

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIII

No. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

TRANCE (Poem)	...	469
REPLIES TO QUESTIONS ON <i>TRANCE</i>	...	470
THE KARMAYOGIN: A COMMENTARY ON THE ISHA UPANISHAD	...	473
BUDDHA — SHANKARA — JANAKA — SRIKRISHNA	...	481

The Mother

‘I PUT MY FULL TRUST IN THEE AND BOW DOWN BEFORE THEE IN SILENT DEVOTION’	...	491
RENUNCIATION AND WIDENESS; THE ASHRAM; DIFFICULTIES; DIVINE LOVE; ASPIRATION AND IMPATIENCE; HASTE; PURITY AND SINCERITY	...	492
A NEW PERCEPTION OF LIFE	...	499
‘AT THE BEGINNING OF MY PRESENT EARTHLY EXISTENCE . . .’	...	501

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

“THE SACRED FIRE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	502
---	-----	-----

P. B. Saint Hilaire (Pavitra)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY CHAPTER EIGHT: NEOPHYTE OF THE ASHRAM: ON THE PATH OF PERFECTION	506
--	-----	-----

Pavitra and Mrityunjoy

GLIMPSES OF PAVITRA	...	519
---------------------	-----	-----

Pavitra

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	523
----------------------------------	-----	-----

Gautam Malakar

DETERMINATION AND WILL: DOUGLAS BADER, CHURCHILL AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN	...	527
---	-----	-----

Prema Nandakumar

LIVING WITH <i>THE LIFE DIVINE</i> 5. WHAT IS MAYA?	...	540
--	-----	-----

TRANCE

A naked and silver-pointed star
Floating near the halo of the moon;
A storm-rack, the pale sky's fringe and bar,
Over waters stilling into swoon.

My mind is awake in stirless trance,
Hushed my heart, a burden of delight;
Dispelled is the senses' flicker-dance,
Mute the body aureate with light.

O star of creation pure and free,
Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown,
Storm-breath of the soul-change yet to be,
Ocean self enraptured and alone!

Sri Aurobindo

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 548)

REPLIES TO QUESTIONS ON *TRANCE*

THESE two poems [*The Bird of Fire* and *Trance*] are in the nature of metrical experiments.

...

[*Trance*] is an experiment in the use of quantitative foot measures not following any existing model, but freely invented. It is a four-line stanza reading alternately

 — — — | — — — | — — — |
 — — — | — — — | — — — |
and — — — | — — — | — — — |

It could indeed be read otherwise, in several ways, but read in the ordinary way of accentual feet it would lose all lyrical quality and the soul of its rhythm.

*

Were *Trance* and the *Bird of Fire* each composed at a single sitting and can the date be given?

The *Bird of Fire* was written on two consecutive days — and afterwards revised. The *Trance* at one sitting — it took only a few minutes. You may perhaps have the date as they were both completed on the same day and sent to you the next.

*

In the line —

Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown —

is the “o” assonance satisfactory, or does the ear feel the two sounds come too close or for some reason are too insistent?

It seems to me that there is a sufficient space between to prevent the assonance from being too prominent; it came like that and I kept it because the repetition and prolongation of the full “o” sound seemed to me to carry in it a certain unexpressed (and inexpressible) significance.

What exactly does “Halo-moon” signify? In line 2 there was the concrete physical moon ringed with a halo. Is the suggestion of line 10 that a glory or indefinable presence is imaged by a lunar halo — the moon as a distinct object now being swallowed up in the halo? My difficulty is that if it is “halo” simply it cannot be a “moon” as well. But possibly the compound “halo-moon” is elliptical for “moon with its surrounding halo”.

Well, it is of course the “moon with its halo”, but I wanted to give a suggestion if not of the central form being swallowed up in the halo, at least of moon and halo being one ecstatic splendour as when one is merged in ecstasy.

*

The last line —

Ocean self enraptured and alone —

I took as meaning “self, who art symbolised by this ocean”, since otherwise you would probably have written “self-enraptured”?

Yes, that is right.

The Metre of *Trance*

Have you yourself invented the metre of *Trance* or is it adopted from some former poet?

No. I am not aware that anyone has used this metre before. It came to me just as I finished the *Bird of Fire* and I put it down.

23 October 1933

*

Is it not the case that, in the metre of *Trance* (quantitative trimeter) one must either keep a rather staccato movement, pausing with almost unbroken regularity at the end of each foot, or else risk the iambic pentameter approximation by the use of an easy and fluent movement? Thus it is your very beautiful line

Mute the body aureate with light,

that would seem least out of place if inserted amidst other iambic pentameters.

Possibly — though the line does not read to my ear very well as an iambic pentameter — the movement sounds then common and rather lame. It goes better as a trochaic rhythm. It is true that there is this dilemma and the whole skill will then be in avoiding the staccato effect, but that necessitates a very light movement.

*

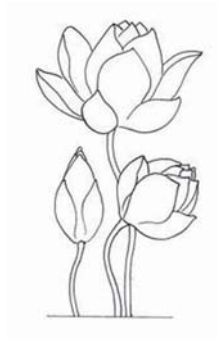
I think the principle of this metre should be to say a few very clear-cut things in a little space. At least it looks so to me at present — though a more free handling of the metre might show that the restriction was not justifiable.

*

I had chosen this metre — or rather it came to me and I accepted it — because it seemed to me both brief and easy, so suitable for an experiment. But I find now that it was only seemingly easy and in fact very difficult. The ease with which I wrote it only came from the fact that by a happy inspiration the right rhythm for it came into my consciousness and wrote itself out by virtue of the rhythm being there. If I had consciously experimented, I might have stumbled over the same difficulties as have come in your way.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 239, 244-46)



THE KARMAYOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of May 2010)

Chapter II

Salvation through Works

I

THE law of spiritual abandonment in preference to mere physical abandonment, is the solution enounced by Srikrishna, the greatest of all teachers, for a deep and vexed problem which has troubled the Hindu consciousness from ancient times. There are, as we know, three means of salvation; salvation by knowledge, the central position in Buddhism; salvation by faith & love, the central position in Christianity; salvation by faith & works, the central position in Mahomedanism. In Hinduism, the Sanatandharma, all these three paths are equally accepted. But in all three the peculiar and central religious experience of Hinduism, — the reality & eternity of the Self, the transience & unreality of all else, — is insisted upon as the guiding principle & indispensable idea. This is the bridge which carries you over to immortality; this is the gate of salvation. The Jnanamargin envisages only one reality, the Brahman, and by turning away from all that is phenomenal and seeking the One reality in himself, enters into the being of the Eternal. The Bhakta envisages only two realities, God & himself, and by the ecstatic union of himself with God through love and adoration, enters into the pure and unmixed presence of the Eternal. The Karmamargin envisages three realities which are one; the Eternal in Itself, pure and without a second, the Eternal as a transcendent Will or Force manifesting Himself phenomenally but not really in cosmic work & the Eternal in the Jivatman, manifesting Himself similarly in individual work in a finite body; and he too, by abandoning desire and laying his works upon God, attains likeness to the Eternal and through that gate enters into identity with the Eternal. In one thing all these agree, the transience & unreality of phenomenal existence. But if phenomenal existence is unreal, of what use is it to remain in the world? Let us abandon house and wealth and wife and friends and children; let us flee from them to the solitude of mountain & forest and escape as soon as possible by knowledge & meditation from the world of phenomena. Such was the cry that arose in India before and after the days of Buddha, when the power of the Jnanamarga was the strongest on the Hindu

consciousness. The language of the Bhakta is not very different; "Let us leave the things of the world," he cries, "let us forget all else and think and speak only of the name of Hari." Both have insisted that works and the world are a snare & a bondage from which it is best to flee. The Karmayogin alone has set himself against the current and tried to stand in the midst of the cosmic stir, in the very surge and flux of phenomena without being washed away in the tide. Few, he has said, who remain in the world, can be above the world and live in communion with the Eternal; but few also who flee to the mountains, really attain Him, and few of those who spend their days in crying Lord, Lord, are accepted by Him to whom they cry. It is always the many who are called, the few who are chosen. And if Janak could remain in the world and be ever with God in the full luxury, power & splendour of the life of a great king, if Rama & Srikrishna lived in the world and did the works of the world, yet were God, who shall say that salvation cannot be attained in the midst of actions, nay, even through the instrumentality of actions? To this dispute the answer of Srikrishna is the one solution. To abandon desire in the spirit is the one thing needful; if one fail to do this, it is vain for him to practise Yoga in mountain or forest solitude, it is vain to sing the name of Hari and cry Lord, Lord, from morn to night, it is vain to hope for safety by "doing one's duty in the world". The man unpurified of desire, whatever way he follows, will not find salvation. But if he can purify his spirit of desire, then whether on solitary mountain and in tiger-haunted forest, or in Brindavan the beautiful, or in the king's court, the trader's shop or the hut of the peasant, salvation is already in his grasp. For the condition of salvation is to leave the lower unreal self and turn to the real Self; and the stain & brand of the lower self is desire. Get rid of desire and the doors of the Eternal stand wide open for your soul to enter in. The way of the Sannyasin who leaves the world and devotes all himself to Jnana or Bhakti, is a good way, and there is none better; but the way of the Tyagin who lives among sense-objects and in the whirl of action without cherishing the first or yielding to the rush of the second, is the right way for the Karmayogin. This is what the Upanishad with great emphasis proceeds to establish as the second rule of conduct for the Karmamargin.

"Do, verily, thy deeds in this world and wish to live thy hundred years, for thus to thee and there is no other way than this, action cleaveth not to a man."

A hundred years is the full span of a man's natural life when he observes all the laws of his nature and keeps his body and mind pure by the use of pure food, by pure ways of living, by purity of thought and by self-restraint in the satisfaction of his desires. The term is ordinarily diminished by heedlessness, sin, contamination or the effects of our past action in other lives; it may, on the other hand, be increased to hundreds of years by Yoga. But the Karmayogin will neither desire to increase his term of life nor to diminish it. To increase his term of life would show a desire for and clinging to phenomenal existence quite inconsistent with that abandonment of desire which we have seen to be the fundamental law of Karmayoga. A few great

Yogis have prolonged their lives without personal desire merely to help the world by their presence or example. These are exceptional cases which the ordinary Karmamargin need not keep in view. On the other hand we must not turn our backs on life; we must not fling it from us untimely or even long for an early release from our body, but willingly fill out our term and even be most ready to prolong it to the full period of man's ordinary existence so that we may go on doing our deeds in this world. Mark the emphasis laid on the word कुर्वन् "doing" by adding to it the particle एव, the force of which is to exclude any other action, state, person or thing than the one expressed by the word to which it is attached. Verily we must do our deeds in this world and not avoid doing them. There is no need to flee to the mountains in order to find God. He is not a hill-man or a serpent that we should seek for Him only in cave & on summit; nor a deer or tiger that the forest only can harbour Him. He is here, in you and around you; He is in these men and women whom you see daily, with whom you talk & pass your life. In the roar of the city you can find Him and in the quiet of the village, He is there. You may go to the mountains for a while, if the din of life deafens you & you wish to seek solitude to meditate; for to the Karmayogin also Jnana is necessary and solitude is the nurse of knowledge. You may sit by the Ganges or the Narmada near some quiet temple or in some sacred asram to adore the Lord; for to the Karmayogin also *bhakti* is necessary, and places like these which are saturated with the *bhakti* of great saints and impassioned God-lovers best feed and strengthen the impulse of adoration in the soul. But if Karmayoga be your path, you must come back and live again in the stir of the world. In no case flee to solitude and inaction as a coward and weakling, — not in the hope of finding God, but because you think you can by this means escape from the miseries and misfortunes of your life which you are too weak to face. It is not the weak and the coward who can climb up to God, but the strong and brave alone. Every individual Jivatman must become the perfect Kshatriya before he can become the Brahmin. For there is a caste of the soul which is truer and deeper than that of the body. Through four soul-stages a man must pass before he can be perfect; first, as a Sudra, by service and obedience to tame the brute in his being; then, as a Vaishya to satisfy within the law of morality the lower man in him and evolve the higher man by getting the first taste of delight in well-doing to others than himself and his; then, as the Kshatriya, to be trained in those first qualities without which the pursuit of the Eternal is impossible, courage, strength, unconquerable tenacity and self-devotion to a great task; last, as the Brahmin, so to purify body & mind and nature that he may see the Eternal reflected in himself as in an unsoiled mirror. Having once seen God, man can have no farther object in life than to reach and possess Him. Now the Karmayogin is a soul that is already firmly established in the Kshatriya stage and is rising from it through an easily-attained Brahminhood straight & swift to God. If he loses hold of his courage & heroism, he loses his footing on the very standing-ground from which he is to heighten himself in his spiritual stature until his hand can reach up

to and touch the Eternal. Let his footing be lost, & what can he do but fall?

II. Vairagya.

Disgust with the world, the shrinking from the phenomenal life and the desire to escape from it to the Eternal, is called, in our terminology, *vairagya*. *Vairagya* is the turning of the soul to its salvation; but we must be on our guard against the false shows and imitations of it to which our minds are subject. "I am continually battered with the siege of sorrows & miseries; I cannot cope with the world; let me therefore get away from the world, put on the saffron robe and be at peace from anxiety and grief"; that is not the language of real *vairagya*. Just as you recognize a genuine article from the imitation by its trademark, so there is a mark by which you recognize the true Sannyasin. Not weariness of the phenomenal world by itself, but this world-weariness accompanied by a thirst for the Eternal, that is the real *vairagya*. The thirst for the Eternal is the trademark; look for it always and see that it is the real trademark, not an imperfect & fraudulent reproduction. The saffron robe nowadays covers a great deal of selfishness, a great deal of idleness, a great deal of hypocrisy. It is not the robe which is the trademark, but the longing for the Eternal. Nor is it the talk and the outward action which is the trademark, for that may be a mere imitation. Look in the eyes, watch the slighter, less observed habits, wait for a light on the face; then you will find the trademark. Apply the same test to yourself. When you think you have *vairagya*, ask yourself, "Is this mere weariness & disgust, a weak fainting of the soul, or can I detect in it even in a slight degree an awakening of the Self and a desire for that which is not transient but eternal, not bound to sin and chequered with sorrow, but pure and free?" If after severe self-examination, you can detect this desire in yourself, know that your salvation has begun.

There are many kinds of *vairagya*, some true, some false. There is one *vairagya*, deep, intense & energetic, when the strong man having tasted the sweets of the world finds that there is in them no permanent and abiding sweetness; they are not the true and immortal joy which his true and immortal self demands, so he turns from them to something in his being which is deeper and holier, the joy of the inexhaustible and imperishable spirit within. Then there is the *vairagya*, false or transient, of the hypocrite or weakling, who has lusted and panted and thirsted for the world's sweets, but has been pushed and hustled from the board by Fate or by stronger men than himself, and seeks in the outward life of the Sannyasin a slothful and thornless road to honour and ease and the satisfaction of greed, or else would use Yoga and Sannyas as the drunkard uses his bottle or the slave of opium his pill or his daily draught. Not for such ignoble purpose were these great things meant by the Rishis who disclosed them to the world. Beware of such weakness. क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते। Truly is such base weakness unworthy of one who is no other

than Brahman, the Eternal, the Creator, Protector and Destroyer of worlds. But on the other hand there is a true *vairagya* of sorrow and disappointment; sometimes men have tried in their ignorance for ignoble things and failed, not from weakness but because these things were not in their nature, were unfit for them and below their true greatness and high destiny. The sorrow and disappointment were necessary to open their eyes to their true selves; then they seek solitude, meditation & Samadhi, not as a dram to drown their sorrow and yet unsated longing, but because their yearning is no longer for unworthy things but for the love of God or the knowledge of the Eternal. Sometimes great spirits enter the way of the Sannyasin, because in the solitude alone with the Eternal they can best develop their divine strength (*Brahmatej*) to use it for divine purposes. Once attained they pour it in a stream of divine knowledge or divine love over the world; such were Shankaracharya and Ramakrishna. Sometimes it is the sorrows & miseries of the world that find them in ease & felicity and drive them out, as Buddha & Christ were driven out, to seek light for the ignorant and help for sufferers in the depths of their own being. True Sannyasins are the greatest of all workers, because they have the most unalloyed & inexhaustible strength and are the mightiest in God to do the works of God.

Whatever be the precise nature of the *vairagya* or its immediate & exciting cause, if the thirst for the Eternal mingle in it, know that it is real *vairagya* and the necessary impulse towards your salvation. You must pass through this stage if you are to reach the Eternal at all. For if you do not get weary of the phenomenal, your mind cannot turn to the Eternal; the attraction of the phenomenal, keeps your eyes turned downward & not upward, outward & not inward. Welcome therefore the first inrush of *vairagya* into your life, but remember it is a first stage on the road, not the goal. Swami Bhaskarananda was driven into Sannyas by a keen & overmastering disgust of life in the world, but when he had attained *mukti*, the state of his mind so changed that if his wife had been living, he would have lived with her in the world as one in the world; an idea shocking to priestly & learned orthodoxy, but natural to the Jivanmukta. Sri Ramakrishna, when he had attained identity with the Lord, could not indeed return to the world as a householder or bear the touch of worldly things, — for he was the incarnation of utter Bhakti, — but he took as much delight in the Eternal manifested in phenomena & especially in man as in the pure actionless Brahman with whom he became one in Samadhi. The Karmamargin must pass through the condition of Vairagya, but he will not abide in it. Or to speak more accurately he will retain the spiritual element in it and reject the physical. The spiritual element of *vairagya* is the turning away from the selfish desire for phenomenal objects and actions; the physical element is the fear of and shrinking from the objects & actions themselves. The retention of the spiritual element is necessary to all Yogins; the retention of the physical element, though often a sign of great physical purity and saintliness, is not essential to salvation.

Do not be shaken by the high authority of many who say that to leave the

world is necessary to the seeker after Brahman and that salvation cannot come by works. For we have a greater authority than any to set against them, the teaching of Srikrishna himself. He tells Sanjay in the Mahabharata that as between the gospel of action and the gospel of inaction, it is the former that is to his mind and the latter strikes him as the idle talk of a weakling. So too, in the Gita, while laying stress on Jnana & Bhakti, he will by no means banish Karma nor relegate it to an inferior place; the most significant portion of the Gita is its eulogy of Karmayoga and inspired exposition of its nature & principles. Jnana, of course, is indispensable; Jnana is first & best. Works without knowledge will not save a man but only plunge him deeper & deeper into bondage. The Upanishad, before it speaks of the necessity of works, takes care first to insist that you must realise the presence of the Lord enveloping this universe & each object that it contains. When you have got this Jnana that all is the One Brahman and your actions are but the dramatic illusions unrolled by Prakriti for the delight of the Purusha, you will then be able to do works without desire or illusion, abandoning the world that you may enjoy it, as the Upanishad tells you, or as Sri Krishna advises, giving up all hankering for the fruits of your work. You will devote all your actions to the Lord; not to the lower false self, which feels pleasure & pain in the results of your actions, but to the Brahman in you which works लोकसंग्रहार्थं, for the keeping together of the peoples, so that instead of the uninstructed multitudes being bewildered and led astray by your inactivity, the world may be rather helped, strengthened and maintained by the godlike character of your works. And your works must be godlike if they are done without desire or attachment to their fruits. For this is how God works. The world is His *lila*, His play & sport, not a purposeful stir and struggle out of which He is to gain something and be benefited. The great empire in which you glory & think it is to be eternal, is to Him no more than the house of sand which a child has built in his play. He has made it and He will break it, and, one day, it will be as if it had never been. The very Sun and its glorious wheeling planets are but momentary toys in His hands. Once they were not, now they are, a day will come & they will no longer be. Yet while He works on these things, He works like the boy when he is building his castle of sand, as if the work were to be permanent and for all time.

न च मां तानि कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ।
उदासीनवदासीनमसक्तं तेषु कर्मसु ॥

“And yet these actions bind Me not, Dhanunjoy, for I sit as one unconcerned and I have no attachment to these My works.” Actions performed after renunciation, actions devoted to God, these only do not cling to a man nor bind him in their invisible chains, but rather fall from him as water from the wings of a swan. They cannot bind him because he is free from the woven net of causality. Cause and effect exist only in the idea of duality which has its root in Avidya; the Yogin when he has

renounced desire and experienced unity, rises above Avidya & her children, and bondage has no farther meaning for him. This is the goal of the Karmayogin as of all Yoga, but the path for him is through spiritual Vairagya, the renunciation of desire, not through physical separation from the objects of desire. This the Upanishad emphasizes in the second line of the verse. "Thus to thee; and there is no other way than this, action clingeth not to a man." एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे। This is conclusive and beyond appeal.

III. One Road and not Three.

"There is no other way than this." By this expression it is not intended that Karmayoga is the only path of salvation for all men, but that the renunciation of desire is essential to salvation; every Yogin, be he Jnani, Bhakta, or Karmi, must devote whatever work he may be doing to the Eternal. To the Karmayogin indeed this path is the only possible way; for it is the *swabhava* or nature of a man which decides the way he shall take. If a born Jnani becomes the disciple of a great Bhakta, however submissively he may accept his Master's teachings, however largely he may infuse his Jnana with Bhakti, yet eventually it is the way of Jnana he must take and no other. For that is his *swabhava* or nature, his dharma or the law of his being. If the Brahmin predominates in him, he will be drawn into Jnana; if the Kshatriya, into works; if the Sudra or Vaisya, the child or woman, to Bhakti. If he is born saint or avatar, he will harmonize all three, but still with one predominant over the others and striking the main note of his life and teaching. It is always the predominance of one or other, not its unmixed control, which decides the path; for as with the Karmayogin, the devotion of works to God brings inevitably the love of God, and love gives knowledge, so it is with the Bhakta; the love of God will of itself direct all his works to God and bring him straight to knowledge. So it is even with the Jnani; the knowledge of the Brahman means delight in Him, and that is Bhakti; and this love & knowledge cannot let him live to himself but will make him live to Brahman, and that is divine Karma. The three paths are really one, but the Jnani takes the right hand, the Bhakta the left hand and the Karmayogin walks in the middle; while on the way each prefers his own choice as best and thinks the others inferior, but when they reach the goal, they find that none was inferior or superior, but it was one road they were following which only seemed to be three.

The Jnani & Bhakta shrink from the idea of Karma as a means of salvation. Unillumined Karma is such a stumbling block in the path of the seeker that they can hardly regard even illumined & desireless Karma as anything but a subordinate discipline whose only value is to prepare a man for Bhakti or Jnan. They will not easily concede that *karma* can be by itself a direct and sufficient road to Brahman. So Shankaracharya disparages *karma*, and Shankaracharya's is an authority which

no man can dare to belittle. Nevertheless even the greatest are conditioned by their nature, by the times they work in and by the kind of work they have come to do. In the age that Shankara lived in, it was right that Jnana should be exalted at the expense of works. The great living force with which he had to deal, was not the heresies of later Buddhism, Buddhism decayed and senescent, but the triumphant Karmakanda which made the faithful performance of Vedic ceremonies the one path and heaven the highest goal. In his continual anxiety to prove that these ceremonies could not be the path, he bent the bow as far as he could in the other direction and left the impression that works could not be the path to salvation at all. Had he laid stress on Karma as one of the ways to salvation, the people would not have understood him; they would have thought that they had one more authority for their belief in rites and ceremonies as all-sufficient for salvation. These things must be remembered when we find Shankara and Ramanuja and Madhwa differing so widely from each other in their interpretation of the Upanishad. It was necessary that the Scripture should be interpreted by Shankara wholly in the light of Adwaita, the Monistic conception of the Eternal, so that the Monistic idea might receive its definite and consummate philosophical expression; for a similar reason it was necessary that Madhwa should interpret them wholly in the light of the Dwaita or dualistic conception and that Ramanuja should find a reconciliation in Visishtadwaita, a modified Monism. All these conceptions of the Eternal have their own truth and their own usefulness to the soul in its effort to reach Him. But the Upanishad is not concerned only with the ultimate reality of the Brahman to Himself, but also with His reality in His universe and His reality to the Jivatman or individual self. It is therefore sometimes Advaitic, sometimes Dwaitic, sometimes Visishtadwaitic, and we should have the courage now to leave the paths which the mighty dead have trod out for us, discharge from our mind all preconceived philosophies and ask only, "What does the Upanishad actually say?" Never mind whether the interpretation arrived at seems to be self-contradictory to the logician or incoherent to the metaphysical reasoner; it will be enough if it is true in the experience of the seeker after God. For the Eternal is infinite and cannot be cabined within the narrow limits of a logical formula.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 192-202)

BUDDHA — SHANKARA — JANAKA — SRIKRISHNA

The works of sacrifice are thus vindicated as a means of liberation and absolute spiritual perfection, *samsiddhi*. So Janaka and other great Karmayogins of the mighty ancient Yoga attained to perfection, by equal and desireless works done as a sacrifice, without the least egoistic aim or attachment — *karmaṇaiva hi samsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ*. So too and with the same desirelessness, after liberation and perfection, works can and have to be continued by us in a large divine spirit, with the calm high nature of a spiritual royalty. “Thou shouldst do works regarding also the holding together of the peoples, *lokasaṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan kartum arhasi*. Whatsoever the Best doeth, that the lower kind of man puts into practice; the standard he creates, the people follows. O son of Pritha, I have no work that I need to do in all the three worlds, I have nothing that I have not gained and have yet to gain, and I abide verily in the paths of action,” *varta eva ca karmaṇi*, — *eva* implying, I abide in it and do not leave it as the Sannyasin thinks himself bound to abandon works. “For if I did not abide sleeplessly in the paths of action, men follow in every way my path, these peoples would sink to destruction if I did not work and I should be the creator of confusion and slay these creatures. As those who know not act with attachment to the action, he who knows should act without attachment, having for his motive to hold together the peoples. He should not create a division of their understanding in the ignorant who are attached to their works; he should set them to all actions, doing them himself with knowledge and in Yoga.” There are few more important passages in the Gita than these seven striking couplets.

But let us clearly understand that they must not be interpreted, as the modern pragmatic tendency concerned much more with the present affairs of the world than with any high and far-off spiritual possibility seeks to interpret them, as no more than a philosophical and religious justification of social service, patriotic, cosmopolitan and humanitarian effort and attachment to the hundred eager social schemes and dreams which attract the modern intellect. It is not the rule of a large moral and intellectual altruism which is here announced, but that of a spiritual unity with God and with this world of beings who dwell in him and in whom he dwells. It is not an injunction to subordinate the individual to society and humanity or immolate egoism on the altar of the human collectivity, but to fulfil the individual in God and to sacrifice the ego on the one true altar of the all-embracing Divinity. The Gita moves on a plane of ideas and experiences higher than those of the modern mind which is at the stage indeed of a struggle to shake off the coils of egoism, but is still mundane in its outlook and intellectual and moral rather than spiritual in its temperament. Patriotism, cosmopolitanism, service of society, collectivism, humanitarianism, the ideal or religion of humanity are admirable aids towards our escape from our primary

condition of individual, family, social, national egoism into a secondary stage in which the individual realises, as far as it can be done on the intellectual, moral and emotional level, — on that level he cannot do it entirely in the right and perfect way, the way of the integral truth of his being, — the oneness of his existence with the existence of other beings. But the thought of the Gita reaches beyond to a tertiary condition of our developing self-consciousness towards which the secondary is only a partial stage of advance.

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 135-37)

*

The Gita declares that the action of the liberated man must be directed not by desire, but towards the keeping together of the world, its government, guidance, impulsion, maintenance in the path appointed to it. This injunction has been interpreted in the sense that the world being an illusion in which most men must be kept, since they are unfit for liberation, he must so act outwardly as to cherish in them an attachment to their customary works laid down for them by the social law. If so, it would be a poor and petty rule and every noble heart would reject it to follow rather the divine vow of Amitabha Buddha, the sublime prayer of the Bhagavata, the passionate aspiration of Vivekananda. But if we accept rather the view that the world is a divinely guided movement of Nature emerging in man towards God and that this is the work in which the Lord of the Gita declares that he is ever occupied although he himself has nothing ungained that he has yet to win, then a deep and true sense will appear for this great injunction. To participate in that divine work, to live for God in the world will be the rule of the Karmayogin; to live for God in the world and therefore so to act that the Divine may more and more manifest himself and the world go forward by whatever way of its obscure pilgrimage and move nearer to the divine ideal.

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 272)

*

The whole range of human action has been decreed by me with a view to the progress of man from the lower to the higher nature, from the apparent undivine to the conscious Divine. The whole range of human works must be that in which the God-knower shall move. All individual, all social action, all the works of the intellect, the heart and the body are still his, not any longer for his own separate sake, but for the sake of God in the world, of God in all beings and that all those beings may move forward, as he has moved, by the path of works towards the discovery of the Divine in themselves. Outwardly his actions may not seem to differ essentially from theirs; battle and rule as well as teaching and thought, all the various commerce of man

with man may fall in his range; but the spirit in which he does them must be very different, and it is that spirit which by its influence shall be the great attraction drawing men upwards to his own level, the great lever lifting the mass of men higher in their ascent.

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 139)

*

Neither the dynamism of the kinetic man nor the actionless light of the ascetic or quietist, neither the vehement personality of the man of action nor the indifferent impersonality of the philosophic sage is the complete divine ideal. These are the two conflicting standards of the man of this world and the ascetic or the quietist philosopher, one immersed in the action of the Kshara, the other striving to dwell entirely in the peace of the Akshara; but the complete divine ideal proceeds from the nature of the Purushottama which transcends this conflict and reconciles all divine possibilities.

(*Ibid.*, p. 141)

*

We all agree that works prompted by desire, lead to nothing but the fulfilment of desire followed by fresh works in another life. Is it that Karma without desire is inconsistent with Mukti, prevents *mukti* by fresh bondage and must be abandoned? This is not consistent with reason, for bondage is the result of desire & ignorance and disappears with desire & ignorance; therefore in *nishkam karma* there can be no bondage. It is inconsistent with Sruti त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं त्रिकर्मकृत्तरति जन्ममृत्यु इत्यादि. It is inconsistent with facts for Srikrishna did works, Janaka and others did works, but none will say that they fell into the bondage of their works; for they were जीवन्मुक्त.

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 114-15)

*

. . . if Janak could remain in the world and be ever with God in the full luxury, power & splendour of the life of a great king, if Rama & Srikrishna lived in the world and did the works of the world, yet were God, who shall say that salvation cannot be attained in the midst of actions, nay, even through the instrumentality of actions?

(*Ibid.*, p. 193)

*

. . . the works of the Karmayogin are works done with knowledge and without desire. These certainly cannot prevent release or lead to fresh debt and fresh bondage. For bondage is the result of desire and ignorance and disappears with desire and ignorance. Desire & ignorance are indeed the boundaries of Nature's jurisdiction and once we have left them behind, we have passed out of her kingdom; we have taken sanctuary from her pursuit and are freemen released from the action of her laws. To deny the innocence of works without desire would be to deny reason, to deny Sruti, to deny facts. For Janaka and others did works, Srikrishna did works, but none will say that either the *avatar* or the *jivanmukta* were bound by his works; for their *karma* was done with knowledge and without desire. Works without desire, then, cannot prevent salvation or lead to fresh bondage.

It may be argued, however, that if they do not prevent salvation, neither do they help towards salvation. The works of the Bhakta or Jnani do not bind him because he has attained the Eternal and by the strength of that attainment becomes free from desire and ignorance; but works done before attainment can be nothing but means of bondage; only the pursuit of God-knowledge and the worship & adoration of God, to which the name of works does not properly apply, are free from responsibility. But this reasoning too is not consistent with divine teaching, with experience or with reason. For divine teaching distinctly tells us that works done after abandonment of the world and devoted to God only, do lead to salvation. We know also that a single action done without desire and devoted to the Lord, gives us strength for fresh actions of the same kind, and the persistent repetition of such works must form the habit of desirelessness & self-devotion to Him, which then become our nature and atmosphere. We have already seen that desirelessness necessarily takes us outside the jurisdiction of Nature, and when we are outside the jurisdiction of Nature, where can we be if not in the presence of the Eternal? Nor can self-devotion to the Lord be reasonably said not to lead to the Lord; for where else can it lead? It is clear therefore that works without desire not only do not prevent salvation but are a mighty help towards salvation.

It may still be argued that works without desire help only because they lead to devotion and knowledge and there their function ceases; they bring the soul to a certain stage but do not carry it direct to God. It is therefore devotion and knowledge, bhakti and jnana, which alone bring us to God. As soon as either of these takes him by the hand, karma must leave him, just as rites & ceremonies must leave him, and its function is therefore not essentially higher than that of rites & ceremonies. But if this were good reasoning, the Karmayogin might equally well say that Bhakti leads to knowledge and the devotion of one's works to the Lord; therefore knowledge and works without desire bring a man to the Eternal and *bhakti* is only a preliminary means; or that *jnana* leads to adoration of the Eternal and devotion of all one does to him, therefore *bhakti* and works without desire alone bring the soul direct to God and *jnana* is only a preliminary means. Or if it is said that works must cease at a

certain stage while Bhakti and Jnana do not cease, this too is inconsistent with experience. For Janaka and others did works after they attained the Eternal and while they were in the body, did not cease from works. It cannot even be said that works though they need not necessarily cease after the attainment of the Eternal, yet need not continue. Particular works need not continue; rites & ceremonies need not continue; the life of the householder need not continue. But work continues so long as the body gross or subtle continues; for both the gross body and the subtle body, both the physical case & the soul-case are always part of Prakriti, and whatever is Prakriti, must do work. The Gita says this plainly

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥

“For no man verily remaineth even for a moment without doing works, for all are helplessly made to do work by the moods to which Nature has given birth.” And again सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि । “Even the Jnani moveth & doeth after the semblance of his own nature; for created things follow after their nature and what can forcing it do?” A man works according to his nature and cannot help doing work; but he can choose to what he shall direct his works, whether to his lower self or his higher, whether to desire or to God. The man who leaves the world behind him and sits on a mountaintop or in an asram, has not therefore got rid of works. If nothing else he has to maintain his body, to eat, to walk, to move his limbs, to sit in *asan* and meditate; all this is work. And not only his body works; his mind is far more active than his body. If he is not released from desire, his work will bind him and bear fruit in relation to himself and others. Even if he is released from desire, his body & mind are not free from Karma until he is able to get rid of them finally, and that will not be till his *prarabdha karma* has worked itself out and the debts he has written against his name are wiped off. Even the greatest Yogi by his mere bodily presence in the world, is pouring out a stream of spiritual force on all sides; this action does not bind him, it is true, yet it is work and work which exercises a stupendous influence on others. He is सर्वभूतहितरतः, busy doing good to all creatures by his very nature, even though he does not lift a finger or move a step. He too with regard to his body, gross & subtle, is अवशः, he must let the gunas, the moods of Nature, work. He may control that work, for he is no longer the slave of Prakriti, but he cannot stop it except by finally leaving his body & mind through Yoga with the Eternal. Work therefore does not cease any more than Bhakti or Jnana.

Shankara indeed says that when we have got Jnana, we necessarily cease to do works, for Jnana makes us one with the Eternal who is actionless अकर्ता. Yet Janaka knew the Eternal and did works; Sri Krishna was the Eternal and did works. For Brahman the Eternal, is both कर्ता and अकर्ता; He works and He does not work. As Sacchidananda, He is above works, but He is also above knowledge and above

devotion. When the Jivatman becomes Sacchidananda, devotion is lost in Ananda or absolute bliss, knowledge is lost in Chit or absolute Consciousness, works are lost in Sat or absolute Existence. But as Isha or Shakti, He does works by which He is not bound and the Jivatman also when he is made one with Isha or Shakti continues to do works without being bound.

Works therefore do not cease in the body, nor do they cease after we have left the body except by union with the actionless Sacchidananda or *laya* in the Unknowable Brahman, where Jnana and Bhakti also are swallowed up in unfathomable being. Even of the Unknowable Parabrahman too it cannot be said that It is actionless; It is neither कर्ता nor अकर्ता. It is néti, néti, not this, not that, unexplicable and inexpressible in terms of speech and mind. We need not therefore fear that works without desire will not lead us straight to the Eternal; we need not think that we must give up works in order that we may develop the love of God or attain the knowledge of God.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 204-07)

*

Finally, it is not even enough for the Sage's purpose that we should realise the Brahman except as the Atman & Ishwara. For if we do not realise Brahman as the Self & our Self we shall be in danger of losing the subjective aspect of existence & laying too much stress on That as the substratum of our objective existence in which I stand merely as a single unimportant movement. The result is a tamasic, an inert calm, a tendency to merge in the jada Prakriti, the apparent unintelligently active aspect of things which the Europeans call Nature or at the highest a resolution of our selves into that substratum of the objective in the Impersonal Brahman. The denial of the Transcendent Personality, the Paratpara Purusha is a strong tendency of the present-day Adwaita. "God", say these modern Adwaitins, "is a myth, or at most a dream like ourselves. Just as there is no I, so there is no God." Under this figure of thought, there lies a philosophical blunder. Personality is not necessarily individual Personality, neither is it a selection & arrangement of qualities, any more than existence is necessarily individual existence or a selection & arrangement of movements in our being. Personality can be & is Universal; this Universal Personality is God in relation to our individual experiences. Personality also can be & is Transcendent, self-existent, beyond individuality & Universality, — this transcendent Personality, a blissful unlimited self-conscious Awareness in self-existence is the Paratpara Purusha — adityavarnas tamasah parastat, drawing us like a sun beyond the darkness of ignorance & the darkness of the Asat. This is He — God universal, but also God transcendent — the Lilamaya Krishna who transcends His lila. Therefore the Upanishads everywhere insist not upon mere Existence, like the later Adwaitin, but on the sole Existent; and they speak continually on the Brahman as the creator,

Master, enjoyer of the worlds, by meditating on whom we shall attain to perfect liberation. Neither Buddha nor Jada Bharata are the true guides & fulfillers of our destiny; it is Yajnavalkya, it is Janaka &, most of all, it is Krishna son of Devaki who takes us most surely & entirely into the presence & into the being of the Eternal.

Atman, Brahman, Ishwara, on this triune aspect here of the Transcendent depend all our spiritual realisations and as we take one or the other & in its realisation stop a little this side or proceed a little to that side, our realisations, our experiences & our creeds & systems will vary from each other; & we shall be Buddhists or Adwaitins or Mayavadins or Dualists, followers of Ramanuja or Madhwa, followers of Christ, of Mahomed, of whosoever will give us such light on the Eternal as we are ready to receive. The Rishi of the Isha wishes us to realise all three, but for the sake of divine life in the world to dwell upon Ishwara, but on Ishwara neither extracosmic nor different from His creatures but rather in & about all beings as their indwelling Self, their containing Brahman and that material Brahman also or Prakriti which is the formal content of the indwelling Self and the formal content of the containing Brahman. In this realisation there are many stages of progress, many necessary first steps & later approximations; but the Rishi, his work being to throw out brief fundamental & important suggestions only & not to fill in details, to indicate & illumine, not to educate or instruct, gives us for the present only two of the final realisations which are the most essential for his purpose. We shall find, however, that there is more beyond.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 407-09)

*

To escape from grief, death and limitation we must renounce the world, to enjoy bliss, freedom & immortality we must possess ourselves in the Lord; but since His object in manifesting is habitation of the universe and not its destruction, the bliss must be enjoyed in this universe, through the Lord, and not in the Lord apart from and exclusive of life in the universe.

This is the difference, the capital difference between the Buddhistic solution — with all those later solutions affected & governed by Buddhistic thought, such as Mayavada & monastic Christianity — and the ancient answer of Hinduism to the problem put to man by life. These say, “Abandon life, put away all possession & enjoyment; absolute asceticism is your only salvation”; that said “Abandon the world that you may possess and enjoy it.” One is an escape, the other a recoil and an aggression; one is a divorce, the other a reconciliation. Both solutions are heroic; but one is a mighty heroism of difficult retreat and flight; the other a mightier heroism of self-perfection and conquest. The one is the retreat of the Ten Thousand; the other is Caesar’s movement from Dyrrhachium to [Pharsalus]. One path culminates in

Buddha, the other in Janaka and Srikrishna. The language of the Seer is perfectly framed, as in the first line, to bring about a confrontation of two giant opposites. Tyaktena in the instrumental case suggests a means, and the very first word after tyaktena, undivided from it by any other vocable or particle, the word which gives the object and work of this instrument, the word which sets ringing from the outset the conclusive note and culminating cry of the Upanishad and is suggested again and again in jijivishet, in ko mohah kah shokah, in amritam, in kalyanatamam, in raye, is the magnificent bhunjithah, Thou shouldst enjoy. Tyaga and bhoga, renunciation and enjoyment, have always been presented to us as the two conflicting ideals of human life & thought, — inevitably, for they are the two master impulses of Nature — both of them eternal — and through the ages they have perplexed and tormented humanity by their perpetual companionship in an always unfinished and inconclusive strife, dividing us into Puritan and Pagan, Stoic and Epicurean, worldling and ascetic, & perpetuating an opposition that rests on a false division of a double unity, maintaining a strife that can lead to no final victory. The Seer has deliberately brought these two great opposites & enemies together and using a pointed and unequivocal language, has put them side by side no longer as enemies but as friends and mutual helpers; his aim is by a fearless and puissant confrontation to reconcile and wed them eternally to each other, as he has already in the first line confronted, reconciled and eternally wedded the two apparent opposites, Spirit and world-Nature. Had he said not “Tyaktena” but “Tyagena bhunjithah”, from which we might have concluded that he pointed us to renunciation of the world for the enjoyment of God aloof from the world, there would then have been no real confrontation & no great monumental phrase but only a skilful verbal turn of words pointing a contrast rather than effecting a reconciliation. But the instrument of the enjoyment is not renunciation in itself and for itself but the world we have renounced, tena, & the enjoyment is not the self-sufficient joy of renunciation & escape, but the enjoyment of Spirit in the world, the Lord in the motion. By means of all that is thing of world in this moving universe we are to enjoy God &, through Him, no longer as now apart from Him, to enjoy His universal motion, — all this that is moving thing in her that moves becomes the instrument of a divine delight, because the world is God and part of His totality, so that by possessing & enjoying Him we possess and enjoy world also. Enjoyment is to be reconciled then to renunciation & even wedded to it, made to depend upon it as the effect depends upon the cause, to stand upon it as a statue stands upon its pedestal or the roof of a house on its foundations, walls and pillars. Renunciation the means, enjoyment the end, but renunciation of the world as mere undivine, ignorant & fettered motion & becoming, enjoyment of God in Himself & of the world only as a symbol, a formal expression of God; this reconciliation founded on a knowledge of the true nature & purpose of existence is the gospel of the Seer.

The ascetic gospel of renunciation is incomplete by itself; the Pagan gospel of enjoyment is incomplete by itself. Renunciation and enjoyment of the world must be reconciled by substituting inward for outward bliss, the bliss that goes from within outward for the pleasure which seeks to appeal from without inward, joy of God in the form & name of things for joy of the finite appearance and the isolated idea. The reconciliation is to be effected through the consummate experience of Ananda, the divine beatitude at which we arrive by true seeing in the kingdom of the pure Idea, satyadharmena drishtyá.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 450-52)

*

Beyond the Kshara & Akshara we rise into the comprehensive infinity of the uttama; lifted above Buddha & Shankara stand Janaka & Krishna, the supreme Yogin & the entire Avatar; they in full action are in entire possession of peace and, conquerors of desire & ego or eternally superior to them, keep their hold on the real and divine bliss of God's triple self-manifestation; they know and exercise the simultaneous & harmonious enjoyment of His transcendent being, His universal Self and His individual play of becoming.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 489)

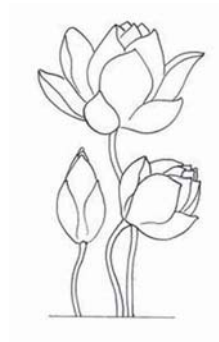
*

Shankara like Buddha refuses to explain or discuss how active consciousness came at all to exist on the surface of a sole Self-existence which is in its very being shanta and inactive; he drives, like Buddha, straight at the actual fact of our bondage, the practical cause of bondage and the most direct path of escape from the bondage. These he states for us as he holds them to be established by Scripture, experience & reason & then, the fact once thus triply established, our business is not to account for its existence, which, moreover, must in the nature of things be inexplicable to the mind, since Maya is an original mystery & therefore incapable of solution, but to grasp at the one means of escape, of release, of the great & final liberation. The intellectual difference between the two systems is immense, their temperamental kinship is close. Yet we have this curious result, due to Buddha's stress on the means of self-denial provided by life & its ethical & altruistic possibilities as a preliminary training, that Shankara's system, less intellectually Nihilistic than Buddha's, has been practically more fatal to the activities of the divine power & joy in life in the nation which has so largely accepted his teachings. By denying God in life, by withdrawing the best souls from life, by discouraging through their thought & example, — the thought & example of the best, yad yad acharati sreshthah, — the sraddha of life, the full confident self-acting of

Matariswan even in those who have practically accepted & cling to the burden of worldly existence, he has enlarged the original Vedantic seed of ascetic tendency into a gigantic growth of stillness & world-disgust which has overshadowed for centuries the lives & souls of hundreds of millions of human beings. On one side the race & the world have gained immensely, on the other it has suffered an immense impoverishment. The world-fleeing saint & the hermit have multiplied, the world-helping saint & the divine warrior of life come rarely & fail for want of the right atmosphere & environment. The Avatars of moral purity & devotional love abound, the Avatars of life, Krishna & Balarama, manifest themselves no more. Gone are Janaka & Ajatashatru, Arjuna & Vyasa, the great scientists, the great lawgivers. The cry of OM Tapas with which God creates has grown faint in the soul of India, the cry of OM Shanti with which He withdraws from life alone arouses & directs the best energies of a national consciousness to whose thought all life is sorrow, self-delusion & an undivine blunder. Chilled is that marvellous & mighty vigour which flowed out from the Veda & Upanishads on the Indian consciousness & produced the grand & colossal forms of life eternally portrayed for us in the fragments of our ancient art & history & in the ideal descriptions of the Epics.

(Ibid., pp. 499-500)

SRI AUROBINDO



**‘I PUT MY FULL TRUST IN THEE AND BOW DOWN
BEFORE THEE IN SILENT DEVOTION’**

February 23, 1914

GRANT, O Lord, that we may be more and more conscious of Thy law, that is, be one with it, so that we may foster its manifestation in all things.

Lord, grant that I may become master of my vagabond thought, that living in Thee I may see life only through Thee, and the illusion of material reality may come to an end and be replaced by a perception more in conformity with Thy eternal reality.

Let me live constantly in Thy divine Love, so that it may live in me and through me.

Grant that I may be an efficient and clear-sighted collaborator and that everything within me may foster the plenitude of Thy manifestation.

I know all my imperfections, my difficulties, my weaknesses, I feel all my ignorance, but I put my full trust in Thee and bow down before Thee in silent devotion.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 83)

RENUNCIATION AND WIDENESS; THE ASHRAM; DIFFICULTIES; DIVINE LOVE; ASPIRATION AND IMPATIENCE; HASTE; PURITY AND SINCERITY

Vivekananda, exalting Sannyasa, has said that in all Indian history there is only one Janaka. Not so, for Janaka is not the name of a single individual, but a dynasty of self-ruling kings and the triumph-cry of an ideal.

In all the lakhs of ochre-clad Sannyasins, how many are perfect? It is the few attainments and the many approximations that justify an ideal.

There have been hundreds of perfect Sannyasins, because Sannyasa has been widely preached and numerously practised; let it be the same with the ideal freedom and we shall have hundreds of Janakas.

Sannyasa has a formal garb and outer tokens; therefore men think they can easily recognise it; but the freedom of a Janaka does not proclaim itself and it wears the garb of the world; to its presence even Narada was blinded.

Hard is it to be in the world, free, yet living the life of ordinary men; but because it is hard, therefore it must be attempted and accomplished.

Sri Aurobindo
'Thoughts and Aphorisms'
(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 435)

It seems so obvious!

It is obvious, but difficult.

To be free from all attachment does not mean running away from all occasion for attachment. All these people who assert their asceticism, not only run away but warn others not to try!

This seems so obvious to me. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level.

Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations.

As a matter of fact I have made a whole series of studies on the subject, on the purely physical plane. . . . In order to be above all possible error, we tend to eliminate any occasion for error. For example, if you do not want to say any useless words, you stop speaking; people who take a vow of silence imagine that this is control of speech — it is not true! It is only eliminating the occasion for speech and therefore for saying useless things. It is the same thing with food: eating only what is necessary. In the transitional state we have reached, we no longer want to lead this entirely animal life based on material exchange and food; but it would be foolish to believe that we have reached a state where the body can subsist entirely without food — nevertheless there is already a great difference, since they are trying to find the essential nutrients in things in order to lessen the volume. But the natural tendency is to fast — it is a mistake!

For fear of being mistaken in our actions, we stop doing anything at all; for fear of being mistaken in our speech, we stop speaking; for fear of eating for the pleasure of eating, we do not eat at all — this is not freedom, it is simply reducing the manifestation to a minimum; and the natural conclusion is Nirvana. But if the Lord wanted only Nirvana, nothing but Nirvana would exist! It is obvious that He conceives of the coexistence of all opposites, and that for Him this must be the beginning of a totality. So obviously, if one feels meant for that, one can choose only one of His manifestations, that is to say, the absence of manifestation. But it is still a limitation. And this is not the only way to find Him, far from it!

It is a very common tendency which probably originates from an ancient suggestion or perhaps from some lack, some incapacity — reduce, reduce, reduce one's needs, reduce one's activities, reduce one's words, reduce one's food, reduce one's active life — and all that becomes so narrow. In one's aspiration not to make any more mistakes, one eliminates any occasion for making them. It is not a cure.

But the other way is much, much more difficult.

(*Silence*)

No, the solution is to act only under the divine impulsion, to speak only under the divine impulsion, to eat only under the divine impulsion. That is the difficult thing, because naturally, you immediately confuse the divine impulsion with your personal impulses.

I suppose this was the idea of all the apostles of renunciation: to eliminate everything coming from outside or from below so that if something from above should manifest one would be in a condition to receive it. But from the collective point of view, this process could take thousands of years. From the individual point of view, it is possible; but then one must keep intact the aspiration to receive the true impulsion — not the aspiration for “complete liberation”, but the aspiration for *active* identification with the Supreme, that is to say, to will only what He wills, to

do only what He wants: to exist by and in Him alone. So one can try the method of renunciation, but this is for one who wants to cut himself off from others. And in that case, can there be any integrality? It seems impossible to me.

To proclaim publicly what one wants to do is a considerable help. It may give rise to objections, scorn, conflict, but this is largely compensated for by public “expectation”, so to say, by what other people expect from you. This was certainly the reason for those robes: to let people know. Of course, that may bring you the scorn, the bad will of some people, but then there are all those who feel they must not interfere or meddle with this, that it is not their concern.

I do not know why, but it always seemed to me like showing off — it may not be and in some cases it is not, but all the same it is a way of saying to people, “Look, this is what I am.” And as I say, it may help, but it has its drawbacks.

It is another childishness.

All these things are means, stages, steps, but . . . true freedom is to be free of everything — including means.

(Silence)

It is a restriction, a constriction, whereas the True Thing is an opening, a widening, an identification with the whole.

When you reduce, reduce, reduce yourself, you do not have any feeling of losing yourself, it takes away your fear of losing yourself — you become something solid and compact. But if you choose the method of widening — the greatest possible widening — you must not be afraid of losing yourself.

It is much more difficult.

Then how can one do this in an external world which absorbs you constantly? I am thinking of people who live in the West, for example; they are constantly swallowed up by their work, their appointments, the telephone, they don't even have a minute to purify what comes pouring in on them all the time, and recover. In such conditions, how can one do this?

Oh, you must know what to take and what to leave!

That is the other extreme. . . . Certainly, monasteries, retreats, escape into the forests or caves are necessary to counterbalance modern hyperactivity; and yet there is less of all that now than there was one or two thousand years ago. But to me this seems to have been a lack of understanding — it did not last.

Of course, it is this excessive activity which makes an excessive immobility necessary.

But how can one find a way to be what one should be, in normal conditions?

How can one avoid falling into one kind of excess or the other?

Yes, to live normally and to be free.

My child, that is why the Ashram was created! That was the idea. Because, in France, I was always asking myself: How can one find the time to find oneself? How can one even find the time to understand how to become free? So then I thought: a place where material needs will be sufficiently provided for, so that if one truly wants to become free, one can do so. And the Ashram was founded on this idea, not on any other — a place where people would have enough to live on so as to have time to think of the True Thing.

(Mother smiles) Human nature is such that laziness has taken the place of aspiration — not for everyone, but anyway in quite a general way — and licence or libertinism has taken the place of freedom — which would tend to prove that the human race has to pass through a period of rough handling before it is ready to pull itself away more sincerely from its slavery to activity.

Indeed, the first movement is this: “Oh! To find the place where one can concentrate, find oneself, truly live without being preoccupied with material things.” That is the first aspiration. It was even on this basis, at any rate in the beginning, that disciples were chosen — but it does not last! Things become easy and so one lets oneself go. There are no moral restraints and so one acts foolishly.

But one cannot even say that there was a mistake in the selection — one would be tempted to believe it, but it is not true; because the selection was made according to a very precise and clear inner indication. . . . It is probably the difficulty of keeping the inner attitude unmixed. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo wanted, what he was trying for. He said: “If I could find one hundred people, that would be enough.” But it did not stay one hundred for long, and I must say that even when it was a hundred, it was already mixed.

Many came, attracted by the True Thing, but . . . one lets oneself go. That is, it is impossible to hold firm in one’s true position.

Yes, I have noticed that in the extreme difficulty of the outer conditions of the world, the aspiration was much more intense.

Yes, of course!

It is much more intense, it is almost a question of life and death.

Yes, that's it! That is to say, man is still so crude that he needs extremes. That is what Sri Aurobindo said: For love to be true, hatred was necessary; true love could be born only under the pressure of hatred. That's it. Well, one must accept things as they are and try to go further. That is all.

That is probably why there are so many difficulties — difficulties accumulate here: difficulties of character, health and circumstances. It is because the consciousness awakens under the stress of difficulties. If everything is easy and peaceful, one falls asleep.

That is also how Sri Aurobindo explained the necessity of war. In peacetime, one becomes slack.

It is a pity.

I cannot say that I find it very pretty, but it seems to be like that.

This is just what Sri Aurobindo said in *The Hour of God*: If you have the Force and the Knowledge and misuse the moment, woe to you.

It is not revenge, it is not punishment, not at all, but you draw upon yourself a necessity, the necessity for a violent impulsion — to react to something violent.

(*Silence*)

This is an experience I am having more and more: for the contact with this true divine Love to be able to manifest, that is, to express itself freely, it demands an extraordinary strength in beings and things, which does not yet exist. Otherwise everything falls apart.

There are lots of very convincing details, but of course, because they are “details” or very personal things, one cannot speak of them; but on the evidence of repeated experiences, I have to say this: when this Power of *pure* Love — which is so wonderful, which is beyond all expression — as soon as it begins to manifest abundantly, freely, it is as if quantities of things crumbled down immediately — they cannot stand. They cannot stand, they are dissolved. Then . . . then everything stops. And this stopping, which one might think is a disgrace, is just the opposite! It is an infinite Grace.

Simply to perceive, a little concretely and tangibly, the difference between the vibration in which one lives normally and almost continually, and that vibration — simply to observe this infirmity, which I call sickening — it really makes you feel sick — that is enough to stop everything.

Only yesterday, this morning, there are long moments when this Power manifests; then suddenly, there is a kind of wisdom, an immeasurable wisdom which causes everything to subside in perfect tranquillity: what must be shall be, it will take the time that is needed. And then everything is all right. In this way, everything is all right immediately. But the splendour fades.

One has only to be patient.

Sri Aurobindo also has written this: Aspire intensely, but without impatience. . . . The difference between intensity and impatience is very subtle — it is all a difference in vibration. It is subtle, but it makes all the difference.

Intensely, but without impatience. That's it. One must be in that state.

And for a very long time, a very long time, one must be satisfied with inner results, that is, results in one's personal and individual reactions, one's inner contact with the rest of the world — one must not expect or be premature in wanting things to materialise. Because our hastiness usually delays things.

If it is like that, it is like that.

We — I mean men — live harassed lives. It is a kind of half-awareness of the shortness of their lives; they do not think of it, but they feel it half-consciously. And so they are always wanting — quick, quick, quick — to rush from one thing to another, to do one thing quickly and move on to the next one, instead of letting each thing live in its own eternity. They are always wanting: forward, forward, forward. . . . And the work is spoilt.

That is why some people have preached: the only moment that matters is the present moment. In practice it is not true, but from the psychological point of view it ought to be true. That is to say, to live to the utmost of one's capacities at every minute, without planning or wanting, waiting or preparing for the next. Because you are always hurrying, hurrying, hurrying. . . . And nothing you do is good. You are in a state of inner tension which is completely false — completely false.

All those who have tried to be wise have always said it — the Chinese preached it, the Indians preached it — to live in the awareness of Eternity. In Europe also they said that one should contemplate the sky and the stars and identify oneself with their infinitude — all things that widen you and give you peace.

These are means, but they are indispensable.

And I have observed this in the cells of the body; they always seem to be in a hurry to do what they have to do, lest they have no time to do it. So they do nothing properly. Muddled people — some people turn everything upside down, their movements are jerky and confused — have this to a high degree, this kind of haste — quick, quick, quick. . . . Yesterday, someone was complaining of rheumatic pains and he was saying, "Oh, it is such a waste of time. I do things so slowly!" I said (*Mother smiles*), "So what!" He didn't like it. You see, for someone to complain when he is in pain means that he is soft, that is all; but to say, "I am wasting so much time, I do things so slowly!" It gave a very clear picture of the haste in which men live. You go hurtling through life . . . to go where? . . . You end with a crash!

What is the use of that?

(*Silence*)

In reality, the moral of all these aphorisms is that it is much more important to be

than to seem to be — one must live and not pretend to live — and that it is much more important to realise something entirely, sincerely, perfectly than to let others know that you are realising it!

It is the same thing again: when you are compelled to say what you are doing, you spoil half your action.

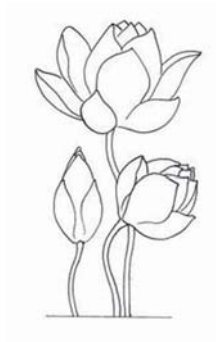
And yet, at the same time, this helps you to take your bearings, to find out exactly where you are.

That was the wisdom of the Buddha who spoke of “the Middle Way”: neither too much of this nor too much of that, neither falling into this nor falling into that — a little of everything and a balanced way . . . but *pure*. Purity and sincerity are the same thing.

16 September 1964

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 194-202)



A NEW PERCEPTION OF LIFE

I AM on the border of a new perception of life.

People's ordinary reaction to the activity of others, to everything around them, their general and ordinary way of seeing things, all of that represents a certain attitude of consciousness: it is seen from a certain level. And when I commented on those aphorisms the other day, I suddenly noticed that the level was different and the angle so different that the other attitude, the ordinary way of seeing things, appeared incomprehensible — you wonder how you can have it, so different is it. And while I was speaking, I had a sort of sensation or perception that this new "attitude" was being established as a natural, spontaneous thing — it isn't the result of an effort for transformation: it's an already established transformation.

It isn't total, because both functionings are perceptible, but I am confident that it is on the way. Then it will be interesting.

As if certain parts of the consciousness were in a metamorphosis from the caterpillar state into the butterfly state, something like that.

It's just on the way. But far enough on the way to make the difference very perceptible. Once it is done, something will be established.

(silence)

From the necessity of certain circumstances, it so happens that things I said ten years ago (statements or remarks I made are read out to me): I really feel it's somebody else! I find it odd.

Yet, at that time, it was the most sincere expression of the consciousness. . . . Now I feel, "Ah, I hadn't gone beyond that. . . ." A strange feeling.

And for Sri Aurobindo's writings (not all), it's the same; there are certain things I had truly understood, in the sense that they were already understood far more deeply and truly than even an enlightened mentality understands them — they were already felt and lived — and now, they take on a completely different meaning.

I read some of those sentences or ideas that are expressed in few words, three or four words, in which he doesn't say things fully: he simply seems to let them fall like drops of water; when I read them at the time (sometimes not long ago; sometimes only two or three years ago), I had an experience which was already far deeper or vaster than that of intelligence, but now . . . a spark of Light suddenly appears in them, and I say, "Oh, but I hadn't seen that!" And it's a whole understanding or CONTACT with things that I had never had before.

It happened to me again just yesterday evening.

And I said to myself, "But then . . . then there are in that certain things . . . we

still have a long, long, long way to go to truly understand them.” Because that spark of Light is something very, very pure — very intense and very pure — and it contains an absolute. And since it contains that (I haven’t always felt it; I have felt other things, I have felt a great light, I have felt a great power, I have felt something that already explained everything, but this is something else, it’s something which is beyond), so I concluded (*laughing*) “Well, we still have a long way to go before we can understand Sri Aurobindo!”

It was rather comforting.

The sense of a sort of certainty that he has opened the doors, and that when we are able, we will go through those doors.

Just yesterday. It’s interesting.

But then, it leaves you . . . speechless.

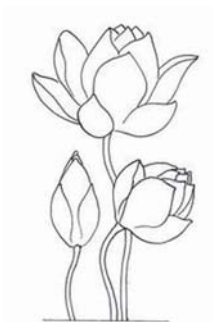
* * *

(A little later, regarding the last aphorism, about which Mother spoke of the haste in which people live.)

I have noticed this, too (I don’t know if you’ve noticed it): the more quiet and still you are within yourself and the more you have eliminated that haste I was talking about, the faster time goes by. And the more you are in that precipitousness, the longer time is, the more it drags on and on. . . . It’s strange.

Years and months are going by with dizzying speed — and without leaving any trace (that’s what is interesting). So, if you look at it, you begin to understand how you can live almost indefinitely — because there no longer is that friction of time.

(From a conversation of the Mother on September 18, 1964)



‘AT THE BEGINNING OF MY PRESENT EARTHLY EXISTENCE . . .’

At the beginning of my present earthly existence I came into contact with many people who said that they had a great inner aspiration, an urge towards something deeper and truer, but that they were tied down, subjected, slaves to that brutal necessity of earning their living, and that this weighed them down so much, took up so much of their time and energy that they could not engage in any other activity, inner or outer. I heard this very often, I saw many poor people — I don’t mean poor from the monetary point of view, but poor because they felt imprisoned in a material necessity, narrow and deadening.

I was very young at that time, and I always used to tell myself that if ever I could do it, I would try to create a little world — oh! quite a small one, but still. . . a small world where people would be able to live without having to be preoccupied with food and lodging and clothing and the imperative necessities of life, so as to see whether all the energies freed by this certainty of a secure material living would turn spontaneously towards the divine life and the inner realisation.

Well, towards the middle of my life — at least, what is usually the middle of a human life — the means were given to me and I could realise this, that is, create such conditions of life. And I have come to this conclusion, that it is *not* this necessity which hinders people from consecrating themselves to an inner realisation, but that it is a dullness, a *tamas*, a lack of aspiration, a miserable laxity, an I-don’t-care attitude, and that those who face even the hardest conditions of life are sometimes the ones who react most and have the intensest aspiration.

That’s all. I am waiting for the contrary to be proved to me.

I would very much like to see the contrary but I haven’t yet seen it. As there are many energies which are not utilised, since this terrible compulsion of having something to eat or a roof to sleep under or clothes on one’s back does not exist — as one is sure of all that — there is a whole mass of energies which are not utilised for that; well, they are spent in idle stupidities. And of these, the foolishness which seems to me the most disastrous is to keep one’s tongue going: chatter, chatter, chatter. I haven’t known a place where they chatter more than here, and say everything they should not say, busy themselves with things they should not be concerned with. And I know it is merely an overflow of unused energy.

That is all.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1956, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 8, pp. 160-61)

**“THE SACRED FIRE” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

After a long time a lyric: it was born out of a strong inner sense during yesterday's morning meditation.

THE SACRED FIRE

O keep the sacred fire
A prisoner poise
With walls that never wake
To earthly voice.

So delicate and small
This undefiled
Epiphany of joy,
This golden child,

That like a freezing blast
The unfruitful power
Of stormy mind will quench
The burning flower.

Breathe tenderly your love:
Feed the pure flame
By secret offerings
Of one far Name

Whose rhythm makes more rich
That smiling face
Of angel glow within
The heart's embrace —

Until the dreamy hue
Grows wide enough
To flash upon time's chill
A warrior laugh

	twilight	
Piercing the twilit walls		[1]
Of calm to blind		
a noon of		
With xxxxxxxx ecstasy		[2, 3]
The space of mind.		[4]
gaze		

A sword divine which darts
From clay's dull sheath,
The luminous tongue shall rise
Devouring death

And every icy thought's
Oblivion

	core	
Of earth's untarnished soul,		[5]
Its core of sun.		[6]
soul		

[Amal's remarks and questions:]

[2] The original word was “terrible”. [*“Terrible” had become illegible*]

[3] Or do you prefer “noons” to “a noon”? In either case there will have to be “gaze” in the next line, I suppose; but “gaze” sounds too common. Can't “space” have a profounder significance here than “gaze”?

Is the inspiration sustained throughout? Is there in the latter half of the poem not only a change of poetic tone but also a fall in poetic quality? What plane has been at work and has it achieved any specially striking lines of beauty and spiritual truth?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[*Sri Aurobindo marked stanzas 2, 5, 7 with a black line*]

[1] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “twilit”*]

[4] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “gaze”*]

[5] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “core”*]

[6] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “soul”*]

Well, it is a very fine lyric. The inspiration is not equally intense throughout — it is most felicitous in the three stanzas marked; the first also is almost that and also [the] three first lines of the sixth. The rest is admirable, though it has not quite the

same intuitive edge; but still is the right thought with the just poetic expression. I don't know exactly what plane, but it comes from the inner being — there is a fine psychic touch in stanzas 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and it is the psychic truth that is expressed throughout.

30 May 1937

[From *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of Amal Kiran* (K. D. Sethna), 1993, p. 156:]

[*Amal's questions:*]

Would the emergence of the psychic being make the writing of "above-head" poetry more possible?

Would the emergence of the psychic being cut across any above-head inspiration?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

To get the psychic being to emerge is not easy, though it is a very necessary thing for sadhana and when it does it is not certain that it will switch on to the above-head planes at once. But obviously anyone who could psychicise his poetry would get a unique place among the poets.

I don't suppose the emergence of the psychic would interfere at all with the inspiration from above. It would be more likely to help it by making the connection with these planes more direct and conscious. . . . The direct psychic touch is not frequent in poetry. It breaks in sometimes — more often there is only a tinge here and there.

[20 October 1936]

*

THE SACRED FIRE

O keep the sacred fire
 A prisoner poise
 With walls that never wake
 To earthly voice.

So delicate and small
 This undefiled
 Epiphany of joy,
 This golden child,

That like a freezing blast
The unfruitful power
Of stormy mind will quench
The burning flower.

Breathe tenderly your love:
Feed the pure flame
By secret offerings
Of one far Name

Whose rhythms make more rich
That smiling face
Of angel glow within
The heart's embrace —

Until the dreamy hue
Grows wide enough
To flash upon time's chill
A warrior laugh

Piercing through twilight walls
Of calm to blind
With a noon of ecstasy
The space of mind.

A sword divine which darts
From clay's dull sheath,
The luminous tongue shall rise
Devouring death

And every icy thought's
Oblivion
Of earth's untarnished soul,
Its core of sun.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of May 2010)

Chapter Eight

Neophyte of the Ashram: on the path of perfection . . .

From 1926, Philippe could write that his inner life was henceforth “pure joy and perfect harmony”. At last he found in Sri Aurobindo the one whom he had sought since a long time, perhaps since 1917: “the guru who can help me in my difficulties, because he has himself gone beyond this stage”! A new period began for him: “the inner development, the anticipation and the descent of this truth into all the parts of my being, and the realisation of the union with the Divine”.

It is in the correspondence of the years 1929-1930 (presented in the next chapter) that Philippe explained the thought, the approach and the expectations of his new guide. His interviews with him have been recounted in a book published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, (1972-1986), entitled Conversations avec Pavitra (Conversations with Pavitra). The first interview, dated Friday, December 18, 1925, mentions the possibility of Philippe's return to France; Sri Aurobindo, noticing his “intense aspiration”, invites him to stay with him . . .

Several interviews do not feature in this book. . . . [A number of pages have been torn out from the notebook where the conversations were recorded as they were considered too personal and as such not to be made public.] . . . A former student of my uncle, P. Mukherjee, has procured for me a copy of Number 83 (April 1953) of the magazine France – Asie which carries the interviews of the 24th and the 28th April as also of the 1st, 5th, 8th and 12th May 1926. There the spiritualist phenomena, Theosophy, some of Philippe's favourite books: Ectoplasm and Clairvoyance by Dr. Geley; Beasts, Men and Gods by Ossendowsky; and Mission of India by Saint Yves d'Alveydre were discussed; lastly, the modern conceptions of physics and the traditional Hindu intuitions in the same domain were compared. Sri Aurobindo concluded these discussions thus, “What is necessary is an aspiration for a complete change of the life itself. For Europe, the obstacle is in the intellect.”

I feel it proper to take note of two points from Philippe's correspondence:

“We (that is to say the Ashram) have had to expand, somewhat against the wishes of Sri Aurobindo who wants to arrive at a certain point of realisation before accepting new disciples so as not to dilute the effort . . .” This position is very

remarkable because it puts deepening before proselytising, contrary to what the religious organisations do for the most part! I have noted recently that in Pondicherry this approach is still followed.

The inmates of the Ashram move with the times and except for the hours of spiritual exercises or of meditation, they work at their tasks or serve according to their talents. Thus my uncle began by looking after the maintenance of the automobiles of the Ashram. Soon he was in charge of the correspondence with the French speaking disciples as well as procuring materials from France for the needs of the community. I have selected a letter which he had sent to Albert; if it is characteristic of the relation between the two brothers, it also gives a precise idea of the nature of Philippe's tasks.

I cannot help pointing out the importance of the number of cars: five vehicles, which is considerable for the place: Pondicherry; time: 1928; and the number of disciples: a few dozen! Therefore my uncle's correspondence permits me to think that the Ashram, . . . was well off.

* * *

Pondicherry, December 27, 1925

Dear Papa and Maman,

Here I am in Pondicherry since eight days, exactly as planned. And I am going to be here for some time because I have found what I thought of finding here and what I came here to seek: a guru who can help me in my present inner difficulties, because he has himself gone beyond this stage and he has attained realisation.

He has around him, I speak of Aurobindo Ghose, some twenty disciples, mostly Hindus. There is a French lady, Mirra Richard, an English lady, two Hindu ladies, and the rest are men, mostly between 25 and 35 years, from different corners of India. They are not too numerous compared to the number of those who call on him.

I shall tell you the little that I know of A.G. During a certain period, some twenty years earlier, he played an active role in the anti-English politics, was considered the leader of the so-called anarchists of Bengal, was tried three times but was acquitted. His younger brother was one of the first to employ violent methods; he was sentenced to life imprisonment and was reprieved only at the armistice, after having spent twelve years in the Andaman Islands. Since over fifteen years, A.G. has completely stopped all political activities in order to devote himself to yoga. This change in the direction of his thoughts was gradual, but at a certain moment the inner call made him leave the political arena. Nor does his brother, who is one of

his disciples at this time, concern himself with the current political movements, but is totally occupied with his inner realisation.

One may, however, suppose that this retreat is only temporary. It may go on for many years still, but it is only a necessary stage for the perfection that A.G. is seeking before resuming his place in Hindu thought and action. This place will be one of a leader. He is known, thought of highly and feared by the English who know that he holds one of the main threads, if not the most powerful one, of the Hindu soul. What he would say would certainly be listened to and done. Gandhi knows him although their ways of looking at the current problems are different. In short, at present, A.G. is entirely devoted to the realisation of the yoga in himself and for the few disciples. He is a master with experience and the first personality of this kind whom I have been fortunate to meet. He has not written much. In 1914 and the subsequent years, he has edited a philosophical review, the *Arya*, from which Madame Potel drew much of her inspiration. At present I am re-reading these very clear and very powerful articles. Since four or five years he has completely stopped all literary work.

It is rather difficult to approach him because he cannot receive all those who want to meet him. It was much easier for me because last year I had written to Mirra R., a childhood friend of Madame Potel who has also written on my behalf.

And now, here I am for some time in this calm and peaceful, almost dead, town of Pondicherry, as a disciple of one of the greatest yogis of present-day India. And I know that it is this which I have received in India. I shall not even go to Adyar (also for reasons of economy)!

I have been given lodging here, but naturally I shall have to pay for my food and upkeep. I have two rooms, simple and quiet. There are three houses occupied by the small group, closely watched, however, by numerous English and French spies. Our letters will probably be opened and surely I am already on the list of the people to be watched if I go to British India.

I have written to Albert who will soon be returning to France. He had at first thought of visiting India, then, I think, he has abandoned this plan. You will see him before me. Do not be sad because all is for the best and what is happening to me today is truly that of which I had an **urgent need**. If I had returned to France without this experience which I know I must acquire here, I would have been in a very bad condition to pursue my life. It is difficult for me to make you understand this. Perhaps Albert, who has seen me, will explain it better.

So, my life will take on again the outward monotony which it already had in Mongolia, while inwardly it will present an incessant work, struggles and joys too. Have confidence, as I myself have confidence!

Unfortunately, I think that there is nothing of A.G. translated into French and that will hamper your understanding of my orientation.

I shall keep you posted and I shall be happy to receive your letters. Write to me at:

9, Rue de la Marine, Pondicherry (French India).

I love you and embrace you very affectionately.
Your son,

Signed: Philippe

N.B. As I promised you, I have kept the money that Papa lent me for my return journey in the bank. May he excuse this further delay!

* * *

Pondicherry, February 20, 1927

My dear Papa,

It will be difficult for me to describe exactly the impression that your last letter has produced on me. Evidently there is a very sweet joy at the thought that I can embrace you as in the past, but also a veil of a little melancholic sadness.

I do not need to make a great effort to imagine the suffering that I have caused you because I have always felt it, and without exaggeration I can say that I suffered in your suffering. This reaction was almost more painful than my personal difficulties, because on myself, I could act, I have learnt to make my pain disappear and to use it, whereas on yours I could do nothing. My clumsy attempts only irritated it and produced effects often contrary to what I had hoped for. It took me long to understand — it is only your last letter which has revealed it completely to me — the reason why you, so tolerant of ideas which differ from yours, and looking at life philosophically with a calm reflection, and above all, being neither a sectarian nor an out-and-out materialist, have always refused to grant me — to me — this tolerance and this liberty. This reason, it was your suffering! And thus, what separated us was made of your pain; and that I felt without quite understanding it, but I was powerless. I even reached a point where I did not dare hope for a change in our relationship, I admit, and that was very painful. And also incomprehensible, because I love you deeply, I love you and respect you, and I know perfectly that you too love me deeply and that you have tried, up to a certain point (I shall specify in a moment), to understand me. And your letter has evoked in me a genuine emotion; it seemed to me that a barrier was disappearing between us and that you were really taking me in your arms.

I would like to talk about a point which I have often found in your letters: you reproach me for not replying to your questions, examining your arguments, following

your reasoning. Be sure that I have read all your letters attentively, and with the wish to find there a point of contact. But it is certain, I agree with you here, that rarely have I entered your line of thought. There are, I feel, several reasons. The principal one is that it was not through reasoning that I was looking for the guide of my life. When I felt inwardly that I must do something and that this command — how to name it? — confirmed itself in silence and peace, my mind had to submit to it and to justify, **if it could**, this inner decision. And often this explanatory reasoning was lame. In any case, I do not think that it could ever justify on its own an important decision of my life to the extent of making it an imperious necessity. How, then, to make you understand the situation? In a similar case, instead of enlightening me, your action tended most of the time to reinforce the mental action and the difficulties.

In a word, the motives behind my action were not, and are not completely explicable. In time, little by little I have purified my inner perception and have managed to clear to some extent the ordinary movements of desires and thoughts. Well, I shall be able less and less to express the true reason of my actions and, what's more, often I myself recognised it long afterwards. I act because I feel deeply that it is thus that I must act. My mind must find the possibility so that the action is realised and often it has trouble finding itself there.

This explains sufficiently why it was so difficult for me to reply to your arguments. What you said, I knew it already, I too had looked at the question in that light. But when it was a matter of taking a decision, it was upwards that I looked to find the indication. Have I made mistakes by this procedure? It is obvious, but they are not important, and on the whole I have rightly followed the direction in which I must walk and I have arrived where I felt that I ought to arrive.

Note that I am not trying to justify my conduct mentally: perhaps it is not humanly justifiable, it makes no difference to me. I am simply explaining to you what I recognise as true in my conduct, but which was not always conscious earlier.

And then, from the beginning there has been a great difference between our points of view. You admitted, if need be, that I could have any idea, whatever "system" as you call it, but its kingdom must stop dead on the edge of the practical life which must remain untouched, governed by the recognised laws and norms and accepted by all around us, or at least it must submit sufficiently to these rules so that they do not cause us pain.

This would mean introducing a division in the being, which from the very beginning was impossible for me to accept. I know that it is a result of the occidental philosophical formation, and the manner in which one has understood "the philosophical truth", which you expressed thus: *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*. [First one must live, then philosophise.] Odd kind of truth really, which should content itself with the little domain which I should give it arbitrarily after requesting it not to disturb me outside and to leave me in peace to do whatever I would like and to renounce it at every step. Perhaps it is because of this conception of the truth that

it is so elusive to the philosophical mind! Truth is more demanding. How can one hope for the truth if the entire being, in an ardent hope of aspiration, does not offer itself completely to know it? We may counter this aphorism with this one, without necessarily taking it in the ordinary catholic sense: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God!" And as soon as I have tried to introduce into my external life what I felt within, you no longer followed me; nor did you understand me any more.

Now I feel that I must also speak to you a little about what I have found here, at least to tell you that I consider the first part of my life as ended. It was a seeking, unconscious at first, then more and more conscious, of my life and the goal of my life. How much suffering I have endured to find them and how painful has been this search in the darkness and isolation! One must really have in oneself an indomitable aspiration and an inner certitude of a profound call. This period came to a close the day when I was accepted as a disciple by Sri Aurobindo. Now I have entered the second phase which is the inner development, waiting for the truth and the descent of this truth in every part of the being, and the realisation of the union with the Divine. Subsequently will come the third part: the projection of the truth in outer work, the manifestation of the Divine in His various aspects, in a rapture more and more integral, the realisation of the perfection not only in the Spirit's inner domains but in the most concrete and the most external ones.

I will not speak more of this; perhaps it is already a little too astounding. And yet . . . I tell you this, not to furnish you with new motives for doubting my reason, but because I want at least to indicate to you the nature of the goal which I am pursuing, or rather which the Divine is pursuing in me and in all of us here.

It does not mean a rejection of the world — I have already told you that — but neither is it an acceptance of the world as it is, in its imperfections and its pettiness. I shall return to it when I shall be capable of transforming what must be transformed and of manifesting there what needs to be manifested.

However, I do not speak of transforming the world in its entirety — that will be rather difficult — and we do not have this pretension. We shall simply prove that human life can be brought to perfection in all its domains and that implies a life more and more beautiful, more and more joyous and powerful, verily, a divine life on earth.

You see that it is to take a position totally opposite to that of the philosopher. For us, the truth, if it exists, has the power to transform in its substance that which offers itself to it. And from this you can see that here I have found that which I have long sought for: the possibility of working for this perfection and participating in this manifestation of the divine on the earth. For the present I am totally immersed in my inner development. My inner life is pure joy and perfect harmony. I cannot speak much about it because its beauty is inexpressible.

No! Here there is no egoism at all, dear Papa. It is not I who have chosen this

path, I am merely obeying the Divine will, as a flower opens itself to the sun. And basically, whether the way leads through thorns and brambles or over laughing prairies, it does not matter to me and I do not worry about it at all. And yet the truth implies a felicity of which man has no idea whatsoever! . . . and it is possible to manifest this **unalterable felicity** in life, even here in this world . . . to make of it the very foundation of our everyday life, the tide which carries us incessantly towards our more glorious destiny. Inexpressible felicity of the Divine love in total self-giving and perfect trust.

As you suppose, the change that has come over me is important, even radical, and becomes deeper every day. Nevertheless, I retain and will always retain my love for you — each new impression of the spirit enriches it because it widens it. I hope that you will not blame me for having spoken to you so confidently about all this without masking my thought, with a trust that will not be shaken. Was I wrong to reveal to you a portion of my soul in this manner or would it have been better to remain more philosophically reserved?

I have received a letter from Albert. I am happy to be able to return to him what he lent me just when he needs it. Herewith a cheque for him, I shall send him the duplicate by the next post. I feel very close to the heart that you have opened to me, dear Papa; I would like to expand it so that it attains the Divine, and I embrace you very, very affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Ph. B. St Hilaire

* * *

Pondicherry, January 8, 1928

My very dear Papa and Maman,

The governor of French India, Monsieur Dandelot, has been recalled to France, and leaves India by the next ship. He has always been very kind to me, and I was happy to visit him and Madame Dandelot. He is very sympathetic to our group and towards Sri Aurobindo who, I do not know if you know it, is a political refugee who has had a brush with the British government.

Monsieur Dandelot has offered to go and see Papa and to give him my news. I thought that that would make you happy and I have accepted it gratefully. Probably that will be between the 10th and the end of February. I do not know if Madame Dandelot will accompany her husband to Paris: they have a house in Nice and, on leaving the tropical climate of India, to land in Paris in the month of February will

be hard. Maybe it would be good if Papa invited the governor to lunch at the club or at home. They could chat a little. You will see. He is not averse to a good lunch!

Papa may try to find out — discreetly — if he plans to come back here or not.

In any case, I think that Papa will be happy to converse with him; he will be able to tell him that he has seen me in good health, both physical and psychological. Also, to some extent he will be able to tell him who my guru is. Monsieur Dandelot has never seen him, but he has heard enough talk about him, and not only by me. I have often lunched with them in their house, and, without going very deep into certain questions and all that concerns our discipline, we have touched upon many subjects and he knows more or less my ideas on life and its problems — as much as may possibly be said! Madame Dandelot too has been very kind to me, but I do not know if she will go to Paris.

I take this opportunity to embrace all three of you. I am expecting to receive from you soon a letter for the New Year's Day.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Pondicherry, August 5, 1928

My dearest Maman,

Just today I have received your two letters of July the 14th and as the post leaves tomorrow, I hasten to write to you. They have made me very happy; it has been long since I have received anything from you and this long silence was beginning to worry me.

Moreover I was not wrong, because it was due to all the troubles that you have gone through one after another and of which both of you have spoken to me. Papa tells me that at last they have succeeded in finding the exact cause of your problems, to diagnose your illness. This is a great achievement, it is even an enormous step towards the cure because, henceforth they can prescribe the appropriate diet and treatment without the risk of erring and causing you more harm than good, as in the past. The treatment would mainly be bed rest. Evidently it is not very pleasant, but at least, if you do not suffer any more, you can still profit from the things of life. Moreover, it does not mean, if I understand correctly, resting in bed all the time, but only for a period of time. I will not tell you to bear your illness patiently, but on the contrary, you must conquer it now that you have found out the chink in the armour. When one knows what one has, one is already half cured.

Your letters are dated 14th July and are from Paris! You must be feeling the

heat, but in the matter of heat I do not have to envy you at all: here it is six hot months followed by six even more hot months, and nearly, within two or three degrees, the same temperature at night as during the day. Nothing has the time to become cooler during the night, everything is always at the same temperature. When I am at home, I dress in the Indian style: bare upper body and some sort of fabric around the waist, it is more comfortable. The Japanese costume is much too hot for this place. Naturally outside, I dress in the European manner in order not to make a scandal, and above all because it is more convenient for walking and working.

As for work — of course, I am not speaking of yoga — I take care of the automobiles. We have five at present and, upon my word, it gives no end of trouble in a country where one can hardly find a spare part. At present I am repainting two of them in pearl gray and the third is being overhauled. It has given me a lot of work, the distributors being totally out of order. In addition, I look after the supplies from France, and, as we are 50 or 60 at present, you can easily imagine the amount of soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, writing paper, dry vegetables, etc., which we order from France, worth several thousand francs per month. I have cupboards, superbly arranged, full of stationery, toilet articles, electrical spares, etc. It is a work which you would very much like and it reminds me of your cupboards for provisions.

Everybody works at something. Some work in the gardens: fruits, vegetables, flowers. Some look after the kitchen; recently, we have set up a bakery and we make our own bread everyday with flour ground the same day because it does not keep in this climate. It is whole wheat bread, brown and absolutely delicious.

I am surprised that Monsieur Dandelot has not given you more details about us. It is true that he has never visited the Ashram; being governor, he kept a great official distance from our group which is considered to be a somewhat dangerous element, given Sri Aurobindo's political past. Moreover, it is totally untrue and all those who are of good faith recognise it because Sri Aurobindo has completely given up all political activity since seventeen years. But here it is a province or even worse, a province extremely remote from Paris where people have little to do and pass their time speaking ill of one another. That is why we do not associate with anybody, another reason for suspicion.

The new governor is much less kind and sympathetic than Monsieur Dandelot and we miss the latter, but what to do about it? Here the civil servants are rapidly transferred, always at the mercy of a political party or victims of an equally political revenge.

I do not understand what Monsieur Dandelot wanted to say about Madame Potel. He is well aware that I know her because we have all spoken about her quite often. Perhaps he wanted to say that we were less intimate than you thought because the fact is that I did not meet her very often. There is no mystery in that, the reason being that she always lived outside the Ashram because of her husband who was not much drawn to the yoga. For a while though I dined in their house every Sunday,

but later the circumstances and the work specific to each one of us did not permit it. Madame Potel was a disciple like the others but that is as far as it goes. It is now some time since she has gone back to France, her husband not being able to stand the climate any more. They are in the Antilles at present; I think that some day she will come back.

You ask me what draws me here. My god, it is certainly not Pondicherry, nor its inhabitants. If Sri Aurobindo were not here, I would not have stayed here twenty-four hours supposing that I even came here. But here, I have found the inestimable beneficial effect of the spiritual guidance which I have sought so long; I have found a master who has traversed the path on which I am walking and who has agreed to guide my steps there. It is he who is leading me towards my realisation, that which I am conscious of having come on the earth to do. It is a certitude which I cannot ask anybody to share, but it is enough for me so that it directs my life accordingly. In fact, it is he who directs my life because I have thrown myself completely at his feet. But there are things which are difficult to speak of and even more to write!

In any case, in no way does it take away from the love that I have for you. I love you very much and often think of you and I have but one wish: it is that you must not suffer because of me.

Tell Papa that I have safely received the album¹ and that I thank him very much for it. I am still waiting for a letter from him in order to reply to him. I have already had a great joy in reclassifying certain countries which I classify in a big album (latest model) in twenty-four volumes, priced at more than three thousand francs. Yes, it has brought back to me many a memory of my youth, but without melancholy.

Ah, what a pity that you cannot know me as I am and understand what I want to do! Henceforth, you will have confidence in me and in my future, and all your suffering will disappear. It is by making this prayer that I affectionately embrace all three of you.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. Tell Albert that it is unkind not to answer the many questions that I ask him. If he prefers it, I shall not ask him anything, but he should tell me.

Herewith two copies of a photograph taken on the terrace of my house.

* * *

1. For his stamp collection.

Pondicherry, December 6, 1928

My very dear Papa and Maman,

The end of the year is approaching and I wish that at the beginning of the New Year, you feel me closer to you and also that you may have news of me.

I hope that Maman has properly benefitted from the Summer and that she resumes life in Paris without much difficulty. Has she been able to follow the complete rest-cure of which she spoke to me in her last letter?

As for Albert, it is easily enough he promises to write to me, but I do not often see his handwriting. His business² must have established itself now leaving him a little more free. I have had a visit from one of his friends, the director of an Industrial Society of France and the Colonies, nothing very interesting.

We are continuing our inner work with patience and perseverance. We have had to expand, somewhat against the wishes of Sri Aurobindo who wants to arrive at a certain point of realisation before accepting new disciples so as not to dilute the effort, but there are some who beseech him with such ardour that he is almost forced to accept them.

At present we occupy some fifteen houses and people accuse us, in addition to all that we are supposed to be guilty of, such as being anarchists and Indian nationalists, of monopolising the houses and of increasing the rent.

Pondicherry is a veritable dump and periodically nauseating stuff is brought to the surface. It is above all in the political domain that it is unpalatable. It is the politics, above all that is disgusting. We keep ourselves separate from the local society, but the echoes cross over the walls all the more, so that to defend ourselves, we need to keep an eye open for whatever happens. At present we are in the period of Senate elections and the European democratic institutions have succeeded in corrupting the country. The locals are not the most brazen ones and the various candidates and elected representatives who come directly from France do all they can to trouble people's thoughts still more. In any case, I would not like to be a government official here, not even the governor! The new governor, a certain Guise, a descendant, it seems, of Balafre, is much less sympathetic than Monsieur Dandelot.

I really want to tell you more interesting things than this local gossip which certainly holds no attraction for you, but our real work, our inner work, which is truly our life, seems to be of hardly more interest to you. I have never felt in any of your letters the least desire to know more about what we want to do and what we have already done; you have not asked me any question about Sri Aurobindo. So you will pardon me for speaking of banalities.

2. Albert had placed his savings from Indochina in the production of cellulose varnish. See later the letter dated May 6, 1929.

In what concerns me physically, I am keeping very well and I do not at all feel fatigued by my uninterrupted stay in this climate. I tolerate the tropical heat better than the cold of Paris: throat infection, bronchitis, etc. At present though, the weather is ideal. From November to March, the thermometer remains between 25 and 30°C and the weather is glorious. Evidently, June, July and August are really hot but the vegetarian diet, and above all abstention from alcohol, allows one to bear it without much hardship. I think that the difficulties for the European in adapting to the colonies — I am talking of healthy countries, without malaria or yellow fever — stem from his intention of maintaining there the food habits which suit the European climate. There are people here who have come dozens of years back and who have never gone back to France: they are not doing badly at all.

I am hoping for a letter soon from one of you with details of your life at present.

For the time being, I have no plans; I have found the purpose of my life, its deeper reason, that which alone gives it a meaning.

I gather all three of you in the loving thought which I am sending you with my best wishes for the New Year and I embrace you tenderly.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Pondicherry, May 6, 1929

My dear Albert,³

I have asked you many times for information on the products that you manufacture. You have never replied to me, probably thinking that I am only pretending to show interest in you. Today I am making a last attempt.

We are now in the process of constructing buildings and we have a sufficiently extensive programme in mind. We are looking for a varnish for the doors and the windows as well as for certain interior partitions which are in teak. The wood looks nice and it would be a pity to hide it behind paint or opaque enamel as is usually done here. The best greasy varnish is not resistant enough against the continuous action of the sun, the sea air and the rain. Quite naturally I have thought of cellulose varnish (transparent). Can you tell me if your product can be used for this kind of work?

There are two modes of application for these products: with a spray gun or

3. This letter was found in Paul's dossier.

with a paint brush. I am afraid that we are obliged to use the second. Are there small portable equipments for applying the varnish with a spray gun? There are no cylinders of compressed air here!

Duco, Vit-lak, Cellimail, etc., can be applied with brush, but does that require any special care? Let me also know the rates at which you can sell us the material and the payment can be made with the order. Can you send us samples?

Eventually we would like to be able to apply this enamel, pearl gray or black, on the automobiles. In fact, all the information will be welcome.

Please tell Papa that I have not forgotten him and that I am in the course of preparing a long letter for him. Embrace Papa and Maman as I embrace you, affectionately.

Signed: Ph. B. St Hilaire

P. S. I would like to have some honest assessment of the various products which are in the market, so that we do not commit ourselves to second grade products.

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001. Our thanks for their kind permission.)

Religion in Europe

There is no word so plastic and uncertain in its meaning as the word religion. The word is European and, therefore, it is as well to know first what the Europeans mean by it. In this matter we find them, — when they can be got to think clearly on the matter at all, which is itself unusual, — divided in opinion. Sometimes they use it as equivalent to a set of beliefs, sometimes as equivalent to morality, coupled with a belief in God, sometimes as equivalent to a set of pietistic actions and emotions. Faith, works and pious observances, these are the three recognized elements of European religion.

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 491)

GLIMPSES OF PAVITRA

From the Reminiscences of Pavitra and Mrityunjoy

(Continued from the issue of May 2010)

Part 4

India: 1925

Pavitra tells of his journey to India where in Pondicherry he met Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I LEFT. I set off again. I passed through Indo-China, where my brother was a radio engineer. I stayed there a month and then I went south and landed in Ceylon. I arrive in Ceylon, with all India before me — on the doorstep of India.

“Where will I go? Pondicherry is nearest. I will go to Pondicherry. But I don’t know what kind of reception I will receive there. I don’t even know whether they will receive me at all — I have had no reply to my letters. I am going to Pondicherry because it is the nearest place. Afterwards? Well, we’ll see. I could perhaps go to Adyar, which isn’t far away . . . Perhaps! I will see.” The inner attitude remained the same: to see whether a door would open.

I waited a couple of weeks in Ceylon because the Indian train services were disrupted by floods (you see, that still happens) — the tracks were damaged. For three weeks, I waited in Colombo. Then I arrived in Pondicherry one morning by train. I booked into the Hotel d’Europe and then went straight to the Ashram. At that time Sri Aurobindo was staying in the room where Anilbaran is now — you know it. So I asked whether I could see Sri Aurobindo. In those days Sri Aurobindo was still seeing people, still meeting his disciples. He agreed to see me. I explained my position to him, what I was looking for, why I had left Europe, why I had come to India and what I hoped to find here. The first day, it was I who spoke. He told me to come back the following day.

In the evening I met the Mother. Of Mother, I remember . . . I especially remember her eyes, her eyes of light. I repeated my story to her, perhaps rather briefly. She said a few words, and then I went back to my hotel. I remember going for a walk on the sea-front and someone saying, “Look, there are some *swadeshis*” — that meant people dressed in white who were members of the Ashram. There weren’t many. How many? About twelve or fifteen.

The next morning I returned and met Sri Aurobindo. And it was he who spoke.

Of course I had explained to him my desire for liberation; I had told him that that was what I was seeking — not so much the liberation from rebirth as the liberation . . . the liberation from myself, from the ego, from ignorance and sin, from falsehood, from everything that makes up the ordinary human life. *Moksha*, liberation, that was my ideal. I didn't think of it in some other place, some heaven. I didn't particularly want to avoid suffering. But it was the burden of ignorance, of falsehood, of ugliness, all that. And even more than avoiding anything, I was seeking something positive. I was seeking for light rather than to avoid suffering; neither the end of suffering nor the end of falsehood, but Light, Knowledge, Truth.

So he told me that several people in India were able to give me what I was seeking, but that they were not easy to meet, especially for a European. And then he went on to say that he himself considered that what I was seeking — this union with God, the realisation of Brahman — came first, as a first step, a necessary stage, but that it was not the whole thing, that there was a second step: the descent of the Divine Power into the human consciousness to transform it; and that was what he, Sri Aurobindo, was trying to do. And he told me, "Well, if you would like to try, you may stay here." I fell at his feet; he blessed me, and it was done. A whole page of my life was finished: the search, the search for the source of light, the search for the one who would lead me to the truth, was over. Something new had begun: the realisation, the practice. I had found Sri Aurobindo, I had found my guru.

That is how I came here.

As I told you, I was accepted. There was no Ashram then. There were a few houses that belonged to Sri Aurobindo, and Mother was mainly looking after him — looking after the disciples a little, but each one was more or less left to himself. The Ashram took birth a year later in 1926. So I had the immense privilege of seeing Sri Aurobindo every day, of listening to him, hearing him reply every day to the questions we asked him.

Finally I had reached the place I was supposed to reach.

*

Pavitra's autobiographical talk ends with his arrival in the Ashram and acceptance by Sri Aurobindo. But Mrityunjoy's account continues with a description of Pavitra's first years in the Ashram.

Pavitra came to Pondicherry in the middle of December 1925. He concealed from his friends in Japan his real intention in coming and told them simply that he was visiting India. This he did to avoid discouraging discussions.

Pavitra set off from Japan and halted on the way in Indo-China, then the biggest French colony in the Far East. His younger brother Albert Saint-Hilaire, a radio engineer, was in service there under the French Government. Albert insisted that

Pavitra spend at least a month with him, and would have liked him to remain longer, for he was not yet married and was all alone.

From Saigon Pavitra went to Colombo by steamship. There he had to wait for three weeks, as the passage to India was suspended; the railway tracks in South India had been washed away due to heavy rains. When the train service was restored, he left Colombo for Dhanushkoti, the southern tip of Indian soil, by ferry steamer. The sea was terribly rough, and Pavitra had his worst experience at sea, on this the last sea-voyage in his life. The small steamer was tossed like a cork on the waves and the passengers were thrown around in their cabins the whole time. It was a last attempt by Nature, perhaps, to resist Pavitra's spiritual quest! But he was indomitable by nature. Once over, the sea-trip was a story of the past, a thing of no importance!

Pavitra reached Pondicherry by train, arriving on December 17. He had already written two letters from Japan to Sri Aurobindo, but he didn't get any reply. Still, he was never one to be discouraged by outer appearances; so he came, put up in the Hotel d'Europe, and immediately set out for the Ashram. At that time the Ashram had not yet started in an official way. Sri Aurobindo was living in the upstairs front room of Library House. He was informed that Pavitra was there, and he granted him an interview. On this first day, Pavitra was the speaker and Sri Aurobindo the listener. He narrated to Sri Aurobindo his life's yearning and the reason for his visit, why he had left Europe and come to India: he wanted liberation from ego, from ignorance and falsehood; he wanted to realise God. Sri Aurobindo listened to him patiently and told him to come back the next day.

That afternoon, the Mother met him. This was quite a departure from the rule in those days, because she was not meeting people then, especially visitors. She mainly remained inside and looked after Sri Aurobindo; it was he who was out and seeing people. Now it is not difficult for us to understand the mystery behind the Mother's seeing Pavitra then; but at that time it was an exception. Pavitra told the Mother in brief what he had said to Sri Aurobindo about the purpose of his visit. The Mother spoke to him very gently and affectionately. Her eyes, Pavitra said, were wonderful, glittering all the time, and he got something tangible from her. He felt clearly that his decision was taken and went back to the hotel inwardly convinced that his place was here and nowhere else.

Until then he had not been sure that he would remain in Pondicherry and join the Ashram. In Colombo he had considered going either to Adyar in Madras (to the Theosophical Society) or to Benares to become a sadhu — he had even bought a book for learning Hindi; the book was in his almirah for a long time.

The next morning Pavitra went again to see Sri Aurobindo. This time Sri Aurobindo spoke. He said that there were some traditional yogis in India who could help Pavitra to gain what he wanted, but they would be hard to find and difficult to approach, especially for a European. The liberation (*mukti*) that Pavitra wanted, said Sri Aurobindo, is a necessary first step for his Yoga. But there is a second step,

and that is the descent of the Divine Power, for the transformation of one's nature. Finally Sri Aurobindo told him, "So I place this ideal before you. If you choose it, remain here among us." These words of Sri Aurobindo were not simply words, said Pavitra. The day before, by the Mother's touch, he had been inwardly convinced that his life would find its fulfilment here. Now outwardly he realised that Sri Aurobindo had accepted him. He was certain that at last he had found what he had long been searching for: his guru was here before him. He bowed down at Sri Aurobindo's feet, and Sri Aurobindo blessed him.

From that day on, for one full year, Pavitra had the privilege of going to Sri Aurobindo every day, talking to him and listening to his answers. Naturally he kept a record of his talks with Sri Aurobindo; selections from it have been published in the *Bulletin*. Those who were with Sri Aurobindo in those days, such as Barindra and Kshitish, have said that from the time Philippe came (for in the beginning he was called by his French name) the talks took a more scientific turn.

(Concluded)

PAVITRA AND MRITYUNJOY
(Compiled from their writings)

(Reprinted with some changes from the
October and November 1988 issues of *Mother India*.)

Religion In India

Religion in India is a still more plastic term and may mean anything from the heights of Yoga to strangling your fellow man and relieving him of the worldly goods he may happen to be carrying with him. It would therefore take too long to enumerate everything that can be included in Indian religion. Briefly, however, it is dharma or living religiously, the whole life being governed by religion. But again what is living religiously? It means, in ordinary practice, living according to authority. The authority generally accepted is the Shastra; but when one studies the Shastra and Indian life side by side, one finds that the two have very little to do with each other; the Indian governs his life not by the Shastra but by custom and the opinion of the nearest Brahmin.

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 492)

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

[Beginning with this issue we will be serialising Pavitra's notation of his conversations with Sri Aurobindo.]

Friday, 18 December 1925

YOUR return to France just now would be a defeat. You would drift away from the state of consciousness you have glimpsed. It could even be worse. Perhaps after a few years you would recover, but in any case you would be missing an opportunity and failing to do what you have to do.

You bring to your search a sincerity of heart and a mental capacity for learning (by reserving judgment). But your mental activity is a hindrance; you have to quiet your mind.

A new consciousness is seeking expression in you. In India there are people, Yogis, who can help you in this and give you a new birth. There will be difficulties in finding them, because you do not speak their language and they are often hard to approach. Still, this is one of the solutions before you.

This spiritual consciousness will give you Mukti. Personally, my Yoga would be completed if my goal were liberation. Mukti is only the first part. The second is to bring down the Light into all the instruments, to make them perfect and to become an embodiment of Truth. The universal Truth and Power will act through you as an instrument. Some persons are more or less unconscious instruments of the Shakti, but it is a question of being perfectly conscious.

This perfection of the human being is difficult, very, very difficult, and it is the work of a lifetime. One may fail and make a mess of one's life. It is so hard, in fact, that I do not advise anyone to take this path. However, there is a powerful aspiration in you and something that is trying to come down. So I place this ideal before you. If you choose it, remain here with us and see what I can give you and what you can take from me before going further.

* * *

Sunday, 20 December 1925

There is a region in us which is above space and time, immobile, immutable at first; it does not participate in the waves of emotions and thoughts. The first aim is to centre one's consciousness in this region and keep it there; this is Mukti. In us, beyond our personality, the Purusha is revealed, with several attributes which are successively unveiled.

First he appears as the witness of actions and sensations, untouched, unmoved.

Then he manifests as the giver of sanctions: he consents or refuses his consent to a movement of Prakriti — desire or thought or even action. When such an order is given — for instance, the refusal to participate in a certain emotion — then even though the past is still strong, the being turns away from that emotion.

Then the Purusha is the Knower and in him is the knowledge. This knowledge has several forms: the lowest is intuition, then comes unitive knowledge. In any case, the senses are no longer the avenues of knowledge; it comes directly.

Finally, the Purusha reveals himself as the Ishwara, the Lord. Governing and acting through his instruments, he at last takes his kingdom in his hands.

This is established in two stages.

At first the contact is mental — the zone of the spiritual mind.¹ A person recognises his mind, his emotions and his body as not himself. He finds that he exists above them — above the spatial and temporal form. He has peace and certitude.

To achieve this, the first thing, especially for you, is to stop the thoughts at will. One must first separate oneself from the mind *mentally*, for one is not yet able to do it otherwise; one must observe it and study it. When this is done, it becomes easy to stop the thoughts. This is the first lesson of Yoga. Thus, while talking with you at this moment, I have no thoughts. I see what is around me, but without thinking (unless I wish to think and call the thought). When I began Yoga I went to see Lele² and asked him to help me. He told me to sit beside him and practise this mental separation. At the end of three days, I succeeded and slew the thoughts.

There are other means of achieving this, such as sitting down and opening oneself to the influx from above, so that this process may be accomplished from above without personal effort. To you I would recommend the first method. Until one has this first realisation, everything is mental; intuition is only fragmentary, uncertain and intermittent. One has to go beyond. Gradually a strong aspiration brings about the inrush (sometimes abruptly) of something new into the consciousness. Sometimes it is peace, solid as a rock. Sometimes light, almost physical, which illumines everything, inner and outer. Sometimes guidance. In any case, ineffable peace is followed by knowledge. And all this comes down from above — not, as with the Tantrics, starting from the lowest chakra, but on the contrary from above.

So for you, the first goal is to separate yourself from your mind and recognise it as being outside you. Take the attitude of the witness. Let thoughts come, but don't let yourself be carried away by them. Practise during meditation. Then you have to infuse into daily life what you first established in meditation.

* * *

1. Buddhi? — Pavitra's note.

2. Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, a Maharashtrian Yogi under whose guidance Sri Aurobindo achieved complete silence of mind.

Tuesday, 22 December 1925

It seems to me that there are two levels in the mind: the first attends to images and forms, the second to words and ideas. Beyond them is the principle of comprehension (Buddhi). I can easily dissociate myself from the lower mind. When I recall to memory an idea or phrase I have just expressed, I can also remain detached. But when I reason, for example, I am one with my mind; more precisely, Buddhi is joined to Manas.

That is true, but there is still a third thing — it is the mind in itself, different from the forms and ideas it produces. It is a principle, calm and transparent, which pervades the whole universe. Most people, and you too, identify themselves with the mind and its activities; they confuse the mind with its activities. You must be able to separate yourself from Prakriti and know yourself as the Purusha.

The method I was taught was to kill the thoughts when they appeared before me, simply by looking at them steadily.

You say that you fall asleep because in fact the only form of silence the ordinary man knows, in regard to the mind, is sleep. But it has to be overcome; it is a known obstacle that all have to overcome. Reject sleep as you reject other difficulties of the lower nature. You have the strength to do it, being the Purusha.

Then one of the following two things will happen: either you will remain fully conscious but with the mind empty, or you will have this consciousness but not in the waking state; in other words, you will be in Samadhi.

So this work is the first step for you.

* * *

Friday, 25 December 1925

By remaining attentive and facing my thoughts, I found that they disappeared as soon as I looked steadily at them. The means of killing them, then, is to watch attentively and, when one becomes conscious of a thought, to thus destroy it. This succeeds quite well in the region of words, but less well in the region of images. I am able to remain in this state, conscious only of my attention, but the mind is not dead — I feel it behind the door. At certain moments I feel that I am soon going to lose consciousness.

Good, but you are still conscious of your effort to kill the thoughts. This is natural, but in time this too will disappear.

As for loss of consciousness, don't be afraid. It could be that besides the

alternative presented last time, you may fall into a state of unconsciousness that you keep no memory of. You must try to avoid that and attain either the waking state without mind or Samadhi.

Is reading harmful? I don't really need it and mental work is sometimes tedious.

You shouldn't make any mental rules. Do according to your inner needs. Reading is not harmful in itself.

* * *

Wednesday, 30 December 1925

I succeed for a few minutes in keeping myself attentive, empty of thought, but then the sensations return with new strength. I am not able to turn away from a noise once my attention has been caught, because I have no object of concentration.

The first step is not to withdraw from all thought and sensation, but to consider them as outside oneself. There are two regions in the mind, one active, the other calm and attentive, not carried away by the movements of Nature. It is this distinction you must make. You want to go too quickly, by suppressing even the thought, "I am not that." At the moment this thought is your instrument.

Remain the spectator of your thoughts and sensations, recognising that they are outside you and do not affect you. Then the higher consciousness, the Purusha consciousness, will descend and take possession of your mind.

But never struggle, because in the mind what you violently reject comes back with greater force. To struggle is to enter into all sorts of difficulties.

(To be continued)

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

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

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

(Continued from the issue of May 2010)

At dawn on 10 May 1940, the Germans began an invasion of Belgium and the Netherlands. Sri Aurobindo told Nirod-da:

Hitler has invaded Holland. Well, we shall see. (Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*,¹ p. 125)

On this day Chamberlain formally resigned and Churchill became Prime Minister.

The same day Sri Aurobindo was asked if this attack could be the reason for British withdrawal from Norway; he replied:

In that case they will have to withdraw from everywhere because everywhere there will be impending blows. If they had attacked Trondheim I am sure they would have been successful. The Germans would have been bogged down there. (Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*,² pp. 628-29)

On 13 May 1940, Churchill responded with his first of many fiery speeches as Prime Minister:

I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many long months of toil and struggle. You ask what is our policy. I will say, it is to wage war with all our might, with all the strength that God can give us, to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. You ask what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory. Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of all terror. Victory however long and hard the road may be. For without victory there is no survival.

This speech evokes an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo, epitomises Churchill perfectly:

So long as a cause has on its side one soul who is intangible in faith, it cannot perish. (CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 458)

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.

Churchill was an exceptional war leader with an indomitable spirit. Despite working under grave adversity he had the ability to inspire and infuse courage in his countrymen. The Mother had said:

Whoever has courage can give courage to others, just as the flame of one candle can light up another. (*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 170)

His speech reverberates with heroism. The Mother had said:

Heroism is to be able to stand for the Truth in all circumstances, to declare it amidst opposition and to fight for it whenever necessary. (*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 179)

and

. . . only he is never vanquished who refuses to be vanquished. (*Ibid.*)

The speed of the German advance — referred to as Blitzkrieg (lightning war) — and the brutality of the air raids gave them a huge psychological advantage. On 14 May 1940 the Dutch surrendered. When someone remarked that there was no fight in Holland, Sri Aurobindo said:

There was a fight there but they allowed themselves to be killed more than kill. Perhaps Gandhi's non-violence? They did not go the whole hog in the Gandhi way. (6 June 1940, *TW*, p. 693)

On an earlier instance he said:

The Dutch seem to be good fighters but they don't seem to have brains. They have lost about a quarter of their army without holding any position.
(16 May 1940, *TW*, p. 638)

The British and the French planned to fight an updated version of what happened in 1914-18 during World War I, but with some essential differences. The French had suffered massive casualties in frontal attacks in 1914. This time they were going to remain on the defensive in Western Europe, while mobilising their military forces and industrial base to fight a total war. They planned to take the offensive some two to three years after the start of hostilities.

Convinced that they were facing a repeat of the German strategy of World War I (when the armies of the two Allies had dug in trenches for what became a long drawn out conflict), Allied commanders moved the bulk of their forces from the Franco-Belgian border into defensive positions within Belgium to await the continua-

tion of the German attack. In doing so, they fell right into Hitler's trap. They were still expecting to fight a war in which the defensive would dominate. With this approach in mind, the French army was sent to man France's heavily fortified border with Germany, the Maginot Line, and to await a German attack. Almost 2 million French soldiers were manning the defensive Maginot Line stretching from Belgium in the north-east to Switzerland on the south-east. The British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) was sent to join the line of French troops defending the border with Belgium.

Sri Aurobindo revealed the Mother's comment on the Maginot Line and the importance of not concentrating the majority of troops on the Line:

The Mother says that the Maginot Line is a farce because from the point where the Rhine divides France and Germany, there is no proper Maginot, only scattered fortifications. Only in the north from Montmedy the Maginot proper begins. I don't know why they have done that. Have they thought that the Rhine will be a natural barrier? It is absurd. If such is the case they ought to remove their troops from there in time. (16 June 1940, *TW*, p. 719)

Earlier Sri Aurobindo had mentioned that German Generals were against breaking through the Maginot Line. (19 March 1940, *TW*, p. 566)

France was under grave threat and they were depending upon the Maginot Line to neutralise the German attack. The Maginot Line replaced the crude trenches in which so much of the 1914-18 War was fought. It consisted of a series of fortifications, which were expected to protect France's frontier with Germany, although crucially the Line did not cover the Franco-Belgian frontier. It was not a continuous line of forts as some believe. In parts the River Rhine provided its own defence between France and Germany. However, the Maginot Line had two major failings — it was obviously not mobile and secondly it assumed that the Ardennes Forest was impenetrable. Any attack that could get around the Maginot Line would leave it floundering. Blitzkrieg was the means by which Germany simply went around the whole Line. The Nazi plan to invade France involved three armies, one facing Belgium, one facing the Maginot Line, and another part-way between the two, opposite the Ardennes. Army Group C appeared to have the unenviable task of advancing through the Maginot Line, but they were simply a diversion, whose mere presence would tie down French troops and prevent their use as reinforcements. German Army Group B attacked through the Ardennes on the German-Belgian-French border — such an attack was believed to be impossible by the French. One million men and 1,500 tanks crossed the seemingly impenetrable forests in the Ardennes. The Germans advanced with their main thrust through the Ardennes Forest, in order to smash the vulnerable flank of the Allies. Hitler had completely out-thought the Allied commanders as his attack on Belgium, where the best British and French troops

were sent, was a subsidiary attack whilst the main drive was through the Ardennes. Thus he isolated the Allied forces in Belgium. Blitzkrieg stressed speed of manoeuvre and attacking the enemy where he was weakest, and usually this meant attacking the flanks. The Germans wanted to drive the Allies to the sea. By doing this, the Maginot Line was isolated and the soldiers in the Line were separated from mobilised French troops. Unlike the Allies, the Germans intended to fight the war offensively, and to win quickly.

On 28 May Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . This extension of the Maginot Line seems to be a myth. There are no fortifications anywhere. (*TW*, p. 671)

He continued:

But where are the fortifications? They do not exist. That is why the Germans have walked over easily to Amiens and other places. (*Ibid.*)

On 9 June Sri Aurobindo mentioned that France had built only scattered fortifications at the Maginot Line on the Belgian frontier. He went on to say:

That is not enough. France counted on the Belgian fortifications which were supposed to be very strong. Liège held up the enemy for a long time. They also thought that the forest of Ardennes would form a natural barrier and the Germans would find it difficult to cross it. Of course, it is all Daladier's work — the most indefensible War Minister. He seems to have done nothing. It is like the story of the general of Napoleon III. When Napoleon asked him, "Is everything prepared?" he replied, "Yes, up to the last button", and when the attack began everything broke down at once! As for Gamelin [Commander-in-Chief of the French Military], he seems to know only the names of officers and nothing more and is quite helpless when in difficulty. That shows that it is easy to build up a reputation during peace. (*TW*, pp. 700-01)

When it was mentioned that Gamelin recoils at the horror of the sacrifice of lives that will be lost in an attack on the Siegfried Line, Sri Aurobindo commented:

Yes, he does not want to sacrifice life as was done in the last War. No such repetition this time, he says. It will be a defensive war with as little loss as possible. . . . (21 May 1940, *TW*, p. 653)

Referring to the French defensive frame of mind Sri Aurobindo said:

Defensive warfare is all right if there are strong fortifications like the Maginot Line or like Namur and Liège. Otherwise, in an extensive front it is very difficult to be always on the defensive. By standing around and waiting all the time, one is likely to lose and gets all the beating without being able to give anything in return. . . . (21 May 1940, *TW*, p. 651)

Sri Aurobindo later said:

. . . From Gamelin's photo which I saw the other day it seems to me he has no brains. He has been under the notion that defence is stronger than attack and he prepared everything only according to that principle. Being fortress-minded himself, he made the soldiers also fortress-minded. It is said that when he met the German mechanised troops he didn't know what to do; he was so unprepared for such things as open attacks. And the wonderful Maginot Line is not a complete line. Some areas have only scattered fortifications. . . .

(22 June 1940, *TW*, p. 740)

Rather than repeat the World War I Schlieffen Plan, the Germans in 1940 advanced with their main thrust through the Ardennes Forest, in order to smash the vulnerable flank of the Allies. As 29 German divisions advanced through the Netherlands and Belgium in the north, 45 further divisions, including about 2,400 tanks in 7 divisions, burst through the Allied right flank and drove towards the English Channel.

German Panzer Tanks broke through the French borders and raced towards the English Channel coast, aided by the German aircraft that ruled the skies. With the bulk of the Allied forces fighting in Belgium, there was little to stop the German forces as they sliced across the Allied supply-lines. The Germans reached the English Channel on 20 May 1940. With other German forces pushing through Belgium and the Panzers looping up from the south and west, the Allies were encircled. The Belgian army surrendered on 28 May 1940, leaving a gaping hole on the British flank of the Allied forces.

When a disciple said that the Belgian surrender would make the position of the B.E.F. extremely grave, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes. There is no way out for them unless Dunkirk can hold on or they can rush through the gap from the French line. (29 May 1940, *TW*, p. 674)

By 21 May, this thrust had reached the Channel and encircled 35 Allied divisions, including the B.E.F. Although the French army put up token resistance for several more weeks, their spirit was broken and the German advance south from Belgium was swift and decisive.

Despite desperate attempts by Winston Churchill to bolster French resolve, the

defeat of the British and French armies in May effectively spelled the end of French resistance. The Allied armies, completely unprepared for the rapid, mobile operations of the Germans, had simply been out-fought at every turn.

Shocked by their experience, the Allied military observers attributed their defeat to the completely new form of warfare pioneered by the Wehrmacht (German Army) — the Blitzkrieg. Blitzkrieg seemed to be based on the pervasive use of new technology. After all, during the disastrous campaign in Belgium and France, it had seemed as if German tanks and aircraft were everywhere.

This view that the Germans used technology, namely the tank and the dive-bomber, to create a new and unique form of warfare has often dominated understanding of how the Germans fought in World War II. In reality, the way in which the Wehrmacht fought was based also upon other ideas than only technology. And the ideas that shaped how Hitler's army fought were influenced by the fighting methods German soldiers had used since the 1870s.

The speed, flexibility and initiative of the German army took the Allies completely by surprise during the Blitzkrieg.

The Allied high command seemed paralysed. On 20 May 1940 General Weygand replaced General Gamelin as French Commander-in-Chief, but it made no difference.

On 22 May Sri Aurobindo said:

They [the Germans] are driving towards the sea. After capturing the ports they will begin to attack England and continue their thrust to Paris from St. Quentin or other places. (*TW*, p. 654)

Sri Aurobindo also agreed when a disciple said that the German drive seemed to encircle the Allies after they had reached the sea and then to attack the Maginot Line from the rear. (22 May 1940, *TW*, p. 653)

Then on 24 May General Lord Gort, the commander of the B.E.F., took the morally courageous decision to abandon his role in a projected Anglo-French counter-attack, and retreated to the English Channel ports. The French regarded General Gort's decision to withdraw the B.E.F. as a betrayal.

When Sri Aurobindo was told that the B.E.F. would perhaps escape through the ports he said:

Which ports? . . . By their surrender Dunkirk will be vulnerable unless they have sufficient troops there to defend it. Now escape also is difficult . . . Where is the main body of the French Army they speak of? Why don't they employ it now to disengage the trapped soldiers? I don't understand this warfare.

(29 May 1940, *TW*, p. 678)

He continues:

. . . this will be a tremendous loss — 300,000 people! . . . Why did England send this Expeditionary Force against an army highly mechanised? Perhaps we shouldn't criticise them. . . . (*Ibid.*)

When the question of the possibility of the British and Allied Forces escaping from Dunkirk arose, Sri Aurobindo said:

They seem to be very clever at retreat — the French are not.
(30 May 1940, *TW*, p. 680)

When a disciple remarked that it would be a great feat if they escaped, he said:

Yes, it can be called a great military feat. (*Ibid.*)

On 24 May, just as the Germans were expecting to drive into Dunkirk, Hitler gave the surprising order to withdraw, to fall back to the canal line. Why this order was given is a mystery and has never been explained fully. However, John Toland, in his biography of Adolf Hitler, speaks of a fog that descended over the region. Not only was Dunkirk itself enshrouded but all the Luftwaffe airfields were blanketed by low clouds which grounded their three thousand bombers. (Georges Van Vrekhem, *The Mother*, p. 296)

On 27th May Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, the German Commander-in-Chief, persuaded Hitler to rescind his order and German tanks again advanced on Dunkirk.

Nirod-da relates about this mysterious fog:

. . . Then the famous Battle of Dunkirk and the perilous retreat, the whole Allied army exposed to enemy attack from land and air and the bright summer sun shining above. All of a sudden a fog gathered from nowhere and gave unexpected protection to the retreating army. We said, "It seems the fog helped the evacuation." To which Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Yes the fog is rather unusual at this time." We, of course, understood what he meant. It was after the fall of Dunkirk and the capitulation of France that Sri Aurobindo began to apply his Force more vigorously in favour of the Allies, and he had "the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction". (*TY*, pp. 125-26)

Sri Aurobindo observed:

The French are not clever at retreat. The Germans seem to have separated the French army from the B.E.F., the main part of which is now evacuating. The

French were covering the B.E.F. By this separation two divisions seem to have been lost. . . . I was wondering why the Allies were not erecting something like trenches around Dunkirk to defend it more effectively against mechanised tanks, and I now find that they have done exactly that.

(1 June 1940, *TW*, p. 684)

Britain teetered on the edge of a military disaster. The German army had advanced across Europe and penned the British forces into a tiny area around the French port of Dunkirk. As troops trickled into Dunkirk, they found themselves stranded without shelter or supplies. They were also under constant attack from the air. On 26 May, the British Admiralty responded by launching Operation Dynamo — the evacuation of the B.E.F. by sea. This enormous rescue mission rounded up a huge fleet of vessels — from tiny tugs and barges, to lifeboats and navy destroyers. As the Allied rescue ships approached Dunkirk they were easy targets for the German Stuka bombers. The narrow sea approach with its deadly minefields left little room for evasive action and the harbour was under constant bombardment. It was left to the smallest ships to pick up soldiers from the shallow beaches and transport them to the destroyers and transport ships waiting farther off. Of the 850 vessels which took part in Operation Dynamo, 235 were sunk. The RAF however was successful in keeping the majority of German bombers and fighters away, shooting down 150 aircraft. Still, they lost 100 precious fighters and 80 irreplaceable pilots. The soldiers were packed like sardines onto the ships for the hazardous journey back to Britain. When they arrived, exhausted, they were greeted as heroes. Hitler's tanks were just 10 miles away and the capture or death of the 400,000 troops seemed imminent. Yet by 4 June, over 338,000 men had been evacuated to England in one of the greatest rescue operations of all time. Churchill had only expected 20,000 or 30,000 to be saved. Nonetheless the B.E.F. lost more than 68,000 men at Dunkirk and a substantial amount of military equipment.

After the evacuation when someone mentioned that the retreat saved the English army, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes, that was the only course open. The French also should have withdrawn.
(7 July 1940, *TW*, p. 787)

He further added:

. . . If the British Expeditionary Force had not retreated, all would have been encircled and escape would have been impossible. (*Ibid.*, p. 789)

Sri Aurobindo felt that the French troops should have retreated like the British had at Dunkirk:

The question is one of military strategy and the only strategy was to withdraw as quickly as possible. If the French had done that, they could have come back to France again and fought. And it was not only the British who escaped. They rescued more than a lakh of the French people too. The fact is that after the breakdown at Sedan and the Meuse, the French, British and Belgian forces were encircled, and then no other course was left but to withdraw. . . .

(Ibid., p. 787)

The Dunkirk evacuation was a great relief and morale booster to Churchill. His doggedness in adversity was remarkable. His response to the British people at the House of Commons on 4 June 1940 was:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!

This speech not only invigorated a doubting House of Commons, but convinced the neutral USA to give aid to a beleaguered nation.

This speech has a striking resemblance (even though it is so different) with an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo:

Fight, while thy hands are free, with thy hands and thy voice and thy brain and all manner of weapons. Art thou chained in the enemy's dungeons and have his gags silenced thee? Fight with thy silent all-besieging soul and thy wide-ranging will-power and when thou art dead, fight still with the world-encompassing force that went out from God within thee.

(‘Thoughts and Aphorisms’, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 460)

Sri Aurobindo writes in ‘The Real Difficulty’:

. . . Will is also omnipresent. It can throw itself into all with whom it comes into contact and give them temporarily or permanently a portion of its power, its thought, its enthusiasms. The thought of a solitary man can become, by exercise of selfless and undoubting Will, the thought of a nation . . .

(CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 536-37)

The question of Allied troops and armament had first arisen in early May when a disciple mentioned how the English thought of fighting the German army with such

insufficient troops. Sri Aurobindo had said:

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

Later, when some people blamed the British for providing insufficient help to the French, Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . As for the inadequate help of the British, you can blame Chamberlain for their late conscription. But instead of trained soldiers whom they could have sent if they had started conscription earlier, they sent whatever army they had and could muster. And if they had adopted conscription earlier, the Labour Party would have made a row. It is no use blaming the British people for that. (10 July 1940, *TW*, p. 799)

Earlier, when he was asked why the British were not sending their army for they had a big force, Sri Aurobindo replied:

Their army is still in training. They have adopted conscription too late. . . . (9 June 1940, *TW*, p. 700)

On another instance a disciple pointed out that at this late hour England was calling up the 29-year-old age-group whom they should have called up long ago. Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Quite so. I suppose they wanted to keep men for commerce, agriculture, industry, etc., so that export would go on leisurely as in 1914. (17 June 1940, *TW*, p. 720)

There was further debate on whether England had helped France sufficiently. Sri Aurobindo clarified the position in the following conversation:

N: In some papers there was a complaint against inadequate supplies to France.

P: That can't be true after Churchill's speech.

Sri Aurobindo: No. They sent three and a half lakhs to Flanders and their best troops. After the Battle of Flanders [in Belgium], they sent only three divisions and Churchill has already said that it would take a long time to recover from the Flanders disaster. He asked that they should be properly equipped. Without the proper equipment it is sheer foolishness to send troops to fight against Germany. He promised Reynaud that he would send fifty thousand men and all available help.

P: Besides, the British have to keep a sufficient number to protect their own land.

Sri Aurobindo: Of course. Otherwise there would be a great danger. No, no, it is all French over-sensitiveness and suspiciousness. This is exactly what happened during the reign of Napoleon III — different political parties playing at governing the country and that is how he was defeated.

...

S: But England sent her best troops and equipment to Flanders.

Sri Aurobindo: Quite so; besides, if France falls, England knows that it will be difficult for her to survive. (19 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 727-28)

Early in June, Sri Aurobindo had already spoken about the dangerous position that England was in:

... France has had such dangers before, as Reynaud says. She has been invaded a hundred times. But England is in a dangerous position only now. Even during Napoleon's time she had her allies in Europe. Now she has only France to rely upon. (3 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 687-88)

When someone commented that Churchill's speech had come as a revelation to Italy, Sri Aurobindo commented:

Yes, Italy thought the Allied Army had been annihilated.

(7 June 1940, *TW*, p. 693)

Earlier, on 3 June 1940, Sri Aurobindo had said:

... just after this great struggle in Flanders the Allies have become weak. If at this moment Italy gives a blow, it may be serious. (*TW*, p. 689)

The only silver lining of the Dunkirk evacuation was put lucidly by Sri Aurobindo:

... But England has learnt one lesson from the fight. She could have gone on evading Hitler and then been put to some difficulty later, but now she knows all his tactics. (9 July 1940, *TW*, p. 795)

There were several reasons for the debacle of the French forces. Sri Aurobindo had already spoken of the error of placing almost the entire Allied army at the Maginot Line but he also mentioned other follies. For instance, he spoke about the amateurishness and unpreparedness of the French Infantry and also of its being ill-equipped:

The French anti-tank guns were not effective. So now they have brought up heavy 75 mm guns. It is because of these tanks that the French were thrown off balance. Naturally, if thousands of tanks push forward, the infantry can't do anything unless they are supported by strong mechanical weapons. . . .

(20 May 1940, *TW*, p. 650)

Sri Aurobindo also felt that the French Army was severely disorganised especially concerning ammunition. He commented:

. . . They say that because their ammunition was exhausted they couldn't use the 75 mm gun. On the first day they were able to destroy 400 tanks. Afterwards we didn't hear any more about this. This was due to lack of ammunition.

(17 June 1940, *TW*, p. 720)

He said further:

. . . England has not shown any military genius but she has shown power of organisation while France has shown neither military nor organisational power. Gamelin is a fraud and Weygand and Pétain too old. Weygand has done nothing remarkable. Neither has any other military genius shown himself.

(19 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 728-29)

The Allied Commanders had expected that battles would develop slowly and be largely dominated by 'traditional' arms — those of the infantry and the artillery. Although the two armies had more than 3,500 tanks between them, these were largely cast in a supporting role.

The events in May and June 1940 proved that this outdated vision of war could not have been further from reality. This time, unlike the Allies, the Germans intended to fight the war offensively, and win quickly. The protection given by tanks increased the ability of the German army to manoeuvre in the face of enemy artillery, and this enhanced speed and mobility. They used their mechanisation and manoeuvres more effectively, and benefitted from domination in the air. The effectiveness was due to German tanks being concentrated into panzer (armoured) formations. The French had some equivalent formations that were of good quality, but they were dispersed rather than concentrated in the German fashion.

In reference to Germany's military strength, its tremendous number of tanks and mechanised units etc., Sri Aurobindo remarked:

The French had some idea but not much. The fact is that they didn't expect such an overwhelming onrush. As I said, they have been made fortress-minded, not prepared for an open attack on such a huge scale. . . .

(22 June 1940, *TW*, p. 741)

On the German military strategy Sri Aurobindo said:

The German technique is to accumulate all their strength at one point and then make a drive. The French don't seem to be able to prevent the thrust.

(6 June 1940, *TW*, p. 692)

When it was suggested that the French could also gather their mass against the Germans, Sri Aurobindo replied:

That is what they should do. I don't know why they don't. I suspect they have dispersed their forces too much. In the east, of course, if Italy comes into the war, it would be helpful. In the last War they had found some counter-measures against German attacks. This time they don't seem to have found anything yet.

(*Ibid.*)

Again on 16 June 1940 Sri Aurobindo said:

The French made the mistake of not concentrating all their troops against Hitler.

(16 June 1940, *TW*, p. 717)

Sri Aurobindo had mentioned earlier:

. . . The Germans act by sheer mass drive and daring. But individually the soldiers were better in the Kaiser's time [WWI]. They had more initiative.

(1 June 1940, *TW*, p. 685)

Immediately after the Dunkirk evacuation the second phase of the Battle of France began on 5 June 1940, with the Germans striking southwards from the River Somme. When asked if Weygand (Commander-in-Chief of the French Armed Forces) could drive back the Germans, Sri Aurobindo replied:

Then he will go down in history as the greatest military leader. If only he can resist them for some months till the French are ready for an offensive, that would be something. (5 June 1940, *TW*, p. 691)

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of May 2010)

5. What is Maya?

TRYING to study *The Life Divine* can be a tantalising experience in many ways. Familiar terms which we have always used in our daily language now come set in the dazzling English of Sri Aurobindo. For the moment, we get the feeling of having understood the argument which is centred on the concept of Maya. But suddenly we find ourselves holding on to the garden gate in the evening, looking at nature around, the moving vehicles, the soul-quietening calm of sunset. Surely all this is not the result of “a distorting consciousness which has fallen from the total and unifying knowledge”! This is something so beautiful, soulful, fascinating. Something divine. That is what we gather from the chapter, ‘The Divine Maya’ which sets us out on an adventure of coming face to face with Maya while still held in Maya’s thrall.

The flowing English style matching Sri Aurobindo’s thought-processes is charming in this chapter as well as elsewhere when the Sanskrit word takes the centrestage with an easy bound. On the face of it, ‘Maya’ remains the most familiar and seemingly comprehensible term in our conversation. Ah, this same twin-syllabled word has managed to keep our philosophers engaged for centuries. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Veda introduced it in our religious-spiritual discourse. The chapter, ‘The Divine Maya’ carries two Rig Vedic verses as the epigraph:

By the names of the Lord and hers they shaped and measured the force of the Mother of Light; wearing might after might of that Force as a robe the lords of Maya shaped out Form in this Being.

The Masters of Maya shaped all by His Maya; the Fathers who have divine vision set Him within as a child that is to be born.¹

We vaguely feel that understanding is not far off. Maya is “a child that is to be born”. What is that? Could it be the baby girl who was born to Yashoda and was replaced by Krishna? It was this baby girl that Kamsa sought to kill, says the *Bhagavata*. We read in the tenth Book that Vasudeva had managed to go to Gokula and put the newborn Krishna near Yashoda who was sleeping and had brought away the baby girl who had been born to Yashoda a little while earlier. Inside the prison, the baby began to

1. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 120

cry and the guards were aroused. On learning of the newborn, Kamsa ran with a knife to kill it and was deaf to Devaki's pleadings to spare the child. What harm can a girl do to Kamsa? Yet, Kamsa picked up the little one and dashed it on a stone slab. Let us go to Sage Shuka describing the awesome incident:

But lo! Leaping from his hands, the infant was seen to rise into the sky and assume the form of an eight-handed goddess, who was none but the Yogamaya incarnated as her Lord's sister. That goddess was decked in celestial garlands, clothes, unguents and bejewelled ornaments, and was armed with weapons like bow, trident, shield, sword, conch, discus and mace.

The skies reverberated with her praises as celestials like Gandharvas and Kinnaras sang about her. Standing in the skies, she said:

O fool! Of what avail is your killing me? Your traditional enemy is born somewhere. Do not kill poor infants unnecessarily. Search out your real enemy. The Devi, the Yogamaya of the Lord, having said thus, disappeared from there, but manifested Herself in different holy places in the world under different names.²

Such a presentation in terms of a myth is easier to understand but the question remains. This is *māyā bhagavati* whom we adore as Durga and call upon to slay our enemies. But it is helpful to refer to the philosophical concept of Maya as Vishnu Maya to draw nearer to *The Life Divine*. This would avoid our getting entangled with Adi Sankara's idea of Maya as Illusion which cancels creation itself as an illusion. Vishnu Maya is the power that helps us understand the manifestation of the Supreme as creation. For there is nothing that is not. We gain one of those sonorous, extended Aurobindonian sentences when the Master explains the Ananda of creation:

Therefore whatever comes into the world, seeks nothing but this, to be, to arrive at the intended form, to enlarge its self-existence in that form, to develop, manifest, increase, realise infinitely the consciousness and the power that is in it, to have the delight of coming into manifestation, the delight of the form of being, the delight of the rhythm of consciousness, the delight of the play of force and to aggrandise and perfect that delight by whatever means is possible, in whatever direction, through whatever idea of itself may be suggested to it by the Existence, the Conscious-Force, the Delight active within its deepest being.³

So this is Maya! The handmaiden of Sat-Chit-Ananda! Vishnu Maya has decided to be the extended veil of the Supreme, and has drawn from Existence-Consciousness-

2. Translated by Swami Tapasyananda.

3. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 121.

Bliss its weave, its colours, its swirling properties, ever in movement. How does it work out this creation? Not easy to understand, for the process is as vague as seeing things in twilight. In fact Sri Aurobindo brings in this concept of Maya in ‘the Book of the Double Twilight’, in *Savitri*. Savitri is moving through dense Night and her companion is Death! Sri Aurobindo points out that this “walking with Death” is a constant experience for humanity though it does not realise it. Not surprisingly for Death is a lie, an illusion but do we not think it is very real? The Nothingness in which Savitri is travelling along with the dread godhead is itself Vishnu Maya, a divine illusion that veils the One out of which everything has come:

But Maya is a veil of the Absolute;
 A Truth occult has made this mighty world:
 The Eternal’s wisdom and self-knowledge act
 In ignorant Mind and in the body’s steps.
 The Inconscient is the Superconscient’s sleep.
 An unintelligible Intelligence
 Invents creation’s paradox profound;
 Spiritual thought is crammed in Matter’s forms,
 Unseen it throws out a dumb energy
 And works a miracle by a machine.
 All here is a mystery of contraries:
 Darkness a magic of self-hidden Light,
 Suffering some secret rapture’s tragic mask
 And death an instrument of perpetual life.⁴

The same idea is conveyed through colourful diction by the famous Vaishnava teacher, Yamunacharya (Alavandar). In a verse which is said to have initiated the pathway of Srivaishnavism that envisions the Supreme as a Twin Entity (Sri or Lakshmi and Vishnu), the Acharya (a predecessor of Sri Ramanuja) says:

Mother adorned with all-auspicious qualities!
 The Supreme Purusha is your consort;
 The Lord of Snakes the couch; Garuda,
 The soul of Vedas, is your seat and chariot;
 Your veil is Maya that enchants the world;
 Brahma, Shiva and all gods with their consorts
 Are your servitors, your name is Sri.
 How can we, the ignorant, describe your glory?⁵

4. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 600.

5. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

Yavanikā māyā jaganmohini. Things seem to be getting a little clearer. This Vishnu-Sri's Maya is what divides Infinite Consciousness (Reality, Sat) from the phenomenal world. Sri Aurobindo's unbounded patience in explaining such philosophical concepts is a matter of constant wonderment for me. As I go back and forth, reading and re-reading this chapter, he never fails to catch the attention of the wandering mind. Did the ancients discuss this divine illusion? Of course! According to the Vedic Rishis, Maya is "the selective faculty of knowledge commissioned to shape finite appearance out of the infinite Reality."

It is childish of me to think of pots and pans at this elevating moment. But I am drawn back to a childhood pastime in the village watching a cousin make tiny kitchen utensils with clay scooped from the river bank. The cousin thinks of a frying pan with a tiny ladle and makes it and sets it out to dry. I watch it and think they are a frying pan and a ladle, not just a blob of clay. My cousin thinks, I think and so the world of toys is made ready and arranged on a plate and kept in the shade (the hot sun would crack them). Vishnu Maya is also such a knowledge that helps us distinguish things in the phenomenal world but the knowledge makes us forget the original of which it has been made.

We need to have a double-vision to perceive both the Absolute and its creation as real. I have received help from the ancient Tamil Siddha poet Tirumoolar in trying to draw closer to this theory of Maya. He has some verses on how Maya veils the Absolute from our sight.

When watching an elephant made of wood
One does not see (think of) the wood;
Once rendered shapeless again
The elephant was lost in the wood
Which alone was now visible. Thus
The Absolute is nowhere because we see
And feel only the five elements.
The Guru's teaching helps in seeing the One
Into which all the elements get lost.⁶

But this places me on a dangerous plank. Is it all a trick of the mind? The world itself? All this is the illusion of Shankara and no more? To return to the proper state and regain our balance, we have to go to the chapter on 'The Cosmic Illusion'. With meticulous attention to the student's needs, Sri Aurobindo maps the progress of man towards the theory of Illusion.

In the course of evolution, having reached the mental plane of consciousness, man accepts the physical world as real. Presently man begins to wonder: is all this

6. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

real? Well, if he merely accepts the physical world, he would be no more than an animal! Man has a vital mentality allied to his physical mind and this vital craves for something beyond the physical:

. . . this [the vital mind] is not satisfied with the actual, it is a dealer in possibilities; it has the passion for novelty and is seeking always to extend the limits of experience for the satisfaction of desire, for enjoyment, for an enlarged self-affirmation and aggrandisement of its terrain of power and profit.⁷

Ah, now another character enters this eternal drama within the evolving human mind. This is the thinking mind that questions everything, affirms, aspires, gets dejected if the possibilities are not realised. This ends the progression in the dead-end of Agnosticism: all is unreal! Well, even if real, it is nothing but futility. *Punarapi janmam, punarapi maranam* . . . Being born again, to die again, only to return and rest for a while in the mother's womb. The use of the term Maya in this context to describe the state of man's mind that reaches this blind alley is sheer poetry. The repetition of the key word in English is mesmerising and it is an understandable state, according to Sri Aurobindo:

Nevertheless there is a certain validity in the mental support of this sense of frustration, in the perception at which the thinking mind arrives that there is an illusion behind all human effort and terrestrial endeavour, the illusion of the political and social gospels, the illusion of his ethical efforts at perfection, the illusion of philanthropy and service, the illusion of works, the illusion of fame, power, success, the illusion of all achievement . . . it is hard to avoid the conclusion that all here is either the creation of an inconscient Energy, which would account for the incapacity of an apparent consciousness to arrive at anything, or intentionally a world of ordeal and failure, the issue being not here but elsewhere, or even a vast and aimless cosmic Illusion.⁸

I know that all this is put down deliberately by Sri Aurobindo who does not want to leave a single stone in Vedanta unturned. This is the "purvapaksha" we need to know. We must have an idea of what we are facing, the 'other' side. The human mind is a very complex instrument and hence Sri Aurobindo's detailed exposition of Maya which is no more than an illusion of the mind, according to some philosophers. But is this world such an illusion? This cow slowly treading its way back to the pen, the bells ringing from its neck-string, the cream-white bunch of plumeria at the edge of the branch shorn of all its green foliage, the red-and-yellow

7. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 430.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 432-34.

bangles on my wrist: I gaze and gaze and just cannot think they are all but an illusion created by my mind. They are so real!

Sri Aurobindo's words regarding Maya comfort me. In the following chapter, 'Reality and the Cosmic Illusion', he says:

It may be noted, however, that nowhere in the Upanishads is it actually laid down that the threefold status is a condition of illusion or the creation of an unreality; it is constantly affirmed that all this that is, — this universe we are now supposing to have been constructed by Maya, — is the Brahman, the Reality. The Brahman becomes all these beings; all beings must be seen in the Self, the Reality must be seen in them, the Reality must be seen as being actually all these beings; for not only the Self is Brahman, but all is the Self, all this that is the Brahman, the Reality. That emphatic asseveration leaves no room for an illusory Maya . . .⁹

The Life Divine volume which has been with me for so long has any number of such passages marked where the term Maya has a thriving presence. It remains a magnetic word. Though Shankara's illusion theory has kind of appropriated the word exclusively, Vishnu Maya (the Maya that is no illusion but is merely the veil of the Supreme) has an even more dramatic presence in Indian literature including the hymns of the Tamil Alvars. When the creative writers find it difficult to explain these formulas, they turn to personifications. Among the works that have tempted me now and then for a reading spree, is a Telugu *yakshagāna* (musical play) titled *Muktikānta Vilasamu*.

The author is Tarigonda Vengamamba (1730-1817). Born in a tiny village in Andhra Pradesh, this Brahmin girl blossomed early in her life as a devotee of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati. She was married much against her wishes and was widowed early. She led a pious life in her village Tarigonda as well as in Tirupati. Those were the murky days when a Brahmin widow was condemned to darkness and domestic slavery. Facing a million obstacles Vengamamba became a well-known writer and has left behind fine *yakshagānas* like *Vishnuparijatham* and *Muktikānta Vilasamu*.

The musical play opens with the information that the Supreme, Eternal, Brahman Consciousness (*nitya, śuddha, buddha, sachchidananda, satyajnanananta, paripūrṇa brahma caitanya*) was covered by the Power of Maya (*Māyāvaraṇaśakti*) like clouds veiling the skies. The Lord of this creation of Maya tries to enter the palace of *Muktikānta* (Lady Realisation). But the doorman refuses entry if the Lord does not remove his veil called Maya. The Lord does so but *Jnanakānta* (Lady Knowledge) says *Muktikānta* is in Samadhi and we have other characters like *Bhakti* (Lady Devotion) and *Vairagya* (Lady Renunciation) entering the scene. The Lord is

9. Ibid., pp. 467-68.

successful and gets closeted with Mukti. All the activities of creation cease.

Worried by the state of affairs *Māyākānta* (Lady Illusion) comes lamenting the loss of her children like the three gunas and other qualities (like *kāma* and *krodha*). Lady Devotion tells her not to worry as the Lord's work has been delegated to Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati and creation will go on as before. One appears to draw a little closer to the truth about Vishnu Maya when we see the formula as a lovely lady with a purpose. Maya searching for her Lord Vishnu has some revelatory stanzas:

My Lord has betrayed me
And given up the joys of this world.

He has disregarded a wonderful family
And joined the Lady Renunciation.

The jivas now want to follow
The ways of their father! They wish to
Ignore me completely and give up
All passions and desires!
Oh what shall I do!¹⁰

Was this creation begun only to end as a zero, null and void? She asks the ladies Renunciation and Devotion:

Where is my Lord, O mothers!
He always had affection for me
And was engaged in varied creation!
Having created millions of lives
He was governing them expertly!

And what a creation!

I married this Purusha and gave birth to three children. Those three had six children. They in turn gave birth to seven children. The sons are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The grandsons are *Kāma*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* (Arrogance) and *Mātsarya* (Malice). My great grandsons are: *Dvesa*, *Irshya*, *Asūya*, *Dambha*, *Darpa* and *Abhimāna*. I have been managing an immense family with these sixteen persons. Of course, my husband would never lift a finger to help me in this management.

10. Translations from the Telugu original of *Muktikānta Vilasamu* quoted in this essay are by Prema Nandakumar.

But it is always a great help to have some male as the head of the house and so I have been working on my own, adjusting to his ways. Now suddenly he has left me in the lurch and gone after an aged lady called Mukti. I have no idea what has happened to the children.

There is a brilliant argument between Vairagya and Maya. Renunciation says that it is best as it is, for this creation with men and women setting up homes is nothing but sorrow. Birth, worry, illness, death. *Anityam asukham lokam!* What is the purpose of it all? Maya argues that there is joy too and when men and women happily live together and sustain this world, why should we deny the Ananda of creation? Vairagya's rejection has no effect on Maya. It is not so easy to obliterate me, says Maya. Lady Knowledge brings in the snake-and-rope idea but Maya rejects it:

Oh! I see the pot and the cloth with my eyes and you say it is all illusion! You say the unseen Absolute is eternal. Well, what is not seen does not exist. Where is the Brahman that is visible? This visible creation, of course!

The *yakshagāna* ends with Maya's victory when the Lord assures her that creation will continue and she will be helped in her work by Aprakruta, Hiranyagarbha and Viratpurusha. Also Lady Consciousness and Lady Mind would be her dear friends. Only, she had better be close to those who have no discrimination, and avoid the Lord's devotees who have discrimination and are anxious to gain Realisation. Despite the title, it is Lady Maya who is very visible and vocal throughout the play. Not surprising for are we not all within her charmed circle?

Beside my copy of *The Life Divine*, I find the great little book, *The Mother*. Sri Aurobindo takes me straight into the subject:

In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action but he is veiled by his Yoga Maya and works through the ego of the Jiva in the lower nature.¹¹

If we keep to the Sunlit Path, one day we will surely see the veil thrust aside and come face to face with the Divine. As Aswapati did in *Savitri*. Meanwhile I would rather watch with adoration this superb veil as the cattle pen where the calf is rushing towards its mother cow, in the scent of the *Parijata* buds wafting around and in this blue cover of the sacred volume on my shelf. Yoga Maya, Maha Maya, Vishnu Maya: Supreme Mother who is present everywhere as Maya, my salutations!

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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