Lidchi-Grassi: *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, 1994 edition; abbreviated to LT.

Churchill “used to insist on an adjournment in order that we might all watch the proceedings from the Air Ministry roof. It made an admirable, though not very safe, grandstand.” To have risked himself and his Chiefs of Staff would have been foolhardy had he not been guided by his intuition. He clearly knew he was the one chosen for this superhuman task. He said as much with fierceness to Anthony Eden, his Minister of Foreign Affairs, when faced with a vote of no confidence in Parliament: “Only I can win this war, only I. Not you, not Halifax, not even the King. . . . I must survive or we will lose.” (*Ibid.*, p. 74)

Churchill was aware that he was assigned to fight Hitler and that a victory for Hitler in the war would be a calamity for mankind. Echoing Sri Aurobindo’s sentiments, he said:

. . . our future and that of many generations is at stake. . . . We may be proud, and even rejoice amid our tribulations, that we have been born at this cardinal time for so great an age and so splendid an opportunity of service here. (*Ibid.*, p. 73)

Churchill was a worthy instrument and there were several instances of his intuitiveness. On 17 January 1941 he delivered his ‘We Will Not Fail Mankind’ speech:

I have absolutely no doubt that we shall win a complete and decisive victory over the forces of evil, and that victory itself will be only a stimulus to further efforts to conquer ourselves. (*Ibid.*)

In a letter supporting the Allied cause Sri Aurobindo had written:

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord’s side, that is enough for the work to be done. (3 September 1943, *SABCL*, Vol. 26, pp. 397-98)

And in the book *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings* Sri Aurobindo writes:

Therefore we find that the greatest men of action the world has known were believers in Fate or in a divine Will. Caesar, Mahomed, Napoleon, what more colossal workers has our past than these? The superman believes more readily in Destiny, feels more vitally conscious of God than the average human mind. (*SABCL*, Vol. 16, p. 284)

Purani-ji mentions in his book, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*,⁴ (pp. 229-30) how Sri Aurobindo “bestowed such anxious care on the health of Churchill, listening carefully to the health bulletins”.

Nirod-da describes how Sri Aurobindo

. . . now listened carefully to the health bulletins about Churchill when he had pneumonia, and, we believe, even helped him with his Force to recover. . . .”
(*TY*, p. 125)

Long before the Second World War had started, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were concerned about the dark malevolent forces of Hitler. Churchill, in his own way, was very much aware of what the rise of Hitler would mean. Referring to the vital world descending onto the physical Sri Aurobindo had written on 18 September 1936:

Hitler and his chief lieutenants Goering and Goebbels are certainly vital beings or possessed by vital beings, so you can't expect common sense from them. The Kaiser, though all-satanical, was a much more human person; these people are hardly human at all. The nineteenth century in Europe was a pre-eminently human era — now the vital world seems to be descending there. (*SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 388)

Again in 1936, Nirod-da wrote to him:

Perhaps you send Force to Germany, Abyssinia, . . . ?

Sri Aurobindo replied:

. . . Who except the devil is going to give force to Germany? Do you think I am in league with Hitler and his howling tribe of Nazis?
(Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*,⁵ p. 553)

On seeing a photograph of Hitler Sri Aurobindo commented:

Hitler gives the impression of the face of a street-criminal. In his case it is successful ruffianism with a diabolical cunning and behind it the psychic of a London cabman, — crude and undeveloped. That is to say, the psychic character in the man consists of some futile and silly sentimentalism which

4. A. B. Purani: *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 1978 edition; abbreviated to LS.

5. Nirodbaran: *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, The Complete Set, 1995 edition in 2 volumes; abbreviated to CW.

finds expression in his paintings and weeps at his mother's grave. He is possessed by some supernatural Power and it is from this Power that the voice, as he calls it, comes. Have you noted that people who at one time were inimical to him come into contact with him and leave as his admirers? It is a sign of that Power. It is from this Power that he has constantly received suggestions and the constant repetition of the suggestions has taken hold of the German people. You will also mark that in his speeches he goes on stressing the same ideas — this is evidently a sign of that vital possession. (*TY*, p. 143)

Sri Aurobindo said this of Hitler on 20 July 1940:

. . . I have not seen any other person who has followed the Asura with such extraordinary fidelity. Three things of the Asura he adopts strictly: first, if you go on telling lies long enough with assurance, people will believe you; second, you must adopt treachery and appeal to the basest passions of the people; third, care only for success without regard for truth. There have been men who have done that with some pretence of truth. But Hitler speaks openly of his method of falsehood and yet people believe him. . . . (*TW*, pp. 816-17)

In a letter he wrote:

History has no parallel of a maniac using all kinds of falsehood, hypocrisy and perversity to capture the imagination of a cultured race like the Germans. (Quoted in *LT*, p. 48)

Speaking about the horrific conditions in Germany on 22 May 1940, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

. . . the whole atmosphere in Germany seems to be dominated by these forces. The young men are actually taught to be devilish. In Poland, when the Poles complained about cruelty by the German soldiers people said, "Don't complain, this is nothing. Wait till the Nazis come to power here; then you will know what cruelty is." (Purani, *Evening Talks*,⁶ p. 735)

On another instance, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the perversity of Hitler:

. . . Do you know that in his secluded residence he has a cinema and enjoys and gloats on the horrors and sufferings he has inflicted on people? . . . (13 December 1940, *TW*, p. 957)

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

The Mother has said:

. . . all cruelty is a sign of great unconsciousness. (*CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 49)

In one of his letters to a disciple Sri Aurobindo reiterated that indeed this was the Mother's war.

You have said that you have begun to doubt whether it was the Mother's war and ask me to make you feel again that it is. I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura. (29 July 1942, *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 394)

Replying to another letter where a disciple raised doubts about unconditional support to the Allies, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all

been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things — they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage of the forward evolution. (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction: she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence — or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that, — after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves. . . . All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines. . . . Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has to be safeguarded; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated.

. . .

For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the virtues of

the Herrenvolk, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance. . . .

. . .

. . . Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us. (3 September 1943, *SABCL*, Vol. 26, pp. 395-98)

Hitler's hatred for coloured people and his policy of exterminating the Jews was diabolical. Sri Aurobindo was asked why the Jews were being persecuted by Hitler and did they betray Germany during the war. He replied:

Nonsense! On the contrary they helped Germany a great deal. It is because they are a clever race that others are jealous of them. For anything that is wrong they point to the Jews . . . You remember I told you about the prophecy regarding the Jews that when they will be persecuted and driven to Jerusalem that the Golden Age shall come? It is the Jews that have built Germany's commercial fleet and her navy. The contribution of the Jews towards the world's progress in every branch is remarkable. (27 December 1938, *ET*, pp. 587-88)

Sri Aurobindo then expounded why dislike exists between nations, races and provinces:

But this sort of dislike exists among other nations also, e.g., the English do not like the Scots, because the Scots have beaten the English in commercial affairs. There was a famous story in *Punch*: Two people were talking. One asked, "Bill, who is that man?" and Bill answered, "Let us strike at him, he is a stranger."

And then in Bengal the West Bengal people used to call East Bengal people *Bāngāl* . . . At one time I used to wear socks at all times of the year. The West Bengalis used to sneer at that, saying, "You are a *Bāngāl*." They thought that they were the most civilised people on earth. It is a legacy from the animal world, just as dogs of one street do not like dogs of another. (*Ibid.*, p. 588)

Sri Aurobindo was closely monitoring the war movements. Nirod-da writes:

. . . There was a strong possibility that fighting would break out in December [1938], just a week or two after the night of November 23, when Sri Aurobindo had his accident. But, as he indicated in our talks, his Force pushed it back to a later date, for war at that time would have been a great hindrance to his work. . . . (TY, p. 123)

Georges Van Vrekhem in his book *Beyond Man*⁷ writes:

We have already seen how in his anger and frustration he [the Asura] turned directly against Sri Aurobindo, in November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo was on the point of effecting the manifestation of the Supermind on Earth, to this end putting off the beginning of the imminent war. We have also heard the Mother say that their work was completely interrupted by the war, which demanded their full attention and occult intervention to avoid that clock of history once again, like so often in the past, being put back. (p. 228)

Purani-ji writes:

It was a priceless experience to see how he devoted his energies to the task of saving humanity from the threatened reign of Nazism. It was a practical lesson of solid work done for humanity without any thought of return or reward, without even letting humanity know what he was doing for it! Thus he lived the Divine and showed us how the Divine cares for the world, how he comes down and works for man. . . . (LS, p. 229)

Nirod-da recounts:

But in the midst of all these dramatic upheavals, Sri Aurobindo never lost his calm equanimity though he knew very well indeed what was at stake. He said that Hitler was the greatest menace the world had to face and that he would stop at nothing to achieve his sinister object, even destroy the whole civilisation; for “An idiot hour destroys what centuries made”, as we find in a verse in *Savitri*. (TY, pp. 120-21)

He continues:

. . . when the War had taken a full-fledged turn, the radio news was transmitted to Sri Aurobindo’s room so that he might follow the war-movements from hour to hour. (TY, p. 124)

7. Georges Van Vrekhem: *Beyond Man*, 1997 edition; abbreviated to BM.

Indeed Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's physical presence came at a most opportune moment for mankind.

* * *

The Second World War began on 1 September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland; Britain and France declared war as a result. Sri Aurobindo remarked:

. . . But Hitler committed only one mistake: when attacking Poland he thought that the Allies wouldn't intervene. . . . (15 June 1940, *TW*, p. 713).

A new type of combined-operations tactics, which the Germans called 'Blitzkrieg', were used where tanks, troops and aeroplanes attacked together and smashed through any traditional defences. Using this method, Poland was captured in just 28 days, despite heroic, often suicidal defence of their homeland by the Polish Armed Forces. Sri Aurobindo was impressed with the Poles and commented:

. . . The Poles seem to be the only brave people: they are still continuing a guerilla war; they have not yet caved in. The Finns were also doing well but as soon as defeat began they caved in. (30 July 1940, *TW*, p. 822)

On 9 April 1940, Hitler attacked Denmark and Norway. German freighters had sailed secretly into the port of Copenhagen, Denmark's capital. Their holds were filled with German troops. The Danes, taken completely by surprise and to save themselves, surrendered in two hours. About the attack on Denmark, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Oh! the War has begun then. . . .

N: But why did they choose Denmark?

Sri Aurobindo: Because then they can control the Baltic and the North Sea and from there they can enter anytime into Norway and Sweden. (9 April 1940, *TW*, p. 597)

Referring to Germany's easy victory over Denmark and Germany's invasion of Poland and Czechoslovakia, Sri Aurobindo said:

Denmark was easy, for geographically it is a sort of suburb of Germany. The Germans had practically to walk in. Poland they conquered because the Allies had no chance of helping it directly. Czechoslovakia was different. The Czechs could have offered good resistance but for the Allies who betrayed them. If the Allies had agreed to help them at that time in combination with Russia, the Czechs could have given an effective fight to Hitler. (12 April 1940, *TW*, p. 603)

When it was learnt that the Germans had captured some ports of Norway, Sri Aurobindo observed:

The British also should occupy other ports. (9 April 1940, *TW*, p. 598)

The discussion was continued the next day:

P: If England occupies part of Norway —

Sri Aurobindo: That depends on her sea-power. If she can, it will be a tremendous economic blockade of Germany. (10 April 1940, *TW*, p. 599)

Two days later Sri Aurobindo added:

. . . In the case of Norway, Germany's power will depend on the control of the sea. It will have to transport troops and mechanised units across the sea. If the British Navy can intercept them, then it will be difficult for Germany. It is a very well-arranged coup by the Germans. Once they have occupied the main ports and landed troops, it will be difficult to turn them out. (12 April 1940, *TW*, pp. 603-04)

The topic was again taken up:

N: Without Norway, can the Allies' blockade be effective?

Sri Aurobindo: It can be. They can impose it with their Navy. If they can smash the German fleet now, then there is a chance of peace . . .

And he added:

If the Norwegians could have fought like the Finns, there would have been some resistance. (14 April 1940, *TW*, p. 606)

A few days later, Sri Aurobindo said that the Germans had foresight and organisation power and that they were preparing for the Norway invasion since two months. (18 April 1940, *TW*, p. 614)

Hitler made a huge strategic gamble. He and his strategists knew that Norwegian coastal waters were vital for the transport of Swedish iron ore *via* Narvik to the German blast furnaces. And, more generally, he recognised that German control of Norwegian waters would make breaking the Allied blockade of Germany a little easier.

Hitler's plan was that the whole strength of the German Navy would be used to

land powerful forces all the way along the Norwegian coast, from Oslo to Narvik, to protect the coastal waterways along which the iron ore was to be transported.

This was risky in the extreme. Germany's Navy was greatly inferior to the Royal Navy in all categories, and even if the troops succeeded in getting ashore, helped by the element of surprise, it was quite possible for them to be cut off subsequently. Only one thing might prevent disaster — German air power. Also, German paratroopers would have to secure the airfields for air transports, and the German Navy carry out sorties to cover the destroyers with ski troops.

The British Admiralty decided that all strength should be diverted to deal with the German fleet at sea, and troops already aboard British cruisers and intended for the likely landings were disembarked. Hitler's troops landed on Norwegian soil the following day.

In the far north, at Narvik, the ten most modern German destroyers were able to get their troops ashore, sinking two Norwegian coast defence vessels in the process.

Sri Aurobindo remarked on the line of approach the Allies could adopt:

. . . In Narvik they have their Navy with which they can bombard the coast and then with the fleet's air force they can continuously bombard the German army till they surrender. I don't know why they can't. (7 May 1940, *TW*, p. 623)

On Sweden's neutrality Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . if Sweden, instead of foolishly guarding its neutrality, joins the Norwegians, then by the time they make a combined resistance the Allies can land their troops in Sweden. Sweden does not seem to realise that it is its turn next to be swallowed up by Germany. (12 April 1940, *TW*, p. 604)

On Chamberlain's inactivity when the Germans were preparing to attack Norway, Sri Aurobindo remarked,

. . . So long as Chamberlain is at the helm, nothing will happen. He applies only business intelligence to politics. (14 April 1940, *TW*, p. 605)

Referring to Britain's unpreparedness in Norway, a disciple wondered how Britain was planning to fight with such insufficient troops. Sri Aurobindo replied:

Not only insufficient but ill-equipped. They have no heavy guns, no aircraft, no mechanised units. (5 May 1940, *TW*, p. 618)

Regarding Britain's leadership Sri Aurobindo said on 5 May 1940:

. . . The Conservatives have to become dissatisfied with Chamberlain before they change him. The question is: whom will they put in his place? Among Labour and the Liberals there is no one except Lloyd George, but he is too old. Among the Conservatives, all except Churchill and Hore-Belisha are imbeciles.

S: Chamberlain won't easily give up.

Sri Aurobindo: No, he will stick on with his hands, feet and teeth unless forcibly dislodged. It is because there is not a single real statesman in Europe that Hitler and Mussolini are getting their own way. (5 May 1940, *TW*, p. 615)

When the question of forming a National Government arose, Sri Aurobindo said:

In that case Churchill, Hore-Belisha, Eden and Lloyd George will have to come in. . . . (7 May 1940, *TW*, p. 623)

Norway was a major strategic failure for the British. This was a campaign that should have played to British strengths. Instead it brought out one of the major weaknesses of the contemporary Royal Navy — its incapacity to contest command of the air off a distant shore, due to its lack of radar control and high-performance fighters.

Even before the Norway campaign was over, it was perceived to have gone so badly that there was a vote of No Confidence in the British Parliament. The government suffered a reduced majority, and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigned. It has been referred to as the Norway debacle.

On 8 May when it was imminent that Churchill would become Prime Minister, Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . Churchill is in command of the War and everything is all right. . . . (8 May 1940, *TW*, p. 625)

The battle lines between Churchill and Hitler had been clearly drawn.

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE LIBRARY

IN the evening of 24th April, 1952 “. . . the Mother opened another section of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. This section will house the temporary library and music and dance room with some additional class rooms.” (*Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1952)

A part of the Ashram Library was moved from the main Ashram Building in 1952 to the first floor of the east block of our present School (now joined to the rest through the long ‘Hall of Harmony’).

We quote a few lines from the Report on the Quarter of the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1954:

In the afternoon (of the 24th April) the Mother opened at the University Centre Library an exhibition on Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. This exhibition had been prepared by the History section of the University which had been holding special classes in this branch of History. So it was arranged with much scholarship and with very good taste. It was so popular that it had to be extended beyond the usual number of days allotted to exhibitions. We publish some pictures of the exhibition in this issue.

Pictures from the *Bulletin of Physical Education* 1954 show the Mother coming out after her visit to the new Library. In both the pictures we see very clearly Medhananda, the librarian in charge, accompanying her to the southern gate on the rue Law de Lauriston. (This gate is usually opened nowadays only on programme evenings.) In these pictures we see Nolini-da, Pavitra-da, Sisir-da, Pranab-da and Amrita-da with the Mother (Sujata Nahar and Debu are also seen with them). The white bag in Pranab-da’s hand is the Mother’s. Every time the Mother visited any place, her bag would be carried by Pranab-da.

When the Ashram Library was moved to this portion of our present School building, we as young students had to carry piles of books from one room to another to be classified and arranged in the appropriate cupboards. Once things were in place, the landing area was used for some pictures and a glass case was put up for the notices. Often on Darshan days, Christmas and the New Year, special arrangements were made for students to see paintings by great masters or pictures of different countries of the world to help the students increase their general knowledge. Sometimes art-work by students was also put up there.

In the two exhibition-pictures published in the 1954 *Bulletin*, we see posters announcing the themes — “Flowers in Yoga” and “March of Man — Egypt and Mesopotamia”, both of which aroused great interest. Outsiders connected with the

Ashram could also come to see these pictures. In one of the photographs, the wife of the French Consul General of India can be recognised — this is just to remind us that Pondicherry was at that time still a part of the French territories as in undivided India. On the right-hand side, for the exhibition on “Flowers in Yoga”, we see Padma, one of our French teachers for children, pointing at a picture. This whole exhibition might have been based on a book prepared by Lizelle Raymond under the Mother’s guidance. This booklet, *Le Rôle des Fleurs* was distributed by the Mother to all who were in the Ashram at the time, children and adults alike. In the pictures on “March of Man” we see Smt. Rani Devi, one of our teachers of English and Bengali, with her students listening to explanations given by Dr. Satyabrata who, in spite of his duties in the General Hospital, had taken a very active part in organising, with the help of some others, the exhibition. He attended regularly the classes on the History of Civilisation. The poster at the entrance of this exhibition, depicting a sphinx, was painted by Sanjiban-da. Robi Ganguli contributed by giving many beautiful photographs for this section.

We can imagine how impressed the students and ashramites were to see this new opening created for the first time in the Library area.

The building where this happened has been referred to as the University Centre because of the convocation held in 1951 announcing the decision to open a University in Sri Aurobindo’s name. And everyone was interested in learning — even the adults joined the literature, philosophy, psychology, History of Civilisation, biology and other classes as auditors.

AMITA SEN

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO LIBRARY

At No. 3, Saint Martin Street, stands a beautiful building, a typical example of French colonial architecture. This is the present Sri Aurobindo Library. The property was registered in the Mother’s name in November, 1954. The building was owned by a French businessman who exported semi-precious stones. It is a beautiful double-storied mansion, with open spaces on its eastern and southern sides. On the eastern side, two large gates open to the Saint Martin Street. There is a large portico in front leading up a few steps to a spacious verandah. Large round pillars support the ceiling. The floor of the verandah is in marble. The doors opening to it are large and high. The hall behind is also spacious, long and large. The beams and rafters of the ceiling are made of wood and covered with wooden panels. The hall is flanked on either side by large rooms. A wooden staircase leads to the first floor where the construction follows the same pattern. The building on its eastern side faces the sea.

A report from the *Bulletin*, February 1955 says:

The Library has been shifted to a beautiful building which we have purchased, just off the sea front and commanding a magnificent view of the sea. The shifting of the Library was done entirely by our children within two days which is all the more remarkable because not only was the old University Library shifted but also the Ashram Library which is now combined with the University Library.

Medhananda was the librarian of the University Centre Library. When this section was merged with other sections of the Library and shifted to the new building, Medhananda was the librarian in charge here. He lived in the new building. Fritz Winkelstroeter, born in Pforzheim, Germany, arrived in the Ashram on February 15, 1952. The Mother named him Medhananda.

The *SABDA Newsletter* of December 2007 provides some interesting details about our librarian:

During the Second World War he was interned near Tahiti, where he spent sixteen years. In these years he had found exceptionally favourable conditions for delving deeper into the inner and higher realms of his being. He was an author and editor, a researcher into the meanings of ancient symbols and myths, . . . and man of profound intellect who was alight with a psychic joy. He also taught the History of Religions at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, a position he was well-qualified for by his lifelong interest in and study of the spiritual cultures of different ages and parts of the world.

Vasanti, who had earlier worked in the Ashram Library and also worked in this new Library, remembers:

In the new Sri Aurobindo Library, Medhananda started expanding the work to meet the needs of University students, because the Ashram school had, in the meanwhile, become Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. His chief assistant was Maud Smith who had been a librarian in the United States before coming to the Ashram. She gave us all a good training. She taught us the classification of books, specially to Romen-da who took over that section when Maud had to leave the Library, as the Mother had put her in charge of the newly formed Sri Aurobindo Ashram Book Stock. Later, Sadhana and Robert joined and they helped Romen-da in the work of classification. Sadhana worked in the Library for about 17 years. She was in charge of the Marathi and Hindi sections. Later, she looked after the Sanskrit section as well.

Stephanie and Robert as also Kalindi Wellingker worked in the Library

for some time.

Kireet Joshi worked with Medhananda for some time before Pavitra-da took him into the Education Centre to become its first Registrar.

In the new Library, Medhananda and Maud gave me fresh training. I was taught new skills which have been useful to me to this day. Medhananda, especially, was a very fine teacher and the horizons of my mind were greatly expanded. I am grateful to him for the insights he provided.

The Mother had given work in the Library to Light (Lumière Ganguli) when it was in the Centre of Education building. When the Library was moved to its present location, Light too was part of the team helping Medhananda. She was looking after the Children's Corner in the Library.

Bibha had worked for some time in the University Centre Library. She was then given work in the Ashram Press. Once the Library was moved to its present location, Medhananda requested the Mother to allow Bibha to work again in the Library. As one climbs up the steps there is a long room in front. This was the place where Bibha used to work. In the big room to the south of her workplace, the Mother's collection of books on art was kept in two cupboards. She had sent her own collection to the Library. The Mother had instructed Bibha that her books should never be sent out for repair. If any repair was needed, it should be done by Bibha in the Library itself.

Bibha had to stamp all the new books. Chaundona-di typed and prepared the cards which were sent to Romen-da. Bibha also packed the copies of *The Life Divine* that Medhananda had translated into German, and kept them ready for dispatch.

Bibha remembers the wonderful experience of repairing the bound volumes of the original *Arya*, containing notes written in Sri Aurobindo's own hand.

Once the Library was moved to its permanent location, Bibha says:

. . . the Mother used to visit the Library on every Darshan day. She would remind me about her visit in the evening, when I would go to her for the Pranam in the morning. As I knew that she would be visiting the Library, I on my part, would keep everything neatly arranged to the best of my capacities. One day she told me, "You know, I have received some brushes and ink from Japan." She showed me the brushes, their handles were made of bamboo stick, white in colour and extraordinary. They looked as if made of ivory. She told me to get a big paper and some smaller-sized papers from Wilfy. "First," she said, "I shall put my signature on the smaller ones, then I shall take up the bigger one!" On that Darshan day the Mother sent the brushes to the Library through Medhananda. I kept everything ready the way the Mother had told me. As she entered my room she said, "Oh! Everything is ready!" then with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes she said, "I thought the paper would be longer!

But who would give me such a long paper?" She then took her place in front of the large table. Medhananda stood beside her with a beaming face. Pranab, Pavitra-da, Nolini-da, Amrita-da were standing by. The Mother first signed on the small papers. She gave one to me and one to Medhananda.

Then in one stroke of the brush she put her signature on the long sheet kept for this purpose

During the Mother's visit I used always to keep some toffees in a dish on the table. The Mother distributed a toffee to each one present. She looked for Pranab who was in the other room, talking to someone. She called him twice, then took two toffees and went to Pranab herself. While giving the toffees to him she said, "What does it matter if Haji doesn't come, the mountain will go to him!"

Medhananda decided to fix two rods on either side of the paper and asked me to prepare the tassels with silk threads for the rods.

I remember that one day Medhananda had taken us, his students, to the central hall on the first floor of the Library and had shown us the beautiful signature on the western wall of the hall. He had pointed out to us that the Mother's signature was like the wings of a bird in flight. We never saw it that way. What a revelation it was for us! Did I not marvel at Medhananda's insight when years later, some time in the seventies, I came to know that the Mother herself had revealed the significance of her signature to Mona Sarkar in one of her interviews with him! Here I quote from the book, *Sweet Mother, Harmonies of Light*, by Mona Sarkar:

(The Mother draws a bird above the signature)

Do you see? . . . This is a graphic representation of the signature. It means: the Bird of Peace descending upon earth. Its wings are tilted towards the earth. You see the angle of the wings and how it is descending to the earth? It is to bring Peace. It is the messenger of Peace. The Bird of Peace descending upon earth. Do you see?

Learn and Be Merry

The first issue of the wall magazine, *Learn and Be Merry*, was placed in the children's corner of the Ashram Library on 21st February 1955. It was mounted in a glass case on one of the walls so that children could easily read the pages.

Sunanda was asked to prepare the magazine by the Mother, who gave it the name *Learn and Be Merry*. Sanjivan-da helped with the art work. It included stories, poems, puzzles, and general knowledge questions. The Mother went through every

issue, correcting any mistake and even solving the puzzles, before it was put up for the children.

Mother gave this beautiful message in 1954 when the Library had started:

Une bibliothèque doit être un sanctuaire intellectuel. Il faut y chercher la lumière et le progrès.

[A library must be an intellectual sanctuary. One must seek there light and progress.]

That has always been the source of inspiration, the guiding principle for the Library.

Here is some additional information collected from the 'Report on the Quarter' section of the Ashram periodical, the *Bulletin of International Centre of Education*, from 1955 to 1960 — which gives us an idea of the activities of the Sri Aurobindo Library. Those important years, vibrant with the Mother's presence, when she was physically present amongst us, moving about, inaugurating each new activity in the Ashram, inspiring and guiding the work to grow to its fulfilment. Exhibitions on different topics were considered important for their educational value. Earlier, in the University Centre Library, this educational tool was effectively used. Quarterly exhibitions were held in the Library too. These exhibitions aroused great interest in the viewers, widening their understanding. The Mother took a keen interest in them and would herself open these exhibitions, go round and see everything that was put up there. The Library had been the venue for exhibitions.

Some interesting details have been culled from the *Bulletin*:

On the 16th January 1955, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, on his visit to the new state of Pondicherry, visited the Ashram. "Sri Nehru went to the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Library and was there introduced to seven teachers of the University Centre who are nationals of different countries."

An exhibition of Dolls of various countries were shown and numerous pictures of dolls used in worship and in play. (April 24, 1955)

An exhibition on Germany was arranged mainly by the German members of the University. It started with an enactment of the opening scene of Goethe's *Faust* played at the entrance to the Library, and inside was the exhibition of numerous pictures of Germany tracing the development of the country from ancient times to modern times. This was in June 1955.

In June 1955, the quarterly exhibition was held in Golconde.

On November 24, 1955, 'The Spiritual Destiny of India' was the theme of the exhibition in the Library.

During the February Darshan in 1956, 'Parks and Gardens' was the theme of the exhibition.

An exhibition on the Mother's works featuring all her published works, as well as a number of her manuscripts and specimens of her handwriting in various languages such as English, French, Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit and Bengali were part of the exhibition in February 1956.

An exhibition of pictures and transparencies of famous stained glass works was held in January 1958.

"The Mother visits the Library" was featured in August 1958.

The following exhibitions were also arranged:

1. Artists Abroad.
2. Indian Painting, including children's finger painting.
3. Two American Cities.

A new Exhibition House was opened in August 1958 and it is there that most of the exhibitions were held from then onward.

The Mother unveiled, in the Library Hall, a bronze bust of Sri Aurobindo sculpted by the famous European artist, Mrs. Elsa Fraenkel. This beautiful stylised work was done from photographs and with great inspiration. The bust is now permanently installed in the Ashram where it has become a focus for inspiration and meditation.

On the 21st February 1957, there was a special flag hoisting ceremony at the University Library. This flag had the symbol of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in gold on a light blue background. Now, this flag is hoisted on the Darshan days.

Through the years many books in different languages and disciplines were donated to the Library.

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The classes of the Higher Course of the Centre of Education were held in the main school premises. Classes of Science subjects were held in the separate laboratories. However due to some constraints of space in the School building, the Higher Course classes were moved to the Library from 16 December 1967 to 1 November 1971 when a separate building which the Mother named 'Knowledge' was ready to welcome the Higher Course classes.

In the Library, the students sat in small groups, each with a teacher, in the open verandah, upstairs. As the groups were sometimes quite close to each other, an arrangement of dark curtains was introduced: if any group felt disturbed by the neighbouring group, the curtain was drawn to separate that area of study.

CHITRA SEN

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO LIBRARY

As a student, every evening I used to go to the newly established big Library about 4 o'clock after my classes and read something till about 5 p.m.

On one such occasion, Medhananda-da stopped by my table where I was taking notes from Drinkwater's book on World Culture. It was quite a large-sized book with a slightly worn out black cardboard cover. Medhananda-da just smiled when I looked up from my work. Just that one glance and he knew what I was reading about. "Oh, you are interested in this?" he said and walked out — within minutes he was back. Then he said, as if continuing his sentence "You can read this book also, and this one and this one . . ."

I used to study in the French Room. I think I wanted to go through Victor Hugo's early poems. Medhananda-da showed me two special 'De Luxe' volumes, huge, almost A4 size and pretty thick. The place used to be empty usually at that time and I liked the silence and the emptiness which was not empty at all. Of course, Medhananda-da would come upto the door on his round and say, "Oh, you are here today."

One morning I was going round the first floor of the Library when I found a glass case with some special exhibits. I wondered if it could be opened. No. Medhananda-da came in. "See, what we have got here. You know, the smallest book in the world!"

"No," I exclaimed.

"Want to touch it?" he asked and he opened the glass lid to show me the treasure. I hardly looked at the book in my hand. I was most surprised at something else.

"You can open it?" I asked.

"Yes, I know how to."

It didn't occur to me that he was in charge of the Library and so he would naturally know everything around. But I think, he was so much part of the whole or, rather, the whole place was so much part of him that you just took it for granted that he would be there.

Once I wanted to look at one of the Art Books. "No, don't open those cupboards," he said. "These are the Mother's books. You want to read one of them? Which one?"

And he gave me the one I wanted to read. I remember that I had to look at it inside that room and was not allowed to take it outside.

"No one reads these books?" I asked.

"Not usually," he said.

Medhananda-da was very proud of the glass case where the Arikamedu remains were placed. One day he was there in the verandah with someone. He saw me and insisted that I should look at this arrangement. I was not very sensitive to such things at that time, (it happened to me afterwards in the National Museum in Delhi)

and Medhananda-da was really surprised. He shook his head and said “No? But you ought to recognise these. Look at this urn . . . No?”

A burial urn from Arikamedu.

The “No?” didn’t ring any bell. I just looked and perhaps thought, not too consciously, “Oh, these old things, broken pottery and all that — well, not my cup of tea!”

He just laughed and let me go on my way, but I think he was very surprised. . . . Now I know why. I think they all knew about the first Roman settlers here and I didn’t.

Western classical music used to be played regularly once or twice a week in the evenings. People would often go to read, to listen to music or even to sit and enjoy the building and the garden. The Library was a place which had large speakers and long-playing records (33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm). (Of course, in the Playground too there were such large speakers for the Mother’s Wednesday classes. Very often, when the Mother was distributing groundnuts to all the members after their physical activities, Western classical music was played for everyone.)

On the northern side of the large verandah on the first floor of the Library, was the supervisor’s desk at which Vasanti would be seen on duty. Meticulous and correct, she was someone who liked books and study; she gave you just the right directions to help you locate whatever you were looking for. There were several cane chairs, always occupied by adults in the mornings who knew exactly which magazine to pick up, as these were kept always in the same place on racks along the wall.

Medhananda himself would take his classes in the southernmost room where there was a long table. At other times, it was used by others.

As there were several small groups, each sitting around a teacher, in the open verandah, upstairs, an arrangement of dark curtains was introduced. If any group felt disturbed by the neighbouring group, the curtain was drawn to separate that area of study.

The French classes were held, for example, in the French room. The teacher could at any moment take out a book and refer to the required books in connection with some question that had come up during the discussion. The whole place was alive — everywhere someone or the other, one group or another was studying, for teachers were free to hold their classes wherever they liked. Of course Medhananda or his assistant would know exactly which place was chosen and by whom. Once there was no place anywhere so one of the students chose a peculiar narrow room along the children’s verandah for his French class. It was not comfortable, but the teacher had to comply with the suggestion for, in the Higher Course, it was the student who had the right to choose!

On the 16th December 1971 the Higher Course classes were moved to the newly constructed building — ‘KNOWLEDGE’ — meant to be used for the classes of the Higher Course section.

AMITA SEN

SRI AUROBINDO LIBRARY

Debranjana-da, the present librarian in charge of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Library remembers:

When I joined the work at the Ashram Library in the early 1960s, after completing my studies at S.A.I.C.E., I was the youngest member on the staff. Even so, Medhananda treated me just like the others, never interfering with any work he had assigned to me, but always stepping back and observing my work with a kindly attention — more like a benevolent father than a supervisor, or boss. It was this loving personality that endeared him to so many. The Mother once told Medhananda that in 1920, when she had stayed in Bayoud House, which is opposite the Library entrance, she had noticed this magnificent house across the street and thought it would make a fine library! So when all was ready at the new Library, Medhananda also moved in here and chose for himself a very small, unprepossessing room, with only a single window. One day the Mother came to visit the Library and when she saw his room, decided it to be too small. She toured the rest of the building and chose a larger, well-lit, better-ventilated room and provided a small kitchen and attached bath. Although he was a master of erudition, a creative and original thinker, and an inspiring writer, he was above all a child of the Mother, with whom he had the most extraordinarily sweet relation. (Sourced from *SABDA Newsletter*, December 2007)

The Library soon became the only privileged buildings to fly a huge flag, with a Centre of Education emblem on it, on Darshan days. Before this, the Library was situated in what is now the Reading Room of the Ashram main building. The collection of books was small at that time — largely the private collection of Dilip Kumar Roy — and was looked after by a sadhak named Premananda, a very strict librarian who didn't hesitate to inform Sri Aurobindo that the books he had borrowed were overdue. Needless to add, Sri Aurobindo appreciated his punctiliousness.

Medhananda was assisted by Maud Smith, Romen-da and Niranjana-da who not only classified the books according to the Dewey Decimal System but modified the system to make up for its shortcomings and to suit the special needs of the Ashram collection, especially in the fields of religion, spirituality and yoga. Bibhadi did the book binding and several elderly women kept the books dusted and in good order. Each language section had a head: Indu-da for Sanskrit, Gunvanti for Gujarati, Runu-da and Bokul-di for Bengali and Light-di looked after the children's section. Sanat-da, the history teacher, though he had no official designation in the library, was often among the books. Later on around 1970, Kanupriyo-da, teacher of Bengali language, was always present, sitting there every morning in the entrance verandah, doing his work on a table on one side. His pleasant, amiable presence

was an asset for the Library.

The Mother saw the Library as a part of the whole educational system, a place where culture and learning were available not only in the form of books but music and art as well. She sometimes sent beautiful or interesting pictures or objects of her own to be displayed. Medhananda followed the Mother's guidance and prepared an exhibition entitled "Unity in Diversity". The upstairs and downstairs rooms and even the stairway were fitted with wooden frames to support displays of educational and cultural material. Artists exhibited their work there. One work of art has become part of the Library's permanent display. William Pitt, an Australian artist, brought his sculptures in the early 70s to India to exhibit them. He visited the Ashram, stayed several months in the Library and, before leaving, offered one of his works in baked clay to the Mother. It stands in the gold-fish pond, in the portico, just outside on the eastern side and it represents the upper bodies of two men, one of whom is clearly an Australian aboriginal.

The 60s and 70s were a period of rapid growth and Medhananda was happy to get the assistance of Debranjanda who has now become the head of the complex setup that the present Library is.

In those days, before television became an evening distraction, and Saturday movies became a weekly event, the Library was open between 7 pm and 9 pm. It was a popular time for students to congregate in the Library.

At the outset in order to create an atmosphere of concentration and serious study, the Mother wanted books to be read in the library rather than to be borrowed and read at home. So entering the Library one would find many readers, absorbed in their books.

Later, as the readers changed and a need for lighter, popular reading became apparent, Leena's lending library section was created. It has become a popular and well-used part of the Library.

The view of the sea from the first floor verandah is so impressive that, in spite of the great inconvenience of flooding during the monsoon season, the Mother never wanted it to be enclosed. Downstairs, on the southern side, a garden was, and still is, divided by a brick wall. The eastern side has a large circular open stage, and on the western side the Mother imagined that there would one day be a Japanese rockery.

In the late sixties, the Library perhaps came close to the Mother's vision of what a Library should be. While the 'Knowledge' building was under construction, the teachers of the Higher Course held their classes in the Library in an atmosphere that must have been conducive to the independent work of the Higher Course students. Even today, because of the limited space at 'Knowledge', classes are held in the Library. During the season of clear skies, at night, on the terrace, students of astronomy regularly watch the stars through the Library telescope.

The collection now — fifty years later — comes close to perhaps a lakh of

books, mainly French and English. European and most Indian languages are represented on the shelves to some degree. Most of these volumes have been donated by individuals but some were the personal libraries of ashramites or friends of the Ashram. The collection includes old books (one from the 16th century) and rare books (the first English translation of the Gita with an introduction by Warren Hastings).

Every good library has a card catalogue and our Library has teak wood catalogue cabinets. An original prototype was imported from the USA, and the ‘Harpagon’ wood working unit copied the original and made several others. The user will find it almost impossible to tell which set of smooth-working, well-fitted cabinets was the original, and which the copies.

In such a large and unplanned collection it is only natural that some people complain that some books are not strictly in keeping with the high ideals of the Institution. A long time ago, when a sadhak actually made the complaint to the Mother, far from suggesting that the offending volumes should be removed from the shelves, the Mother asked the librarian to classify these books as OL (ordinary life) so that readers could make a conscious choice. On another occasion, the librarian took a handful of paperbacks that had been termed “unwholesome”. The Mother picked up one, turned some pages, read out a description of nature that she considered beautiful and handed the pile back to the librarian without another word. The message was clear.

The Library has entered the 21st century: new additions are being made to serve the Ashram community and research scholars.

JAHNAVI

I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end. Say not therefore that I attain it. I become it. Only so can man attain God by becoming God.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 5)

FEARLESS PERSISTENCE

(How Chanchal-ben came to Sri Aurobindo)

“I too wish to see Sri Aurobindo,” 22-year-old Chanchal told her husband Shivabhai. “You always talk about him and his ashram in Pondicherry. Besides, you call him your Guru, and your Guru is my Guru, so I should see him too.”

“In this ashram it does not follow that my Guru is automatically your Guru,” said Shivabhai.

“Well, I still want to go to Pondicherry so that I can see Sri Aurobindo myself. Tell me, how do I go there?”

“If you wish to see Sri Aurobindo, you will have to take action yourself to get permission. You cannot ask someone else to act on your behalf. Sri Aurobindo is a very highly evolved, spiritual Guru. It is not a simple thing to understand his teachings. It is even harder to put them into practice.”

“Then how did you get permission to go to the ashram?”

“I read books written by Sri Aurobindo and made attempts to follow his teachings by doing yoga. I have also corresponded with him to seek his guidance when necessary.”

“But in the end, what did you do to receive permission to go to the ashram?” persisted Chanchal.

“I wrote to him. Sri Aurobindo granted me the permission to visit the ashram and Purani-ji wrote to let me know.”

“Who is this Purani-ji? Is he the same person who fought for India’s freedom and who was in charge of the akhādas (Indian style gymnasiums) in Gujarat? I remember that once he slapped a boy who was caught harassing a girl in his class.”

“Yes, indeed, that is the same Purani-ji. He has given up his political activities and he is now a permanent resident at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry.”

“Why did he do that? India needs people like Purani-ji.”

“Yes; however, he is now a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and lives in the ashram under Sri Aurobindo’s guidance. I too take guidance from Sri Aurobindo before making major decisions and starting all my important tasks.”

“What will happen to India’s freedom if people like you and Purani-ji give up everything and simply sit down and merely pray?”

“Sri Aurobindo is now working for India’s freedom through the Divine’s power. He has changed his course of action from political activities to the spiritual awakening of the youth of India. He has set up his ashram to help others to join in this new adventure. Sri Aurobindo’s teachings involve Integral Yoga through which human

beings can evolve to a higher level of spiritual consciousness than the present.”

* * *

Chanchal-ben and Shivabhai participated in Mahatma Gandhi's village projects. This included waking up very early in the morning and cleaning the streets and gutters. During the monsoons, they would wade through deep waters to deliver medicine and food to the people affected by floods. They were fully involved in such projects organised by Mahatma Gandhi. They believed that such work would lead India to be better prepared to achieve independence from British rule.

Shivabhai explained to his wife that Sri Aurobindo knew that India's independence was assured. Purani-ji had originally gone to meet with Sri Aurobindo to ask him to return to political life and help India become a free country.

As it turned out, Sri Aurobindo said to him: "Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?" Purani-ji asked: "Who can give such an assurance?" Sri Aurobindo replied: "Suppose, I give you the assurance?"

Purani-ji enthusiastically accepted Sri Aurobindo's assurance. It changed Purani-ji's life and very soon he became a member of the ashram.

Shivabhai had a decision to make about his future career. Chanchal-ben asked him, "What are your plans now and how will you make your decision?"

Shivabhai said that he had written a letter to Sri Aurobindo in which he explained that his brother Rambhai who was living in Kenya, was willing to help him to go to England for legal studies. Shivabhai asked Sri Aurobindo to guide him on whether going to England was the right thing to do.

Sri Aurobindo agreed with the proposal. "This is the reason for my decision to go to England," Shivabhai told Chanchal-ben.

Chanchal-ben replied, "I see. Now I understand why you have felt the need to stop working towards India's freedom and to go and study instead."

Within a few months Shivabhai withdrew from Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement, gave up his college studies and sailed for Nairobi, Africa. There he joined his brother Rambhai. With Rambhai's support Shivabhai left for England to start his studies to become a lawyer and a barrister.

Chanchal-ben had been left behind in Tarapur, a small village in Gujarat. She lived with her grandfather-in-law, Dada Hathi-bhai, her sister Suraj-ben and her young niece and nephew. After Shivabhai left, she had a strong urge to go to Pondicherry.

Although she was not very skilful in writing in Gujarati, she wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo asking for his permission to visit the ashram. She was confident that a reply would arrive soon.

* * *

Chanchal-ben took a vow not to eat or drink until her prayers were answered. Dada and Suraj told Chanchal to give up her vow but she wouldn't listen to them.

Instead, Chanchal-ben left home for the crematorium which was located near the village border. There was a small temple of Lord Shiva within the grounds of the crematorium. She entered the temple and sat in silence — for seven days and seven nights — without any food or water. She had no formal knowledge of meditation or concentration. She just prayed to Sri Aurobindo, “Please let me come to the ashram. I want your blessings.”

Those were seven very hard days. It was in the year 1927. Chanchal-ben was the young daughter-in-law. Her husband, Shivabhai, was overseas, he had gone to England for his legal studies. Chanchal-ben was advised by relatives and friends to return home. Others made mean and nasty comments because she had left her home, but Chanchal-ben did not give up. There were even some who tried to scare her by saying that she would be attacked by snakes and evil spirits. But Chanchal-ben had courage and faith. After a bath in the nearby pond in the temple garden, Chanchal-ben spent all her time sitting quietly and continued to pray for permission to go to see Sri Aurobindo.

The tiny temple in the then small village of Tarapur, was located away from all farms and residences. As is common with temples on the grounds of the crematorium, no regular functions or rituals were observed there. The inner sanctum was bare, without flowers, garlands or incense. The priest would retire to his hut as the sun set; then darkness descended and silence blanketed the night.

Chanchal-ben stayed there through the night.

After seven days and seven nights, she finally received the inner call, “Come to Pondicherry.”

She went straight to the only post office in Tarapur and demanded of the postmaster, “There is a letter for me and I have come to collect it.”

The postmaster was also one of the village elders and he was aware of Chanchal-ben's stubborn nature. Annoyed at being addressed without due respect, he said, “How do you know there is a letter for you? The mail is not even sorted and you say that there is a letter for you! We are all tired of your shameless behaviour, ignoring the needs of your father-in-law and your sister while your husband is abroad in Africa or in England.”

“Just give me my letter,” Chanchal-ben insisted.

“If there is a letter for you, the postman will deliver it at your residence. Now, go home,” said the postmaster.

Chanchal-ben refused to leave and sat down on the steps of the post office, waiting.

After a few hours, she saw the postman come out with his bag. She immediately stood up and said, “There is a letter for me. I will take it now.”

The postman was surprised to find that there was indeed a letter addressed to

Chanchal-ben Amin, with a Pondicherry postmark. He had no hesitation in giving the letter to Chanchal-ben.

With the letter in her hand, Chanchal-ben rushed home. As soon as she reached the front door, Chanchal-ben opened the envelope and found photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who she affectionately called “Mataji”.

The letter contained the message, “Chanchal, permission has been granted for *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

Chanchal-ben started packing. She was used to travelling at short notice when working as a volunteer in Mahatma Gandhi’s village projects. She collected just two sets of garments made from homespun cotton. The photographs, the letter and the clothes were placed in a small folding bag.

She then told her sister Suraj-ben, “I am leaving for Pondicherry.”

Suraj began to cry.

“Where is Pondicherry? How will you go there? Have you lost your senses?” she asked. Just then her grandfather-in-law, Dada arrived.

Dada was a Krishna devotee and an administrator of the Krishna temple in Tarapur village. He was admired in the community for his wisdom and the guidance he offered to those in need. He knew that Chanchal had spent her seven days and seven nights in the Shiva temple and was glad to see her back home. He listened calmly to what Suraj and Chanchal had to say.

In a very quiet tone Dada said, “Suraj, let Chanchal go to Pondicherry. She wishes to go on pilgrimage to the ashram. Give her five rupees.”

Can you imagine? This happened in the 1920s. Nothing deterred Chanchal-ben.

She said goodbye to Suraj and Dada and walked to the Tarapur railway station. She presented her five rupees to the ticket master and said, “Give me a ticket to go to Pondicherry.”

Now just consider that until very recent times, the 180-kilometre train journey from Chennai to Pondicherry took ten hours. Today, it takes thirty-four hours to get from Gujarat to Chennai by express train and then a further four hours by bus from Chennai to Pondicherry.

The ticket master was aware of Chanchal-ben’s reputation as a simple village girl but he also knew that she would not take no for an answer. He realised that five rupees was insufficient even to reach the border of Gujarat.

He said, “With five rupees you cannot buy a ticket to Pondicherry. Either get more money or better still, forget about going to Pondicherry.”

Chanchal-ben did not know how far Pondicherry was. But she did not care.

“Give me a ticket that will take me as far as five rupees can,” she said.

The ticket master gave her a ticket and mentioned the name of the final station. Chanchal-ben had never heard the name before nor did she remember what the ticket master had told her. The longest distance she had ever travelled was from her

maternal home in Jalund to Tarapur after her marriage to Shivabhai, and that was by bullock cart. Her knowledge of spoken Gujarati was good, but she found reading difficult and she didn't know any English, let alone Hindi or Tamil. The only word she remembered from her conversation with the ticket master was 'junction'. This is because he had advised Chanchal-ben that she would have to change trains at various junctions.

With full faith and a strong determination Chanchal-ben was on her way to Pondicherry.

She had no idea how long it would take to reach Pondicherry. She prayed to Sri Aurobindo with her mind and heart, "Please, let me have your *darshan*."

The next station was Petlad. Chanchal-ben had visited this town during her work as a volunteer. She looked out of the window and a local businessman recognised her. He was surprised to see Chanchal-ben on the train travelling all by herself.

"Chanchal-ben, where are you heading?" he asked. "I have heard that Shivabhai is in Africa and now you are travelling on your own! Can I help you?"

"I am on my way to Pondicherry to see Sri Aurobindo. Yes, I am on my own. I have a ticket worth only five rupees and after that, my faith in my God will guide me and take care of me," Chanchal-ben explained.

The businessman told Chanchal-ben that he would return soon. He rushed to a local shop and returned to find the train about to leave the station. He placed a one-hundred-rupee note in Chanchal-ben's hands. Chanchal-ben was overjoyed with this unexpected but most welcome help.

Her mind was now focussed on what the Tarapur ticket master had told her about changing trains when the word 'junction' cropped up. In those days the railway gauge, the width between the rails, changed from place to place and you had to change trains often. Wherever the gauge changed there was a junction. Beyond Mumbai the language would also change from Gujarati to Hindi.

Chanchal-ben just waited to hear the word 'junction' from other passengers or from hawkers. As soon as she heard it, she would get off the train and ask for Pondicherry. Now, most passengers would not have known where Pondicherry was located as it was not even a part of British India. Pondicherry was the capital of the French territories in India. The only way to reach there was from Madras, now known as Chennai. But Chanchal-ben was focussed on Pondicherry only. On several occasions Chanchal-ben got onto a train only to be told it was the wrong one.

After several days and many train changes, Chanchal-ben reached Pondicherry at six o'clock in the morning. This was the final station and as soon as Chanchal-ben set foot on the platform she heard a voice calling, "Chanchal!"

Purani-ji welcomed Chanchal-ben and explained to her that Sri Aurobindo had told him that Chanchal was arriving from Tarapur and that he should go to the station to bring her.

Chanchal-ben had never met Purani-ji and only knew about him because her husband had often spoken of him. There was no facility available for Chanchal-ben to indicate her date or time of arrival in Pondicherry and yet Sri Aurobindo knew. He also made sure that she was well looked after in the ashram.

After showing Chanchal-ben her room and related facilities, Puarani-ji said, "Chanchal, I will come back later, to take you to Sri Aurobindo."

Chanchal-ben felt charged with joy and blessings. She had participated in so many protest marches as well as village education and health projects. All the volunteers had to fend for themselves for meals, sanitation needs and sleeping arrangements. *But here in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, everything was taken care of. The day she arrived in Pondicherry she was given a spotlessly clean room. Getting ready to be taken to Sri Aurobindo, she felt she was in heaven where angels lived.*

When Purani-ji led Chanchal-ben to Sri Aurobindo, she just sat down, her head at his feet with tears pouring from her eyes. She had no words to ask for anything.

Sri Aurobindo gently placed his hand on her head. She was in her Lord's lap.

After two days, Chanchal-ben met "Mataji". The Mother arranged for her to have English lessons and to work in the soup kitchen. Chanchal-ben knew how to pray from her days spent in the Shiva temple in Tarapur, and now she learned how to do proper meditation. Chanchal-ben was part of the ashram, and she did not think of anything else.

Meanwhile her sister Suraj and Dada became restless. Chanchal had supposedly only gone for a pilgrimage to Pondicherry. Why had she not returned to Tarapur?

Letters started to arrive in Pondicherry asking Chanchal to come back home. Later, letters were sent to Purani-ji demanding Chanchal's return to Tarapur, "Send our Chanchal back."

* * *

The Mother advised Chanchal-ben to go back to Tarapur and assured her that in future she would revisit the ashram. Chanchal-ben returned to Tarapur and soon Shivabhai returned from England after completing his legal studies.

Shivabhai heard with astonishment about Chanchal-ben's passage to Pondicherry and back. He was proud of what Chanchal-ben had managed to do, all by herself.

Chanchal-ben had a go at him saying, "All the time you have been talking about your Guru Sri Aurobindo. But do you know, the real power is with Mataji. *All activities in the ashram are directed by Mataji and even Sri Aurobindo draws upon Mataji's power for his yoga.*"

Shivabhai was speechless. Many years later he shared this conversation with us. He said, "It was indeed Chanchal who helped me appreciate the grandeur and power of the Mother."

* * *

Chanchal-ben, our ‘Ba’, would often talk about her first visit to Pondicherry.

She used to say, “In those days the inmates of the Ashram looked like divine entities. They were seen involved in their tasks, speaking only a few necessary words. They followed in practice the teaching of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo: ‘To work for the Divine is to pray with the body.’ ”

Chanchal-ben felt that the Mother had gathered these selected souls to collaborate with her and Sri Aurobindo in their mission on this earth.

SUNANDA AND PRATAP AMIN

(From the booklet *Our Ba* by Sunanda and Pratap Amin, 2010)

The development of the experience in its rapidity, its amplitude, the intensity and power of its results, depends primarily, in the beginning of the path and long after, on the aspiration and personal effort of the sadhaka. The process of Yoga is a turning of the human soul from the egoistic state of consciousness absorbed in the outward appearances and attractions of things to a higher state in which the Transcendent and Universal can pour itself into the individual mould and transform it. The first determining element of the siddhi is, therefore, the intensity of the turning, the force which directs the soul inward. The power of aspiration of the heart, the force of the will, the concentration of the mind, the perseverance and determination of the applied energy are the measure of that intensity. The ideal sadhaka should be able to say in the Biblical phrase, “My zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.” It is this zeal for the Lord, — utsāha, the zeal of the whole nature for its divine results, vyākulatā, the heart’s eagerness for the attainment of the Divine, — that devours the ego and breaks up the limitations of its petty and narrow mould for the full and wide reception of that which it seeks, that which, being universal, exceeds and, being transcendent, surpasses even the largest and highest individual self and nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 58)

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

4. The Hemisphere Image

IF the sheer size of the New York Library edition of *The Life Divine* frightened me in spite of its undeniable attraction and the obvious reverence I noticed when Father handled the volume, the argument proposed in the book seemed altogether beyond my grasp. Father's teaching of Sri Aurobindo at home was radically different from his teaching of English literature in the Honours class. He was the University Professor of English and would lead us through Shakespeare or Milton or the odes of John Keats step by step, while we took down copious notes as he lectured. This was not so when he drew me into the Aurobindonian world. One never knew how or when he made things appear simple to the enquiring mind. I guess that is the secret of *gurukulavāsa*.

I was expected to read the book and then ask questions if there were doubts. Time and again I would sit down with the book and open the Contents pages which held their own attraction. From the way Sri Aurobindo had massed the titles, it seemed as if he were leading us step by step in a classroom. 'The Human Aspiration' opens the list and the poetic headings are likeable and inviting. 'The Materialist Denial'; 'The Refusal of the Ascetic'. What is that? 'The Origin of the Ignorance'. That would be a great search!

All the same, it was beyond my power to move forward steadily from the first page onwards. Abstractions got me drowsy even when I was young. When one is not able to hold on to the subject easily when reading from the start, one tends to take the short-cut. Since I knew Sri Aurobindo's philosophy posited an evolutionary theory, any chapter that had 'evolution' in its title was a natural temptation. 'Man and the Evolution'. So direct!

A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence. This significance is concealed at the outset by the involution of the Spirit, the Divine Reality, in a dense material Inconscience; a veil of Inconscience, a veil of insensibility of Matter hides the universal Consciousness-Force which works within it, so that the Energy, which is the first form the Force of creation assumes in the physical universe, appears to be itself inconscient and yet does the works of a vast occult Intelligence.¹

1. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 856-57.

There was no problem in understanding ‘evolution’ as it had become common parlance in science. Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* written in a superb style had made the term familiar to students of English literature. From matter had emerged life leading to insect life and then to animals and finally to man. Though I was not a student of science, I watched my friends who had taken science speak of the Neanderthal man, how our ancestors were chimpanzees. Not a very easy subject — as we giggled away in the common room in Mrs. A. V. N. College at Visakhapatnam. Drawing closer to Sri Aurobindo one learnt to memorise the lines from *Savitri*:

If from a bodiless Force Matter was born,
 If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,
 Its green delight break into emerald leaves
 And its laughter of beauty blossom in the flower,
 If sense could wake in tissue, nerve and cell
 And Thought seize the grey matter of the brain,
 And soul peep from its secrecy through the flesh,
 How shall the nameless Light not leap on men,
 And unknown powers emerge from Nature’s sleep?²

There had been a definite evolution from below; that could be understood. But involution? From where does this ‘something’ jump down? As one belonging to the Srivaishnava tradition, I found the avatar-idea familiar; it was deep-rooted in my psyche. I could understand that and maybe call it involution. But there was no reference to involution meeting the evolutionary ladder. Rama and Krishna were born as divine children and they grew up as divine beings performing incredible feats. They were not ordinary mortals like me. For human beings the life divine was charted only as an after-life experience. If we led ideal lives on earth with total faith in Narayana, we could then become immortals living in total bliss in the Beyond, always gazing at the Supreme. For the rest they were two different worlds and beings.

As we were having lunch one day, I returned to the subject of Sri Aurobindo. “He is definitely very difficult, especially when explaining his philosophy in *The Life Divine*.”

“Oh, what is it that has made him seem complex to you? He is so clear!” was Father’s nonchalant reply.

“I can understand evolution, man goes on and on and up and up till he becomes god. Or god swoops down as an incarnation and clears the fumes on earth by destroying the evil and saves the good. *Paritrāṇāya sadhunām vinaśāya ca duṣkṛtām* and so on. But this mixing up of man going up and god coming down . . .”

2. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 648-49.

Father lifted up the ancient silver water pot³ near him with his left hand and asked me to imagine god's creation as this pot. A single, indivisible one! Soon the lunch was over but the lesson continued. That is when he explained to me the timeless time-table of Evolution-Involution, a key concept in *The Life Divine*.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy should not be seen as one more juggling with existing concepts to explain the relationship between man, Nature and God. The earlier thinkers had contemplated upon this existence which was made up of experienced reality like man and Nature and a visioned unseen quantity, God. Their tool was reason but could mere dry reasoning have created the vast edifices of philosophy? Apparently an occasional insight had helped in taking knowledge of existence further. That brought the understanding that all these seeming differences were but parts of the One. But what about the future? If the world as we see it had not simply appeared as pictures do on a television screen, if there had been a long, long time when man and Nature evolved slowly and surely, it was obvious this evolution was towards some future. Sri Aurobindo's yogic experience assured him that the evolution was constantly being helped to advance by some other power. The first volume of *The Life Divine* explains the nature of what is evolving from below and what is coming down from above.

So Father held the water pot in his hand and said that I should imagine it to be the Omnipresent Reality. Was he serious? He was. "It will take you quite some years or even decades to hold on to Sri Aurobindo's style at one go. Till then you would need the help of concrete images. Here is one."

The silver pot was *pūrṇa* for Existence is One, *pūrṇa*, total, complete. An Upanishadic concept one finds in the *Brihadaranyaka*:

*Om pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
Pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśisyate.*⁴

If cut across in the middle, we would have two hemispheres on hand instead of one single pot. Sri Aurobindo has described the constituents of this Omnipresent Reality which happens to be one glowing sphere. They are made up of two quartets:

- A. Sat (Existence)
- B. Chit (Consciousness-Force)
- C. Ananda (Bliss)
- D. Supermind (Real-Idea: Vijnana)

3. Originally it belonged to my grandmother. My father used it throughout his life. The pot is now with me. I do not use it but keep it as a reminder of the lesson on *The Life Divine*!

4. "Om. That (Brahman) is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. (Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), it remains as the infinite (Brahman) alone." Translated by Swami Madhavananda.

Now we have the line that still divides the two quartets, the second being:

D¹. Mind
 C¹. Psyche
 B¹. Life
 A¹. Matter

The upper hemisphere (Sat-Chit-Ananda-Vijnana) has made a descent of consciousness (involution) and become the lower hemisphere (Mind-Psyche-Life-Matter). A metaphorical line or veil now divides the two quartets. The lower quartet, caught in terrestrial existence, struggles to reach out to the upper hemisphere as an evolving phenomenon. Even as Matter evolves, the dividing line or veil has to be drawn aside so that the powers above can help man evolve into his divine existence fast and surely. When it is done, the life divine would become real for life on earth.

Closest to the two sides of the veil are Mind and Supermind. They hold the key to make life on earth the life divine. We are able to understand the concept of Mind fairly well. The chapter, 'Mind and Supermind' underlines the differences between Mind and Supermind and seeks to teach us about this Supermind, gently suggesting not to create our own imagined image:

But so far as we have been able yet to envisage this supramental existence, it does not seem to have any connection or correspondence with life as we know it, life active between the two terms of our normal existence, the two firmaments of mind and body. It seems rather to be a state of being, a state of consciousness, a state of active relation and mutual enjoyment such as disembodied souls might possess and experience in a world without physical forms, a world in which differentiation of souls had been accomplished but not differentiation of bodies, a world of active and joyous infinities, not of form-imprisoned spirits.⁵

At that age, fifty years ago, this seemed clear enough. One could relate those moments of being utterly together in joy with what was seen by the eye or heard by the ear. It could be just a spread of *parijata* blossoms beneath a tree at 'the hour before the gods awake'. Those dots of white on the dark earth, wafting a sweet scent around, as one picked them up carefully, as though if a blossom were pressed hard and lost its shape, it would be like oneself being pressed by a giant machine, never able to regain the original appearance. Or, when late at night, after hours of reading, the mind was totally blocked and the eyes wouldn't move on the printed page, when a melody in *malkauns* flowed into one's ears from a neighbour's gramophone, the book, the table lamp and me are all gone, it is only the intense

5. The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 170.

pain of an aspiring soul for a vision of the Supreme that has to be gained somehow if I wish to stay alive . . . *mana tarapat Hari darshan ko āj* . . . One is all mind: no, one becomes all-soul. All one could do to understand the moment was to get back to *Savitri* and be reassured:

Immortal harmonies filled her listening ear;
A great spontaneous utterance of the heights
On Titan wings of rhythmic grandeur borne
Poured from some deep spiritual heart of sound,
Strains trembling with the secrets of the godsm.⁶

However, one was not satisfied with these ‘moments’ for *The Life Divine* had shown the possibilities of a whole life lived with this sense of oneness with the rest of creation and a life that did not necessarily terminate with Death. One also knew the answer was far, far away but it was exhilarating to know that we had a rishi in our own times who thought of the possibilities and also went back to the origins. The idea of the two hemispheres indicated in the silver pot drew closer when discovering the Golden Egg. *Savitri* draws our attention to it.

In him shadows his form the Golden Child
Who in the Sun-capped Vast cradles his birth:
Hiranyagarbha, author of thoughts and dreams,
Who sees the invisible and hears the sounds
That never visited a mortal ear, . . .⁷

Hiranyagarbha? A casual question gets me directed to *Harivamsa* itself. Known as the “*kila*” of the *Mahabharata*, the opening canto of the first Parva has a passage on creation. When Vishnu directed his power at waters created by him, an immense golden egg appeared and remained in the waters for a very long time. Brahma was self-created inside this Egg, and so he is known as Hiranyagarbha:

Lord Hiranyagarbha remained in the egg for one whole year. He then broke the egg into two and made one Heaven and the other Earth (*divam, bhuvam*). In between the two, he created space. He steadied and made firm the earth which was floating in the waters. Then he set up the ten directions. Within this Brahma-egg he created Time, Mind, Speech, Desire, Anger and Love.⁸

6. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 674.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 681.

8. *Harivamsa*, Canto One, ll. 38-40.

This image of the two hemispheres is thus part of our cultural consciousness and the entire process of creation described in this canto could not have been idle imagination either. But cannot the image be unravelled? If the entire creation is that of the Hiranyagarbha, why should we be satisfied with the flawed existence of today? Why cannot the hemispheres be made whole? Or, is it a case of once broken, never to be mended again? Can we gain the Sat-Chit-Ananda-Vijnana hemisphere only when we let go the lower hemisphere of Mind-Psyche-Life-Matter? Says Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*:

In that case the perfection of humanity is elsewhere than in humanity itself; the summit of its earthly evolution can only be a fine apex of dissolving mentality whence it takes the great leap either into formless being or into worlds beyond the reach of embodied Mind.⁹

It is here that the image of the sphere, the Golden Egg is helpful. This totality confirms that the Supermind (Real-Idea, Truth-Consciousness, Vijnana) is in possession of the essential unity of things and has been able to manifest the seen worlds out of its force. It would also mean that the manifestation is going on and the higher regions are coming to view as man goes up the evolutionary ladder. It is as if the upper quartet is pressing down, revealing the higher planes to ascending humanity, all this within the Brahmanda which of course has no walls.

Speaking of images that help in drawing close to understanding Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, we have also to keep in mind that one's experience is different from what is imaged. After all, sieved through the mind, much of the truth remains opaque. So is it with the 'evolutionary ladder'. They are not like the steps of the throne of Vikramaditya for a new statuette to come to life and take the story forward. Nor can we be helped by any scientific diction on the reality of existence. I can't help feeling that reading Sri Aurobindo on the subject is living the life divine! What a complex theme brought to us as sheer poetry!

And as Matter is the last word of the descent, so it is also the first word of the ascent; as the powers of all these planes, worlds, grades, degrees are involved in the material existence, so are they all capable of evolution out of it. It is for this reason that material being does not begin and end with gases and chemical compounds and physical forces and movements, with nebulae and suns and earths, but evolves life, evolves mind, must evolve eventually supermind and the higher degrees of spiritual existence. Evolution comes by the unceasing pressure of the supra-material planes on the material compelling it to deliver

9. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 171.

out of itself their principles and powers which might conceivably otherwise have slept imprisoned in the rigidity of the material formula.¹⁰

This passage made it clear to me that involution is there all the time and it is not as though it begins to set up a higher plane when one plane has been evolved. That explained the concept of the Golden Egg which contains everything. It is all happening at the same time. It is for clarity in our movement that we have set up certain compartments. The eternal questioner, the Doubting Thomas would then ask: If creation is a totality within the One, the Golden Egg, why is evil created at all? Why should the upper hemisphere be all-Truth, all-Consciousness and all-Bliss and the lower hemisphere be a flawed one?

One of the charms of *The Life Divine* has been the electrical ease with which Sri Aurobindo posits East and West together to drive home a point. Evil? Is there anything that can be seen apart as evil? Is it not in the way we perceive reality that something seems evil and something else good? Have we the tapasya in us to say easily: *Isā vāsyam idam sarvam*? To say that with conviction, we need to be touched by the Divine's wand. Our elders give us the story of Yudhisthira and Duryodhana to drive home the point that we must see good in others and we can do this only if we are good ourselves. It is not possible otherwise.

Once Drona set an examination for Yudhisthira and Duryodhana. They must go out and meet people and give him statistics about the number of good and evil people they had met that day. The two young princes went round all the day and returned at night after interviewing scores of people. Drona asked Duryodhana: "How many bad people did you meet today?"

Duryodhana replied: "How many? Every one I met was a rascal. This one was greedy, that person was egoistic, the other person offensive. This world is apparently peopled with evil persons alone."

Drona turned to Yudhisthira: "Hope you have been able to get some numbers of good and bad people in Hastinapura."

Yudhisthira replied: "Gurudev! I did move around tirelessly and met scores of people from all walks of life. Not a single person had anything evil about him. They are all honest or hard-working or gentle. No, there is none in our dear capital who is evil. They are all good people."

Obviously Yudhisthira's innate goodness made him see only good everywhere and with Duryodhana it was otherwise. One is reminded of Milton's Satan spewing jealousy and hatred:

All hope excluded thus, behold instead
Of us outcast, exiled, his new delight,

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 272-73.

Mankind created, and for him this world.
 So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
 Farewell remorse! All good to me is lost;
 Evil, be thou my good; . . .¹¹

Driving home this point Sri Aurobindo says:

If all is in truth Sachchidananda, death, suffering, evil, limitation can only be the creations, positive in practical effect, negative in essence, of a distorting consciousness which has fallen from the total and unifying knowledge of itself into some error of division and partial experience. This is the fall of man typified in the poetic parable of the Hebrew Genesis. That fall is his deviation from the full and pure acceptance of God and himself, or rather God in himself, into a dividing consciousness which brings with it all the train of the dualities, life and death, good and evil, joy and pain, completeness and want, the fruit of a divided being. This is the fruit which Adam and Eve, Purusha and Prakriti, the soul tempted by Nature, have eaten.¹²

From the Golden Egg to the apple, our education on Evolution-Involution is complete!

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

11. *Paradise Lost*, Book IV.

12. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 56.

There is possible a realistic as well as an illusionist Advaita. The philosophy of The Life Divine is such a realistic Advaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 44)