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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A PRAYER

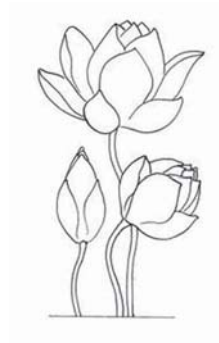
[This poem appeared in the March 31, 1908 issue of *Bande Mataram*]

Spirit of God that rulest, lord and king
Of all this universe, who from Thy throne
In heaven, besieged by prayers, lookst down on man,
Immeasurable Spirit, if any thought
Of human frailty in my mind should dwell,
While at Thy feet I lay myself, forgive.
Not for myself but for the land where Thou
Wert once a mighty warrior, lord and king,
For India, for her sons, I pray, who now
Fallen, abject, cringing to a foreign hand,
Forget Thee. Thou immeasurable Lord
Of all this universe, august, unborn,
By Thy unspeakable compassion urged
Enteredst a human body, of Thy huge
Empire a little province camest down
From foes within and foes without to save.
Again the land is full of Thee and full
Of hope; a stir is in the air, a cry
Is in men's hearts, the whole terrestrial globe
Thrills and vague rumours, huge presentiments
Move like the visions born of mist and dream
Across the places where Thou once wast born
Propheying Thy advent. Wilt Thou come
Lord, in a form such as Thou worest once
When Mathura was free, when Kamsa fell,
And from Brindavan came the avenging sword
Till then concealed. So would we have Thee come.
The nations of the earth are full of sin;
Greed, lust, ambition are their gods, and keep
Revel with Science for their caterer
To give the food by which they live. All forms
Of mercy, gentleness and love are lost
While strength alone is worshipped, strength divorced
From justice, uninspired by noble aims.
The greatneses of earth forget their source

And limit; they desire to break and build,
 To fill their lust, to hold majestic rule
 For ever, but forget the source of strength,
 Forget the purpose for which strength is given.
 Oppression fills the spaces of the world,
 Hatred and pain reply with murder, One
 Is needed who will break the strengths of earth
 By His diviner strength; and till He comes
 In vain we struggle and in vain aspire.
 Come therefore, for Thou saidst that Thou wouldst come;
 Whenever strong injustice lifts her head
 To slay the good, — Thou saidst that Thou wouldst come
 For rescue of the world. Today the globe
 Waits for Thy coming, as it waited then
 When Ravan was the master of the world
 And Lanka, full of splendid strength and sin,
 Possessed mankind. Now many Ravans rule
 And many Lankas. Therefore come; the earth
 Can bear no more the burden of their pride,
 Hellward she sinks. Unless Thou come, the end
 Approaches. Save Thy fair creation, Lord.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, Vol. 1, pp. 810-12)



THE KARMAYOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of June 2010)

Chapter II

Salvation through Works

IV. The denial of salvation by works

WHAT is it, after all, to which the denial of salvation by works amounts, when looked at not from the standpoint of logic only but of actual spiritual experience? Some people when they talk of Karma or works, think only of rites and ceremonies, Vedic, Puranic or Tantric. That kind of works, certainly, do not bring us to salvation. They may give success & great joy, power and splendour in this world. Or they may lead to enjoyment after death in Paradise; but Paradise is not salvation; it is a temporary joyous condition of the soul, the pleasure of which ceases when the cause is exhausted. Or these rites may lead to the conscious possession and use of occult powers, latent in ordinary men, by which you may help or harm others; but the possession of occult powers cannot be an assistance, it is indeed often a hindrance to salvation. Or rites and ceremonies may purify and prepare the mind and fit it for starting on one of the paths to salvation. This indeed is their only helpfulness for the true aim of our existence. They are no more than an infant or preparatory class in the school of Brahmavidya.

It is evident again that works done with desire, works done without knowledge and not devoted to God, cannot lead to salvation, but only to continued bondage. Works prompted by desire, lead only to the fulfilment of desire; nor do they disappear in that consummation. For all work that we do, has, besides its effect on ourselves, infinite effects on others and on the general course of phenomena; these in their turn become causes and produce fresh effects; so the ripple continues widening till we lose sight of it in the distance of futurity. For all the effects of our action we are responsible and by each new thing we do, we are entering into so many debts which we must discharge before we can be released from the obligation of phenomenal existence. Existence in phenomena may be imaged as a debtor's prison in which the soul is detained by a million creditors not one of whom will forgive one farthing of his claims. But those claims we can never discharge; each sum we get to pay off our old creditors, we can only procure by entering into fresh debts which put us at

the mercy of new and equally implacable claimants. Nature, the great judge and gaoler, is ever giving fresh decrees against us, for her law is inexorable and will not admit of remission or indulgence. We can obtain our release only by escaping from her jurisdiction into the divine sanctuary where the slave of Nature, by his very entry, becomes free and her master.

But 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.

V. Mukti and the Jivanmukta.

The ideal of the Karmayogin is the Jivanmukta, the self who has attained salvation but instead of immediately passing out of phenomenal existence, remains in it, free from its bondage. There are three kinds of salvation which are relative & partial; *salokya* or constant companionship with the Lord, *sadrishya*, or permanent resemblance to Him in one's nature & actions, and *sayujya* or constant union of the individual self with the Eternal. It is supposed by some schools that entire salvation consists in *laya* or absorption into the Eternal, in other words entire self-removal from phenomena and entrance into the utter being of the unconditioned and unknowable Parabrahman. Such *laya* is not possible in the body, but can only begin, *adehanipatat*, as soon as the Self throws away all its bodies and reenters into its absolute existence. It is not indeed the mere mechanical change of death that brings about this result, but the will of the Self to throw aside all its bodies and never returning to them pass rather out of that state of consciousness in the Eternal in which He looks upon Himself as a Will or Force. This, however, is an extreme attitude. Complete self-identification with the Eternal, such as we find in the Jivanmukta, is complete *mukti*; for the Jivanmukta can at will withdraw himself in Samadhi into the being of Sacchidananda, who is actionless and turned away from phenomena; and can at will look again towards phenomena, dealing with them as

their Lord who puts them to work without being touched by their stir and motion. For the Jivanmukta *laya*, absorption into the Unknowable, can be accomplished at his will; but he does not will it.

The reason for his not willing this utter departure brings us to the very essence of Mukti. Why do men hanker after complete absorption into the unphenomenal? why do they flee from Karma and dread lest it should interfere with their salvation? Because they feel that phenomenal life and works are a bondage and they desire to be free and not bound. This state of mind can only last so long as the seeker is the *mumukshu*, the self desirous of freedom, but when he is actually *mukta*, the free self, the terror of Maya and her works cannot abide with him. *Mukti*, which we have to render in English by salvation, means really release. But release from what bondage, salvation from what tyranny? From the bondage of Maya, from the tyranny of Avidya which will have us believe that we are finite, mortal and bound, who are not finite, but infinite, not mortal, but deathless & immutable, not bound, but always free. The moment you have realised that Avidya is illusion and there is nothing but the Eternal, and never was anything but the Eternal and never will be anything but the Eternal, the moment you have not merely intellectually grasped the idea but come to have habitual experience of the fact, from that moment you will know that you are not bound, never were bound and never will be bound. Avidya consists precisely in this that the Jivatman thinks there is something else than the Eternal which can throw him into bondage and that he himself is something else than the Eternal and can be bound. When the Jivatman shakes off these illusory impressions of Avidya, he realises that there is nothing but Brahman the Eternal who is in His very nature *nityamukta*, from ever and forever free. He can therefore have no fear of Karma nor shrink from it lest it should bind him, for he knows that the feeling of bondage is itself an illusion. He will be ready not only to do his deeds in this world and live out his hundred years, but to be reborn as Srikrishna himself has promised to be reborn again and again and as other avatars have promised to be reborn. For however often he may enter into phenomenal life, he has no farther terror of Maya and her bondage. Once free, always free.

Even if he does not will to be reborn, he will be careful not to leave the world of phenomena until his *prarabdha karma* is worked out. There are certain debts standing against his name in the ledger of Nature and these he will first absolve. Of course the Jivanmukta is not legally bound by his debts to Nature, for all the promissory notes he has executed in her name have been burned up in the fire of Mukti. He is now free and lord, the master of Prakriti, not its slave. But the Prakriti attached to this Jivatman has created, while in the illusion of bondage, causes which must be allowed to work out their effects; otherwise the chain of causation is snapped and a disturbance is brought about in the economy of Nature. उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोकाः. In order therefore to maintain the law of the world unimpaired, the Jivanmukta remains amid works like a prisoner on parole, not bound by the fetters of Prakriti, but detained

by his own will until the time appointed for his captivity shall have elapsed.

The Jivanmukta is the ideal of the Karmayogin and though he may not reach his ideal in this life or the next, still he must always strive to model himself upon it. Do therefore your deeds in this world and wish to live your hundred years. You should be willing to live your allotted term of life not for the sake of long living, but because the real you in the body is Brahman who by the force of His own Shakti is playing for Himself and by Himself this dramatic *lila* of creation, preservation and destruction. He is Isha, the Lord, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer; and you also in the field of your own Prakriti are the lord, creator, preserver and destroyer. You are He; only for your own amusement you have imagined yourself limited to a particular body for the purposes of the play, just as an actor imagines himself to be Dushyanta, Rama or Ravana. The actor has lost himself in the play and for a moment thinks that he is what he is acting; he has forgotten that he is really not Dushyanta or Rama, but Devadatta who has played & will yet play a hundred parts besides. When he shakes off this illusion and remembers that he is Devadatta, he does not therefore walk off the stage and by refusing to act, break up the play, but goes on playing his best till the proper time comes for him to leave the stage. The object of this phenomenal world is creation and it is our business, while we are in the body, to create. Only, so long as we forget our true Self, we create like servants under the compulsion of Prakriti and are slaves and bound by her actions which we falsely imagine to be our own. But when we know and experience our true Self, then we are masters of Prakriti and not bound by her creations. Our Self becomes the Sakshi, the silent spectator of the actions of our Nature which she models in the way she thinks would best please it. So are we at once spectator and actor; and yet because we know the whole to be merely an illusion of apparent actions, because we know that Rama is not really killing Ravana, nor Ravana being killed, for Ravana lives as much after the supposed death as before, so are we neither spectator nor actor, but the Self only and all we see nothing but visions of the Self. The Karmamargin therefore will not try or wish to abandon actions while he is in this world, but only the desire for their fruits; neither will he try or wish to leave his life in this world before its appointed end. The man who violently breaks the thread of his life before it is spun out, will obtain a result the very opposite to what he desires. The Karmamargin aims at being a Jivanmukta, he will not cherish within himself the spirit of the suicide.

VI. Suicide and the other World.

In the early days of spiritualism in America, there were many who were so charmed by the glowing description of the other world published by spiritualists that they committed suicide in order to reach it. It would almost seem as if in the old days when the pursuit of the Eternal dominated the mind of the race and disgust of the

transitory was common, there were many who rather than live out their hundred years preferred a self-willed exit from the world of phenomena. To these the Upanishad addresses a solemn warning. "Godless verily are those worlds and with blind gloom enveloped, thither they depart when they have passed away, whatso folk are slayers of self." One has to be peculiarly careful in rendering the exact words of the Upanishad, because Shankara gives a quite unexpected and out-of-the-way interpretation of the verse. He does not accept आत्महनो, self-slayers, in the sense of suicides, the natural and ordinary meaning, but understands it to signify slayers of the eternal Self within them. Since this is a startlingly unnatural & paradoxical sense, for the Self neither slays nor is slain, he farther interprets his interpretation in a figurative sense. To kill the Self means merely to cast the Self under the delusion of ignorance which leads to birth and rebirth; the Self is in a way killed because it is made to disappear into the darkness of Maya. Farther लोकाः has always the sense of worlds as in गोलोक ब्रह्मलोक द्युलोक but Shankara forces it to mean births, for example birth as a man, birth as a beast, birth as a God. Then there is a third and equally violent departure from the common & understood use of words; असुर्या or आसुरा would mean ordinarily Asuric of the Daityas in opposition to Daivic of the Devas; Shankara takes आसुरा as Rajasic and applicable to birth in the form of men, beasts and even of gods in opposition to दैव which is pure Sattvic and applicable only to Parabrahman. He thus gets the verse to mean, "Rajasic verily are those births and enveloped with blind darkness to which those depart when they pass away, whoso are slayers of the Self." All those who put themselves under the yoke of Ignorance, lose hold of their true Self and are born as men, beasts or gods, instead of returning to the pure existence of Parabrahman.

The objections to this interpretation are many and fatal. The rendering of आत्महनो substitutes a strained and unparalleled interpretation for the common and straight-forward sense of the word. The word लोकः cannot mean a particular kind of birth but either a world or the people in the world; and in these senses it is always used both in the Sruti and elsewhere. We say स्वर्गलोक, द्युलोक, मर्त्यलोक, इहलोक, परलोक; we do not say कीटलोक, पशुलोक, पक्षिलोक. We say indeed मनुष्यलोक, but it means the world of men & never birth as a man. The word असुर्या may very well mean Rajasic but not in the way Shankara applies to it; for असुर्या लोका cannot signify the births of beasts, men, gods as opposed to the divine birth of Parabrahman, who is above birth and above condition. Moreover, Daivic and Asuric are always opposed terms referring to the gods and Titans, precisely as Titanic and Olympian are opposed terms in English. For instance in the Gita

मोघाशा मोघकर्माणो मोघज्ञाना विचेतसः ।
 राक्षसीमासुरीं चैव प्रकृतिं मोहिनीं श्रिताः ॥
 महात्मानस्तु मां पार्थ दैवीं प्रकृतिमाश्रिताः ।
 भजन्त्यनन्यमनसो ज्ञात्वा भूतादिमव्ययम् ॥

In this passage Asuric and Rakshasic nature are rajasic nature as of the Titans and tamasic nature as of the Rakshasa; daivic nature implies sattwic nature as of the Gods. Such is always the sense wherever the terms are opposed in Sanscrit literature. It may be urged, in addition, that the expression ये के loses its strong limiting force if it is applied to all beings but the very few who have found salvation. There are other flaws besides the straining of word-senses. The verse as rendered by Shankara does not logically develop from what went before and the fault of incoherence is imported into the Upanishad which, if taken in its straightforward sense, we rather find to be strictly logical in its structure and very orderly in the development of its thought. On the other hand, the plain rendering of the words of the Upanishad in their received and ordinary sense gives a simple and clear meaning which is both highly appropriate in itself and develops naturally from what has gone before. Shankara's rendering involves so many and considerable faults, that even his authority cannot oblige us to accept it. We will therefore take the verse in its plain sense: it is a warning to those who imagine that by the self-willed shortening of their days upon earth they can escape from the obligation of phenomenal existence.

The Asuric or godless worlds to which the suicide is condemned, are the worlds of deep darkness & suffering at the other pole from the worlds of the gods, the world of light and joy which is the reward of virtuous deeds. Patala under the earth, Hell under Patala, these are Asuric worlds: Swarga on the mountaintops of existence in the bright sunshine is a world of the gods. All this is of course mythology and metaphor, but the Asuric worlds are a reality; they are the worlds of gloom and suffering in the nether depths of our own being. A world is not a place with hills, trees and stones, but a condition of the Jivatman, all the rest being only circumstances and details of a dream. The Sruti speaks of the spirit's *loka* in the next world, अमुष्मिन् लोके लोकः, where the word is used in its essential meaning of the spirit's state or condition and again in its figurative meaning of the world corresponding to its condition. The apparent surroundings, the sum of sensible images & appearances into which the spirit under the influence of Illusion materializes its mental state, makes the world in which it lives. *Martyaloka* is not essentially this Earth we men live in, for there may be other abodes of mortal beings, but the condition of mortality in the gross body; Swargaloka is the condition of bliss in the subtle body; Narak, Hell, the condition of misery in the subtle body; Brahmalo the condition of abiding with God in the causal body. Just as the Jivatman like a dreamer sees the Earth and all it contains when it is in the condition of mortality and regards itself as in a particular region with hills, trees, rivers, plains, so when it is in a condition of complete *tamas* in the subtle body, it believes itself to be in a place surrounded by thick darkness, a place of misery unspeakable. This world of darkness is imaged as under the earth on the side turned away from the sun; because earth is our mortal condition and this world is a state lower than our mortal condition; it is a world of thick darkness because the light created by the splendour of the Eternal in the consciousness

of the Jivatman is entirely eclipsed with the extreme thickening of the veil of Maya which intercepts from us the full glory of His lustre. Hell, Patal, Earth, Paradise, the Lunar & Solar Worlds, Golok, Brahmalo, — these are all imagery and dreams, since they are all in the Jivatman itself and exist outside it only as pictures & figures: still while we are dreamers, let us speak in the language and think the thoughts of dream.

This then is the Asuric world. When a man dies in great pain or in great grief or in fierce agitation of mind and his last thoughts are full of fear, rage, pain or horror, then the Jivatman in the Sukshmarsharir is unable to shake off these impressions from his mind for years, perhaps for centuries. So it is with the suicide; he sinks into this condition because of the feelings of disgust, impatience and pain or rage & fear which govern his last moments; for suicide is not the passionless & divine departure at his appointed time of the Yogin centred in samadhi, but a passionate and disgustful departure; and where there is disturbance or bitterness of the soul in its departure, there can be no tranquillity & sweetness in the state to which it departs. This is the law of death; death is a moment of intense concentration when the departing spirit gathers up the impressions of its mortal life as a host gathers provender for its journey, and whatever impressions are dominant at the moment, govern its condition afterwards.

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।
तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥

“Or indeed whatever (collective) impressions of mind one remembering leaveth his body at the last, to that state and no other it goeth, O son of Kunti, and is continually under the impress of those impressions.” Hence the importance, even apart from Mukti, of living a clean and noble life and dying a calm and strong death. For if the ideas and impressions then uppermost are such as to associate the self with this gross body and the vital functions or the base, vile & low desires of the mind, then the soul remains long in a *tamasic* condition of darkness and suffering which we call Patala or in its acute forms Hell. If the ideas and impressions uppermost are such as to associate the self with the higher desires of the mind, then the soul passes quickly to a *rajasic* condition of light & pleasure which we call Swarga, Behesta or Paradise and from which it will return to the state of mortality in the body. If the ideas and impressions uppermost are such as to associate the self with the higher understanding and bliss of the Self, the soul passes quickly to a condition of highest bliss which we call variously Kailas, Vaikuntha, Goloka or Brahmalo, from which it does not return in this aeon of the universe. But if we have learned to identify for ever the self with the Self, then before death we become the Eternal and after death we shall not be other. There are three states of Maya, *tamasic* illusion, *rajasic* illusion, *sattwic* illusion, and each in succession we must surmount before we reach utterly

that which is no illusion but the one eternal truth and, leaving our body in the state of Samadhi, rise into the unrevealed & imperishable bliss of which the Lord has said, "That is my highest seat of all."

VII. Retrospect

The Isha Upanishad logically falls into four portions, the first of which is comprised in the three verses we have already explained. It lays down for us those first principles of Karmayoga which must govern the mental state and actions of the Karmamargin in his upward progress to his ideal. In the next five verses we shall find the Upanishad enunciating the final goal of the Karmamargin and the ideal state of his mind and emotional part when his Yoga is perfected and he becomes a Yogin in very truth, the Siddha or perfected man and no longer the Sadhak or seeker after perfection.

While he is still a seeker, his mind must be governed by the idea of the Eternal as the mighty Lord and Ruler who pervades and encompasses the Universe. He must see him in all and around all, informing each object and encompassing it. On all that he sees, he must throw the halo of that presence; around all creatures and things, he must perceive the nimbus and the light.

His mind being thus governed by the idea of the divine omnipresence, he must not and cannot covet or desire, for possessing the Lord, what is it that he does not possess? what is it he needs to covet or desire? He cannot wish to injure or deprive others of their wealth, for who are others? are they other than himself? The Karmamargin must strive to abandon desire and make selflessness the law of his life and action. Seeing God in others, he will naturally love them and seek to serve them. By abnegation of desire he will find the sublime satisfaction the divinity in him demands and by the abandonment of the world in spirit, he will enjoy the whole world as his kingdom with a deep untroubled delight instead of embracing a few limited possessions with a chequered and transient pleasure.

Whatever others may do, the Karmamargin must not remove himself from the field of action and give up work in the world; he is not called upon to abandon the objects of enjoyment, but to possess them with a heart purified of longing and passion. In this spirit he must do his work in this world and not flee from the struggle. Neither must he shrink from life as a bondage. He must realise that there is no bondage to him who is full of God, for God is free and not bound. He must therefore be ready to live out his life and work out his work calmly and without desire, seeking only through his life and actions to get nearer to Him who is the Lord of life and Master of all actions.

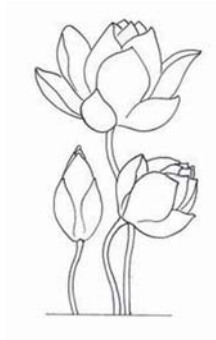
Least of all will he allow disgust of life and work so to master him as to make him seek release by shortening his days upon earth. For the suicide does not escape from phenomenal being in this world but passes into a far darker & more terrible

prison of Maya than any that earthly existence can devise for the soul.

If his nature can expand to the greatness of this discipline, if his eyes can avail never to lose sight of God, if he can envisage the godhead in his fellowmen, if he can empty his soul of its lust & longing, if he can feel all the glory & joy & beauty of the world passionlessly & disinterestedly as his own, if he can do his works in the world however humble or however mighty not for himself but for God in man and God in the world, if he can slay the sense of egoism in his works and feel them to be not his own but the Lord's, if he can put from him alike the coward's shrinking from death and the coward's longing for death, suffering neither the lust of long life nor impatience of its vanities & vexations, but live out his full term bravely, modestly, selflessly and greatly, then indeed he becomes the Karmayogin who lives ever close to the eternal & almighty Presence, moving freely in the courts of God, admitted hourly to His presence and growing always liker & liker in his spiritual image to the purity, majesty, might and beauty of the Lord. To love God in His world and approach God in himself is the discipline of the Karmayogin; to embrace all created things in his heart and divinely become God in his spirit, is his goal and ideal.

SRI AUROBINDO

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



**‘TO DO EVERYTHING SEEING ONLY
THEE EVERYWHERE . . .’**

February 25-26, 1914

HE who wants to serve Thee worthily should not be attached to anything, not even to those activities which enable him to commune more consciously with Thee. . . . But if as a result of the totality of circumstances, material things still take a greater place in life than usual, one must know how not to become absorbed by them, how to keep in one’s inmost heart the clear vision of Thy presence and live constantly in that serene peace which nothing can disturb. . . .

Oh, to do everything seeing only Thee everywhere and thus soar above the act that has been carried out, without letting any chain that holds us prisoners to the earth burden our flight. . .

O Lord, grant that the offering I make to Thee of my being may be integral and effective.

With a respectful and loving devotion I bow down before Thee, O ineffable Essence, inconceivable Reality, Nameless One.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 84)

TOTAL TRUTH

97 – When thou affirmest thy soul-experience and deniest the different soul-experience of another, know that God is making a fool of thee. Dost thou not hear His self-delighted laughter behind thy soul’s curtains?

Oh, it’s delightful!

One can only smile and say, “Never doubt your experience, for your experience is the truth of your being, but do not imagine that it is a universal truth; and never on the basis of this truth deny the truth of others, because for each one, his experience is the truth of his being. And a total truth would only be the totality of all these individual truths . . . plus the experience of the Lord Himself!”

98 – Revelation is the direct sight, the direct hearing or the inspired memory of Truth, *dr̥ṣṭi*, *śruti*, *smṛti*; it is the highest experience and always accessible to renewed experience. Not because God spoke it, but because the soul saw it, is the word of the Scriptures our supreme authority.

I assume that this is an answer to the Biblical belief in the “Commandments of God” received by Moses, supposedly uttered by the Lord Himself and heard by Moses — it is an indirect way of saying (*Mother laughs*) that this is not possible.

“Our supreme authority” “because the soul saw it” — but it can only be a supreme authority for the soul that saw it, not for every soul. For the soul that had this experience and saw, it is the supreme authority, but not for the others.

This was one of the things which used to make me think when I was a small child: these ten “Commandments”, which are besides extraordinarily commonplace. Love thy father and thy mother. . . . Do not kill. . . . It is revoltingly commonplace. And Moses went up Mount Sinai to hear that!

Now, I do not know whether Sri Aurobindo was thinking of the Indian Scriptures. . . . There were also Chinese Scriptures. . . .

(*Silence*)

More and more my experience is that revelation — it does come — revelation may be universally applicable, but it is always personal in form, always personal.

It is as if one had an *angle* of vision of the Truth. It is necessarily, necessarily an angle, from the very moment it is put into words.

You have a wordless, thoughtless experience of a kind of vibration which gives you a feeling of absolute truth and then, if you remain very still, without

seeking to know anything, after some time it is as if the vibration were passing through a filter and it is translated as a kind of idea. Then this idea — it is still rather hazy, that is, very general — if you continue to keep very still, attentive and silent, this idea passes through another filter, and then a kind of condensation occurs, like drops, and it turns into words.

But then, when you have had the experience very sincerely — that is, when you are not fooling yourself — it is necessarily only one point, *one way* of saying the thing, that's all. And it cannot be more than that. Besides, it is very easy to observe that when you are in the habit of using a particular language, it comes in that language; for me it always comes either in English or in French, it does not come in Chinese or in Japanese! The words are inevitably English or French; and sometimes there is a Sanskrit word — but that is because, physically, I learnt Sanskrit. I have occasionally heard — not physically — Sanskrit pronounced by another being; but it does not crystallise, it remains nebulous; and when I come back to an entirely material consciousness, I remember a vague sound, not a precise word. Therefore, it is *always* an individual angle from the very moment it is formulated.

You must have a kind of *very austere* sincerity. You are seized with enthusiasm, because the experience brings an extraordinary power: the Power is there — it is there, before the words, and it diminishes with the words — but the Power is there and with this Power you feel very universal, you have the feeling: “It is a universal revelation” — yes, it is a universal revelation, but when you put it into words, it is no longer universal; then it is relevant only for minds that are built to understand this way of speaking. The Force is behind, but you have to go beyond the words.

(*Silence*)

Things of this sort come to me more and more often and I jot them down on a piece of paper. It is always the same process, always. First of all, a kind of explosion, an explosion of truth-power — it is like a great, white fireworks display (*Mother smiles*), much more than a fireworks display! And it spins round and round (*gesture above the head*), it churns and churns; then there is the impression of an idea — but the idea is lower, it is like a covering; the idea contains its own sensation, it also brings a sensation — the sensation was there before, but without the idea, and so the sensation could not be defined. There is only one thing, it is always an explosion of luminous Power. And then, afterwards, if you look at it and remain very quiet — the head, especially, should keep quiet — everything becomes silent (*motionless, upward gesture*), then suddenly someone speaks inside the head — someone speaks. It is this explosion speaking. Then I take a pencil and paper and I write. But between what speaks and what writes there is still a little space to be crossed, so that when it is written down something up there is not satisfied. So I remain quiet a little longer — “No, not that word, this one” — sometimes it takes two days to become quite final. But those who are satisfied with

the power of the experience make short work of this, and send out into the world sensational revelations that are distortions of the Truth.

You must be very steady, very quiet, very critical — especially very quiet, silent, silent, silent, without trying to seize hold of the experience — “Oh! What is it, what is it?” — that spoils everything. But watch — watch very closely. In the words there is something left, something that remains of the original vibration — so little! But there is something, something that makes you smile, that is pleasant, like a sparkling wine, and here (*Mother indicates a word or a passage in an imaginary note*), here it is dull. Then you look with your knowledge of the language, or with your sense of word-rhythm: “Look, there’s a pebble.” You must remove the pebble; and then you wait and suddenly it comes, plop! it falls into place: the right word. If you are patient, after a day or two, it becomes absolutely accurate.

5 February 1964

99 – The word of Scripture is infallible; it is in the interpretation the heart and reason put upon the Scripture that error has her portion.

I am not quite sure that this is not ironical. . . . To people who say “The Scripture is infallible”, he answers: “Yes, yes, of course the Scriptures are infallible, but beware of your own understanding!”

But here is the word of truth:

100 – Shun all lowness, narrowness and shallowness in religious thought and experience. Be wider than the widest horizons, be loftier than highest Kanchanjungha, be profounder than the deepest oceans.

5 February 1964

101 – In God’s sight there is no near or distant, no present, past or future. These things are only a convenient perspective for His world-picture.

102 – To the senses it is always true that the sun moves round the earth; this is false to the reason. To the reason it is always true that the earth moves round the sun; this is false to the supreme vision. Neither earth moves nor sun; there is only a change in the relation of sun-consciousness and earth-consciousness.

(*Long silence*)

Impossible, I can’t say anything.

25 March 1964

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 181-85*)

WHEN SWIMMING UPSTREAM

YOU speak of “the resistance of inconstancy and unfavourable circumstances” and “fears of weakness and depressions leading to unspiritual mental processes in us”. It is the common lot of all who try to swim upstream. The real remedy is to find something within us to which swimming upstream is the most natural thing in the world. It is the psychic being of which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written such a lot. Once you get into touch with this true soul, there is a happy spontaneity in turning towards the Divine. The psychic being makes no effort to find the Supreme, it is itself a part of the Supreme. From its deep place within our hearts, devotion and self-dedication flow automatically. There are several parts which are not in accord with its unforced movement. Instead of fighting with them in the name of an Ideal held by the mind, it is more practical to put these parts into contact with that inner fountain of surrender to the Divine. A general equanimity, a quiet confronting of circumstances, including those of our own many-shaded nature, is called for and, along with it, a gesture of putting them all before the Mother. Visualise her face and figure and remember those lines from *Savitri*:

Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men’s lives. . . .
A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;
Love in her was wider than the universe,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.

[CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 15]

If you can conjure up the Mother’s presence before you in bodily shape and let the inmost being in you put into her hands all your difficulties gathered together as if in a heap, the poignancy of your problems will disappear and the way will be clearer for your soul to suffuse the rest of your psychological self.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(From *Life-Poetry-Yoga, Personal Letters*, Vol. 2, published by
The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 1995, p. 100)

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of June 2010)

Monday, 4 January 1926

I am able to fix my consciousness so as to remain awake, immobile, in silence. This state lasts for only a few moments. I find that my consciousness is then centred at a point near the eyebrow centre. This exercise involves great mental strain and a working in three centres: solar, eyebrow and occipital.

LATER, this cerebral effort will disappear, for you will not work with the brain. This is an intermediate state. Your consciousness will be centred at a certain moment outside your physical body, above your head; then it will expand and you will become aware of its unity with the other centres.

The throat centre is not involved because it is not a mental centre, but only vocal. Most people who work with the emotional mind remain at the level of the solar plexus.

If one becomes aware of one's unity with the whole, does one then become capable of identifying one's consciousness with that of another centre of consciousness?

Not all at once. There are two stages. At first, you perceive your unity with other centres of consciousness in the Silence; it is in the Transcendent that you perceive the identification. Later, you realise this union even in manifested activity, in the play of forces, and at that time the union you speak of is possible.

I am still not able to realise practically the independence of my true being from my physical body — an independence I can conceive of mentally. Will I realise this division?

It will definitely come and you will realise that your body is an instrument you can put aside. This is the first aspect of Mukti — the recognition that you are free from your body.

Similarly, certain imperfections, such as the desire for approval and respect, are very strong, though I fight them mentally.

Yes, and your being is still far more complex than you imagine. A time will come when you observe your inner being as though it were outside. There is a part of your consciousness which gives its sanction to this movement of Nature, because there is something in you which desires this approval, though your mind fights it. But the mind can only restrain; it cannot change anything.

For this change, this transmutation to take place, it is necessary, according to my current ideas, to attain the cosmic consciousness and thus get hold of the "universal solvent", as the alchemists say. Then one can transmute, can't one?

No, it is not enough. When you come down again from your cosmic consciousness, the same tendencies are there, and they always come back to life. But beyond the immanent aspect of the absolute Power — the aspect you realise in the experience of the cosmic consciousness — there is what may be called the transcendent aspect, which is creative and unlimited. This is the solvent that destroys and creates. The vital Purusha, which consented to a certain movement of Nature, must surrender to the higher life and then transformation is possible.

There are several levels in the embodied consciousness. The Upanishads speak of five Purushas connected to the five Koshas.

In the case where the soul succeeds in escaping from the world of forms and entering into Nirvana, in sinking into the Silence, is this fusion and loss of individuality final?

Naturally, this is what many people seek. The Absolute has two aspects as the Purusha: the transcendent immutable Purusha and the mutable Purusha, as the Gita says. The soul can realise its union with the first: Prakriti disappears and the soul escapes from the manifested world, which it considered a falsehood, an illusion or a dangerous trap. But this cannot satisfy, because the Absolute also contains the mutable Purusha, and if the soul wants an integral union, it must realise its oneness with the Divine in the manifestation as well as with the Transcendent.

Besides, to say that the soul has become finally absorbed in the Absolute is only a way of speaking. Is this liberation final? I am not ready to accept this.

The Absolute has an aspect that knows itself and loves itself through us as intermediaries, and that is the reason for the manifestation.

* * *

Friday, 8 January 1926

What seemed so simple has become very difficult. These last few days I have had the greatest difficulty in separating myself from my lower mind. It took a great deal of energy to remain awake, attentive, and not let myself be carried away by the flood of mental images without head or tail, a sort of waking dream. Perhaps this is a temporary reaction?

What do you do when you try to calm your mind?

I fix my consciousness on a point and try to remain attentive, to watch the play of the lower mind. If I get this poise, it becomes quiet. Two positions, one with images, one with language. The one with language is more difficult. It is automatic: it does not attach itself to well-defined things, but to what preoccupies me most or to the last thing I have thought about. The process is often set in motion by the senses.

At what spot do you try to fix your consciousness?

Normally at the level of the Ajna.

The Ajna is the centre that corresponds to the automatic mind and it is this dynamic centre that is working in you. This is what constitutes the mind in most men, and if you are aware of it — if you notice its action during your ordinary activities — others are not aware of it.

The mind proper (the thought mind) is higher. The other is the mechanical mind, which is no longer of any use to you. It is a waste of the nature.

Have you ever tried to use the will?

Of course, but I don't know if it is really the will I used.

The will has three levels, and first it must be distinguished from purely mental effort. The first level is desire, corresponding to the solar plexus. The second, Ishita or Aishwarya, is a kind of command or order that either sanctions or does not sanction the work of Prakriti. When it is recognised that something should be or should not be, it ought to come into action. This is an indispensable power for the Yoga we follow. One can call upon it by a consecration and then one becomes aware of its action. This action is disturbed and imperfect at the beginning, but in time it gets perfected. Mental effort may succeed in time, but the action of the true will is infinitely faster.

I have experienced this action when, by a call that is at the same time an offering, I reach the highest levels of my being. Physically I have the sensation of an action descending from above my head.

That is it. Try from time to time to invoke it. A continuous action is not yet possible, but get back the contact now and then.

The third action of the will is a control, an absolute possession of Prakriti by the Purusha.¹

* * *

Monday, 11 January 1926

The fundamental doctrine of the Theosophical Society, in my opinion, is the existence of the Masters. On the one hand this is the new message, the other doctrines (Karma, reincarnation) being purely philosophical and already known. On the other hand, this is a vital point for the leaders of the Society, who affirm that they are guided by these very Masters. From the logical and philosophical point of view, the existence of Siddhas who have perfected their nature and remain to guide humanity, is reasonable and even very probable. I admit it on this ground. Putting aside the idea that the leaders of the Society are consciously deceitful, how to account for their assertions about their relations with the Masters, not only on the higher planes but also on the physical plane? Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott and C. W. Leadbeater,² for example, have met living masters. If one admits these statements, how to explain the paucity of spirituality in the Theosophical Society in general, and the general trend — ethical, moral, but not spiritual? There is something erroneous here; I cannot find its cause, but it has made me keep away from the movement (missionary, sectarian, etc., etc.). These are very important questions for me.

There are, in fact, two very different questions. Their true answers are not of a mental order, but can only be understood through spiritual realisation. However, here is what I can say about it.

About the first point, I shall say only that the existence of *perfect* beings, “those who have nothing more to learn” as you say, is problematic. There is always

1. Vashita? — Pavitra’s note.

2. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Charles Webster Leadbeater and Annie Besant (mentioned later in this conversation) were the other two important leaders of the early Theosophical movement.

something to learn in the Infinite. The Buddha who took a vow to remain on earth until the last man enters Nirvana is not Gautama but Amitabha.

The other question is to assess the relations of the leaders of the Theosophical Society with the Masters — that is, to determine the nature of the psychical experiences of these persons. Everything in their works, and particularly the little true spirituality one finds there, makes me think that they have never gone beyond the vital plane, which corresponds to what they call the astral plane. I set aside the case of deception. The first thing to be considered is wilful self-deceit, the fact that on this plane we see what we mentally want to see. This is a complex and marvellous realm, where the true and the false are inextricably entangled. Everything appears under a logical and seductive form, organised, but finally illusory.

Madame Blavatsky was an amazing woman, with strong intuitions, but someone in whom everything would get mixed up; she was incapable of discussing psychical facts critically. She did not want to, besides. What mattered to her was to launch a movement. And this impulse, this desire to organise, to exercise an influence, is characteristic of the vital plane. There are influences of all kinds there, whose one desire is to take possession of those who are high-placed in order to use them for their own ends. Not only the weak are their prey, but also the strong, for it is especially the strong they aim at.

After Madame Blavatsky, there was Mrs. Besant. In the beginning she simply followed the lines of Madame Blavatsky; then it was Leadbeater who influenced her. She recognised this, however, at a certain point in her life (“the glamour he has put on me”), but as she had nothing of her own she returned to him.

What is special about the vital plane is that anyone who has a certain realisation there can make another person have the same realisation. One should not apply the criteria of ordinary life to this plane; this is the mistake that many spiritists, metapsychists, etc. make. I know this by experience. I have old disciples who have deviated without my being able to bring them back, so great is the force of deception. Others write to me letters full of visions they have had; they have seen me and I am supposed to have given them instructions. Now it was not me and those instructions I would disown. It so happened that several of them had the same vision at the same time, apart from small variations of detail.

On the other hand, if the Masters directing the Theosophical Society are perfect, they have surely perceived the nature of these influences and also known the value of true spirituality. How is it they did not warn their disciples and why does one find so little of this spirituality? I have met Theosophists, some of whom have had glimpses of the spiritual life, but in none of those I know has it really been organised. While in others, persons who don't claim to be guided by perfect masters, one often finds far more spirituality, as in certain Yogis and others.

Their conception is mental and ethical, not spiritual. And as an ethical conception, there is nothing remarkable.

In spiritual life, one must always be ready to reject all systems and constructions. For a time a certain form is useful; then it becomes a hindrance. In my own spiritual life, since I was forty, three or four times I have completely discarded and broken the system I had arrived at.

If our disciples at X could not be brought back, the fault lies in their ambition, that kind of spiritual ambition, so dangerous for a Yogi, which endows us with a special importance in human life. It is a big danger, and I think it was responsible for making the Theosophists fall. There is a core of true spirituality there, very small, surrounded by a mass of erroneous facts and psychical data. And in time even the core gets affected.

I am answering your question because, by breaking through the veil, you will reach this psychical region. Hardly one per cent can pass through it — due to their mental purity, their mind does not get attached to objects in order to find satisfaction in them. And this is a great danger, a powerful pressure. One must be very strong and hold on to the truth in order to resist. This is why I am replying and not in order to speak about the Theosophical Society. I have nothing against it nor against any of the Theosophists, to whom I wish the very best. I am not against them.

As for the fact that some have seen a Master physically, an explanation is possible. When conditions are favourable, these influences of the vital plane can very easily materialise; they have sufficient mastery over matter for this. Of course they must be given these conditions.

But if the Asuras can do this, can't the Suras do it too?

Obviously, but they do it far less frequently; they are not in a hurry to impose their guidance. And then very strict special conditions are necessary — one must be on an absolute march towards the Truth.

If these are the conditions of the vital plane, is it nevertheless possible to free oneself from them? These forces obey laws; by knowing them one can free oneself from them.

Of course it is possible. Even illusions obey laws. Here there is an aspect of true occultism, not that of the Theosophists. This occultism seeks to understand and realise, not to mentally create. It is in a way an extension of science.

* * *

Friday, 15 January 1926

I am progressing, but slowly. I have not been able to apply the will as you described it. In this regard a curious thing happens. In meditation when I look for a higher support in myself, when I try to invoke the deeper parts of my being, I only meet a void and I am unable to make any inner movement. In ordinary life, of course, either under the press of outer excitement or by themselves, such movements and their results are frequent. And in general, though meditation has had very perceptible effects on my general state, it has never had any tangible results.

There are two principal forces that help in the ascent of man. One is aspiration; it is emotive and has its centre in the solar plexus. The other is higher mental and its centre is above the head. You act in ordinary life with the help of the first. In meditation your consciousness rises into the higher mind. The silence you seek is not for its own sake, but only to let this higher Force descend and rejoin the other. The old allegory of the ascending fire and the descending Sun. But your mind is not used to letting this Force pass through consciously, and as a result it does not know how to act. There is, then, no effort to be made; in your case it is better to remain immobile. Naturally, this depends on the case; there are people who are very active above the head, and they easily draw from this Force. Later one succeeds in calling it down at will.

When I try to become silent inside, I have noticed that I centre my consciousness by taking the help of the physical body. Then my attention gradually sinks deeper. But a moment comes when I must leave this point of support; then I don't know where to fix my consciousness. Either it returns to external things and I become quite awake and attentive to the outer world, or else I fall into a half-dream state, though I keep my consciousness attentive for a while.

It is not necessary to fix the consciousness anywhere. When you begin to participate in the higher consciousness, you will find it spread out, encompassing everything, without any specific centre. One makes one's own centre for oneself above the head. In the beginning, what you are doing is natural — but let go. As for attention to the outer world, you will see at a certain point that all phenomena, all noises are part of you and so on. You will include them in your consciousness; they will pass through it. The half-dream state is not to be feared, but keep your consciousness attentive; it will probably shift inward then. But have you succeeded in quieting your mind?

Yes, in the first state where I take a support. When I let go of the support, I still cannot stop the passing images.

What kind of images? Objects and beings seen and known, or unknown to you?

I don't know. Some of them seem new to me, but perhaps I have seen them before.

And what do you do then?

I try to remove them.

That need not be done. Wait and observe. Perhaps these images indicate the first sign of clairvoyance. You may be seeing events that are happening at a distance. You have to take the scientific attitude and see what is there. This may be a precious faculty.

I have heard a lot about this faculty, but I don't think that the incoherent images I see could lead to it.

This may be the beginning.

All that you said about the Theosophical Society is undoubtedly quite true. I have understood and am not raising an objection. I have the feeling that a link has been cut. But I would like to ask one more question. The force that is behind me, which I feel, which guides me, which I call my master (without ever having seen him) and which some psychics have connected with a Master — what is this force?

These are problems that cannot be resolved solely with the mind. When your psychic being opens, you will see and understand; it can happen. But there are many things. All those who have a strong push towards the higher life have a similar experience. The mind travesties and clothes the Force in a form that pleases it or that it is used to: Christ for a Christian, and so on. First, there is the universal force, the Purusha, whose action is effective and guiding. Then there are the intermediaries in the great plan, at every level. Then again, those you are destined to meet can influence you, often without their knowing it. When the psychic being has opened and set foot on spiritual ground, it can judge. The mental being cannot.

* * *

Monday, 18 January 1926

I have succeeded in keeping my mind absolutely empty of thought for a few minutes. All the waves have stopped. But still my consciousness is fixed on the physical plane all the time; thus I hear and see, though the perceptions do not awaken any thought. But several times I have had the feeling of being on the point of passing beyond; my breathing became very difficult and everything went whirling around, though my consciousness remained calm and attentive. If I could have stopped my breathing, I would surely have changed consciousness.

It is a question of leaving the physical body, but it should not be tried at the moment; it is necessary to get more control first to know, for example, how to guide oneself beyond. And other conditions are also necessary — for example, to be sure of not being disturbed. Of course, this state is what the Yogis are seeking and try to attain. Everybody cannot do it. In my opinion, it is not necessary for you to seek this state at present — for instance, by proper breathing.

No, you have touched the state of perfect silence.

Widen it; this does not mean to deepen it. But make it last steadily for a longer time and gradually let it encompass all that surrounds you.

* * *

Friday, 22 January 1926

These last few days have not brought much progress, for my mind was extremely distracted and disturbed by different mental pursuits. Everything has settled down now, but I don't see very clearly what I ought to do. My mind is divided into two parts. The first part, which uses language and reasons and formulates, is the part that falls silent. But a certain attention is necessary to prevent untimely thoughts from arising through the throat and disturbing this peace. The other part is attentive, its special function being the vision of inner images; its centre is the Ajna. This part has been inactive so far, but even so it is not always still; it is centred here and there and does not know what to do.

Thoughts, in fact, have their origin in the solar plexus; then they rise up through the throat and invade the brain, where they become conscious. The still mind has no definite localisation; it is a matter of habit. For the moment you are localising it in the brain, but its true seat, which corresponds to the higher mental truth, is the Sahasrara. Above, this consciousness itself will spread out and become the cosmic

consciousness. There are two different points to consider. The first is to empty the active mind of thoughts and leave it motionless. This is a useful capacity. The second is to remain completely detached from the thoughts that may arise in this active mind. Later you will see the thoughts being formulated there, not rising from below but coming from the surroundings or from above. And you will have to learn to recognise the Truth.

So you must learn to regard these thoughts as external objects, never allowing yourself to get carried away.

Besides, from now on, while keeping the lower mind still, you may “look above” in order to gradually centre your consciousness there.

When I do that, my consciousness oscillates between the above and below, because it still has to watch the lower part. Moreover, sound, a prolonged sound for example, does not raise any thought, but it captures my attention, which gets riveted there.

This is wrong concentration! Simply put that aside. In the cosmic consciousness you will have the impression that this sound is occurring somewhere in this consciousness, but it will no longer bother you.

* * *

Monday, 25 January 1926

At times I can keep my attention fixed, “turned above” (towards the Sahasrara) and my mind is calm and empty of thought. But it is all closed up there — I am at the door and I knock.

Something curious happened this morning. I woke up with waves of powerful vibrations at the top of the head and in the pit of the stomach. They were even physical; my scalp was sensitised. These vibrations corresponded to a sort of anguish, though I was not frightened and I reproduced these vibrations in order to study them.

You must be prepared for such things. You have called and the Force is descending, preparing the parts of the nature, right down to the physical itself. Everything in man is opposed to the working of the Force, and it has to be transformed. Even the cells will be transmuted later.

The feeling of fear has to be put aside completely. Even when an experience is likely to be dangerous, one must remain calm and in control of oneself, for without that danger comes immediately. The help is always given if one remains in control.

Here it is a simple preparation — a response to the call given, a response, moreover, that does not always come.

The mental states are becoming more pronounced — joy, calm and fervent seeking on the one hand, but also deep sadness when I am separated from my inner light or when my mind, disturbed by some outer cause, becomes a great obstacle to the sadhana.

It is normal and connected with the psychic being.

(Then we spoke of Z, whose letter, announcing her impending departure from France, had just come. A.G.³ asked me several questions, wanting to know what stage she had reached and whether she had succeeded in separating the true psychic from various false creations. I know almost nothing about it. Is she coming here to realise her original plan of a small colony in North India?)

(To be continued)

PAVITRA

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

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

3. At that time, Sri Aurobindo was often called A.G. (Aurobindo Ghose) by his disciples.

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of June 2010)

Chapter Nine

Summa of the Divine Consciousness

Philippe had been Sri Aurobindo's disciple for the past four years now. The Master had retired; Mirra Alfassa directed the Ashram, and the number of disciples had grown, during this period, from twenty to ninety.

The new orientation that she gave to the Ashram, of which Pavitra became an important part in his capacity of a general secretary, was something like that of a Saint-Simonian phalanstery. "He established a machine workshop, a laboratory for medicines and perfumery, laboratories for physics and chemistry at the Centre of Education of which he was the Director and one of the first to give it shape";¹ . . .

Regarding spirituality, Philippe explained to his parents who Sri Aurobindo was and expounded — in the absence of any doctrine — his yoga based on his inner experience. At last he answered, in his long exposition of May 13, 1929, the questions that his father had asked in his equally long diatribe of September 5, 1921!

This part of his correspondence is certainly that which would coincide with his "floruit" had he been Greek and a philosopher! Here he expounded enthusiastically and with level-headedness, precision, clarity and coherence, the corpus which was going to guide him during the remaining forty years of his life.

To better explain to his parents and family the progress in his thoughts, he chose to send to his parents carbon copies of the typewritten letters which he had written to two disciples abroad.

The first of these two correspondents was a friend of his, Noémi, with whom he tried to share his new faith. The reader will find later in the book the text of these two letters which I have found in Paul's files.

The second correspondent was a restless and worrisome person. Between June 1927 and September 1930 Pavitra wrote to him eight long letters which were authorised if not dictated by Sri Aurobindo: "I wish to inform you that this letter — just as all the preceding ones have been — will be read by S.A. and will not be sent without his approval." Nothing could be more precise! The recipient was enamoured

1. Cf. Editorial note, February 1972, in *Conversations avec Pavitra*, op. cit.

of esotericism. He had, in fact, asked the Master in 1927 for “his guidance and his spiritual help”; to say who he was, he had sent to Pondicherry two of his writings: *In the Shadow of the Tibetan Monasteries* and *Asia Mysteriosa*.

*I have not included that correspondence in this book, although it may be doctrinally important, because it is known in part, the first five letters² having been already published in the book *Conversations avec Pavitra*, already mentioned. Later, this person brought out a book entitled *The Spiritual Betrayal of Freemasonry*; in it he had reproduced, in violation of the confidentiality which he had promised, several pages (pp. 247 to 251) “almost verbatim excerpts” of this correspondence.³ I obtained this information from a letter which my uncle addressed on July 13, 1932 to Madame Alfassa’s son, André Morisset, and of which he had sent a copy to Paul:*

“Marquès Rivière is one of those people who believe that it is enough to enter into a particular religion, a secret society or an esoteric group, to receive, as an immediate and complete gift, the inner realisation, the Knowledge, the Power.”

Had not Philippe written in a letter of the preceding chapter: “We continue our inner work with patience and perseverance” . . .

* * *

Copy to Albert

Pondicherry, May 13, 1929

My dear Papa,

Since long I have been pondering over the reply that I wish to give to your letter of the month of January, but I did not have the time till now to put it on paper.

You feel that you have the right to an **explanation** of my conduct, which will be more satisfactory to you than what I have written to you until now. In fact, I do not think that I can even try to **explain** my way of acting to whoever it may be. It seems to me entirely futile on the part of men to pretend to a **reasonable** explanation of the actions of any individual or even of their own actions. The real motives are much too subtle and complex, more or less unconscious and most of the time indiscernible. I think that from the historical point of view, you will easily agree with me.

In what concerns me, the difficulty has become a radical impossibility, for entirely different reasons, which I shall try to explain to you.

2. It is not in fact the originals which have been published, but the re-translation into French from the translations in English which had been made from them.

3. He continued to pursue his condemnation of Freemasonry because during the Occupation, he published its secret archives which had been seized.

What you call **reason**, that is to say the discursive capacity of our mind, which permits us to analyse, to compare and to judge, is certainly not the principal director and determinant of my life. It is however my experience that my conduct, seen with a certain detachment, has always shown itself perfectly adapted to the goal that I am pursuing. One cannot therefore say that it is devoid of **sense**; quite the contrary; it is perfectly logical and easily justifies itself. But this is looking for a justification after the act, *a posteriori*, and not going back to the living source from where it ensues.

The real **reason** — the only true reason — of my actions (I am speaking of those which count, of those which have had a decisive importance in my life these last years) is basically always this: “I act because I **feel** (or **perceive**, or **understand**, *ad libitum*) that I must act thus and that it is impossible for me to act otherwise.”

To try to satisfy you, and I wish to do everything possible to this end, I cannot do better than to expound why I accept the validity and the authority of an **inner perception** of this nature which you consider to be suspect on several counts, and why, when such a decision is in conflict with the habitual notions and with the so-called **common sense**, it is this inner imperative voice that I obey unhesitatingly.

To tell the truth, if you do not know this inner voice, it is impossible for me to make you understand its nature, and if you know it, you will not need my explanation.

In any case, I shall try to show you why I refuse to trust all other guides and that the belief in the value of this inner direction has nothing in it which offends reason. It even reconciles itself with certain philosophers; Victor Cousin has called it **mystic philosophy**, but it is for all ages. One finds it as much in ancient India, among the Neo-Platonists and the Gnostics, as among the Christian mystics.

You declare again and again that you have done everything possible to follow my progress and to understand me. Yes, certainly, at least as long as I remained in the purely intellectual period of theosophy, occultism and oriental thought. But as soon as I wanted to apply what I had understood of the spiritual truth, as soon as I wanted to pass from the theory to the practice, you will admit that it was no longer the same.

You approved of the purely impartial, intellectual study of any system or school; you even understood that one could have a sincere conviction about them, but you could not admit without a profound repugnance that this conviction could modify the normal and intellectual life, above all to the point of causing a complete upheaval of the established order.

I think that the reason for your attitude is that you have always doubted man’s possibility to know the truth. For you the philosophies are nothing but mental games, religions nothing but palliatives intended, you used to say, “to lull the human misery”. In these conditions, “*Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*” is evidently well founded.

Whatever it may be, it is from the moment I began to shape my life to my ideal, where I considered the inner call as more imperative than the prevalent notions, that, according to your expression, “you could not understand any more”.

First of all, I agree with you in affirming the incapacity of the human intellect to seize the truth. **For me, the mind is not an instrument of knowledge.**

The indictment of all knowledge that we have of the external world is classic. We grasp only the **appearances** and not the **real existence**; this you know as well as me. Classical philosophy, moreover, attributes this impotence to our senses rather than to our mind; it considers this to be the drawback of all sensorial knowledge without admitting that one can ever obtain it in other ways. I, however, think that this is due to an imperfection of our mind itself. If it is impossible for it to rise from the **phenomenon** to the **noumenon**, it is a consequence of its nature itself: being bound to the body, it is a product of the phenomenal world and it cannot escape from it. Moreover, it is one of the points which Bergson has elucidated very well and he has shown that it is actually our **intelligence** which is incapable of **understanding** life.

Mind can follow the phenomena in their development, recognise their succession and sometimes their cause and effect. Thence it deduces what it calls **the laws of nature**. In addition, it is a marvellous classifier. But it is not by giving names to the things that we can know them. We grasp absolutely nothing of the real nature of the beings and the things. And their **why** always escapes us.

Actually the mind is an **instrument** with which we have to act on the universe. And all the so-called laws of nature, even if they do not teach us anything even about the essence of things, at least permit us to manipulate and use them. Mental knowledge is utilitarian and we make use of it to realise in matter what we first conceive in the mental domain: thus mind is a shaper, and then an effectuator.

It is because the mind is first and foremost an **instrument of implementation** that there is the considerable development of mental knowledge in the modern times, although, if it has not made us advance one step in the true knowledge of the universe, it has, on the other hand, placed in our hands a considerable power over the natural phenomena.

So far, I think, we would more or less agree. But instead of putting, with Comte, an insurmountable barrier between the **knowable** and the **unknowable**, after having established that **everything** is really unknowable by the intellect, I hold it as certain that **all** is really knowable by the **superior consciousness**. Bergson had examined the first rudiments of this **superior knowledge** under the name of **intuition**.

Evidently, there is a radical opposition between the **inferior knowledge**, based on the sensorial perceptions and on the ordinary movements of the mind, uncertain and groping, and the **superior knowledge** which is direct, immediate and complete.

To attain this knowledge is not to accumulate facts, nor to draw conclusions from them, it is to penetrate to the heart of the **Divine Consciousness**, in which one possesses, one is and one lives in the Divine Truth. All things are included in this Divine Consciousness, not with the phenomenal deformation with which they appear

to our senses and to our intellect, but in their truth, their essence and their totality. And it is only in this consciousness that one can grasp their Being and their Becoming.

If this Knowledge is perfect and total, that does not mean that one can possess it at the first go in its integrality and its purity. Many deceive themselves who do not know how to eliminate the foreign elements and cannot bring their mental and their vital to the necessary silence and transparency. In addition, although each element of knowledge that it procures may be complete and sure, it is always possible to plunge more deeply in the Divine Consciousness and to go deeper, so to say, into the cosmic and the extracosmic mysteries.

I feel, therefore, like you and certainly more keenly and more directly the weakness of the intellectual systems, philosophical and scientific. All attempt at mental formulation of the truth about man, the universe or God, is doomed to failure from the start.

Scientific knowledge is entirely pragmatic (“everything happens as if . . .”) and, even in the most abstract and most theoretical aspects, **mathematics** has at bottom only a utilitarian value. Mathematics, like formal logic, is but an instrument with which the mind manipulates the elements of its world. People have made fun of the mathematician by saying that he does not know what he is talking about, nor whether what he says is true. At the very root of mathematics are the non-demonstrable postulates. And it is this science that Comte puts above all the others!

Some persons, completely persuaded of the impotence of the mind, have fallen back on faith. They thought that by giving their blind allegiance to a dogma, to inspired words, to a sacred book, they would place themselves on firmer ground and obtain the certitude that their being needed. But dogma, creed, sacred words or writings are mental constructions still, and, instead of fixing the Truth, only demarcate its shadow. And yet, what power faith possesses, even obscure faith! It is because this human faith borrows its power from the true Faith of which it is a counterfeit. This Faith is no more human in the sense that it goes beyond the mind to the region where man’s centre of his consciousness is, but is, nevertheless, accessible to him.

Once we have become aware of our soul and in it recognised the Divine Presence, our entire being, mental, vital and even physical, experiences a reversal, sudden or gradual, and gives its adhesion to the new law which will govern it. It is this **adhesion** which is the **real Faith**: Faith in the Divine within us, Faith in His omnipotence. Faith has as its complement self-giving and aspiration: the being offers itself and asks for the transformation.

For it is the **transformation** which is the direct and conscious aim of Sri Aurobindo and his disciples, as it was more or less consciously that of the mystics of bygone eras. Those who have approached the divine have felt the **necessity** and the **possibility** of transmuting the ordinary human movements: mental, vital and

physical into divine and perfect movements. It is the dream of the mystics and it is the **Great Work** of the alchemists, and the **Temple** that the Masons seek to rebuild is its symbol at the social level.

It is therefore important to understand that all real knowledge expresses itself as power. Just as all increase of mental knowledge confers a certain mastery over the natural forces, all mystic knowledge enables the task of transforming the ordinary movements of the lower consciousness. The power that the yogi seeks is that of transforming his own life, to make and manifest there, in an unceasingly more integral and more intense way, the truth, the power, the joy and the beatitude, the suppleness and the harmony, in one word, to make his entire being an ever more perfect **vehicle** of the Divine in the manifestation.

It is now easy to understand why the true mystics have always been eminently practical. Unfortunately, side by side with the **true mystic**, there is the **false mystic**; their difference is of the same nature and equally radical as that which separates the true faith from the false. The current opinion, which makes of a mystic a dreamer living in the clouds and incapable of handling tangible realities, stems from this mistake.

The true mystic takes his direct and constant guidance from the indwelling God and consequently is a direct instrument of the Divine; the other has created for himself an ideal, that is to say, a mental image of a state of things which seems desirable to him, and he tries hard to bring his realisation in himself or in a small group or in all humanity (he has moreover an annoying tendency towards generalisation). The first alone, strictly speaking, is a **mystic**; the second is nothing but a religious or social **reformer**.

The latter will preach his panacea *urbi et orbi* (to the city and to the world), will endeavour to win over numerous adepts to his cause and will show himself very much attached to the success of his work. The former will follow, in everything, the action of the **Divine Grace**, will worry little about people and even less about success or apparent failure of what he undertakes, knowing that only one thing matters, it is that he does what he must, putting himself, his work, all that he has and all that he is, entirely in divine hands. The weapon of the one is the Divine Grace, of the other, it is a rule of life which he imposes on himself and wants to impose on the others.

The distinction may seem to you subtle and artificial; however, it is essential and indispensable to one who does not want to lose his way. Of course, many claim to be mystics who have only the realisation of a mental ideal and who belong to the class of reformers. This is the case with the majority of the **Theosophists**. In this category are also the **dreamers** without contact with the reality and pursuing a chimerical ideal, and the **fanatics**, desirous of imposing by all means their views and their beliefs.

I said that the mind was the instrument of execution. But the **guiding principle of the implementation** belongs to a higher region, that of the true Knowledge. If the mind does not receive this impetus or if it refuses it through arrogance and appropriates the right to command, only gropings and mistakes result from it.

I have frequently noticed — and your experience will no doubt confirm mine — that those who claim to **reason out** all their actions very rarely act appropriately and succeed less often. They lack the capacity to assess correctly and to make up their minds at the right time. It is commonly said that they do not have the right feel for things. Perhaps, you will say, they would have done something more stupid if they did not reason. Yes, because they would have abruptly removed the mental control on their actions after having atrophied in themselves the capacity for intuitive decision. But this capacity can be cultivated, and those who have succeeded, the leaders of men like the heads of enterprises and the big financiers, generally owe their success to it.

To act thus is not to obey one's **impulses**, as those who do not possess this capacity will no doubt affirm. In the same way, intuition must not be confused with **sentiment**.

Intuitive action, of which I have just spoken, is moreover very imperfect and subject to error. There is a **superior action**, sure and infallible, just as there is a **superior knowledge**, of which **intuition** is the reflection in the attentive mind. These distinctions are interesting, but they will take us too far away from our subject.

In fact, there is no difference between true **Knowledge** and true **Action**. Once one is in the heart of the Divine Consciousness, **to act** means **to live** in the divine Will. Action is no more this groping and hesitating, sterile and limited movement to which man is incited by mental motives or sensual desires, egoistic or altruistic, when it is not by the habit or the instinct of imitation. True action then becomes the external manifestation, direct, powerful and perfect in itself, of the inner life. This is the **superior action** of which it is said that it “does not leave any traces” (in the one who accomplishes it), because it is truly the Divine who acts and not the human, the latter remains impassive and serene. It is also what the ancient sages of China called “to act without a motive for action”.

It was the opposition between my deeper conception of the possibility of this superior life and your attitude of intellectual scepticism, so French perhaps in its tradition of light irony, to which the greatest stupidity that man can do is precisely to **take things seriously**, which is at the origin of the misunderstanding that has separated us. At the present moment my conviction has not changed, quite the contrary; it is supported by the experiences of several years, and it is confirmed by the first realisations that I have had.

You see that the opposition is radical between the mystic conception and your way of seeing which is that of most western intellectuals. When you studied the religions and comparative philosophy, the metaphysics and the metapsychology,

you assumed a strictly intellectual point of view; it was your right and it was logical and normal. But when it came to mysticism and yoga, you tried to maintain the same attitude, and yet the case was very different. Considering them too as systems built by the intellect on sensory and mental inputs, you were mistaken about their true nature. You surely found that their intellectual base was weak and their means often questionable. Then, looking for their *raison d'être* and the source of their intense vitality, you believed you had found them in the confused and ignorant, but insatiable and powerful, aspirations of suffering man.

You have never understood that the **subjective** can have as much value as the **objective**; that it too was subject to experience and even experimentation, and finally, that it approached the truth just as much as, **if not more**, than the latter. All said and done, you are one of those — and they are legion — who still ask for an objective and mental proof of the existence of God and cannot conceive that the only proof of that is personal and subjective: to find God within oneself!

The same limitations that we find in the explanation of the physical universe are found in all mental theories. The codes, the laws, the rules of conduct, as well as the dogmas, the theories and the systems are artificial, rigid, incomplete and false. It is said that as soon as the Law was written down, it became false. And that is perfectly true: all products of human activity are limited and imperfect. It is the same with the social and worldly customs, the religious and civil codes and laws, the moral and ethical notions, whatever they may be. It is precisely the false mystics who proclaim the truth of a unique and fixed **formula** to the exclusion of the others.

In the domain of morality, what results has man's intellect achieved? Abandoning the utopia of a scientific morality, he has subsequently discovered that Nature is **amoral**, that is to say he has been obliged in spite of himself to concede that Nature refuses to obey the so-called **moral laws** invented by him. He has come up against **instinct** of which he understands nothing, absolutely nothing, and which he has tried to include in a mental framework (the law of conservation of the individual and the species). In short, the balance sheet is paltry.

Strangely enough, we find many people, rejecting religion as superstition, theorising that Nature too is amoral, while in their private life subscribing to notions of honour and of integrity as if they have the sanction of the severest deities. Why this contradiction? It is because the **ethical consciousness** is not a product of reflection and of personal determination but that it is above all an influence of the collective on the individual. Heredity, education, environment are powerful in other ways than the free choice of the individual. The collective human ideals, like common morality and the elementary notion of good and bad, have changed with the time and the place, and will change still more. A typical example is furnished to us by the notion of **honour** which varies from one sex to another!

All this is essentially relative and transitory and cannot satisfy the seeker of the Truth.

Man is caught up in a mental atmosphere which moulds his thoughts and makes him see everything through a distorting screen. He thinks himself to be free — mentally speaking — and he has sucked even with his mother's milk a vast quantity of prejudices and conventions which he drags along all his life. He does not see them nor feel them because he lets himself be carried away by them without offering any resistance and because he does not struggle against the current of the human banality. They are very deep-rooted and one realises their whole power only when one seeks to liberate oneself from them. Besides, few are those who feel the need to do so and the vast majority do not even suspect their mental slavery.

No doubt you would have thought that it was quite useless and futile to wonder about problems of this nature, that all this is beyond and will always be beyond man and that a sane and balanced mind ought to refuse to tread this path. Does not wisdom mean simply to follow the common path, wherever one has been placed, to do one's duty as best one can and in the humblest manner possible? According to a saying attributed to Pascal which you have quoted so often to me: "Man is neither an angel nor a beast, and he who wants to act like an angel ends up acting like a beast!"

Even from the strictly utilitarian point of view, such a resignation or abdication is difficult to defend because, taken literally, it is a negation of the progress of the race. It is those who have separated themselves from the crowd and have walked alone who have shown the path and paved the way for the others. The inventors have always been pioneers and, most of the time, have only encountered mistrust and hostility around them.

To preach the fulfilment of **Duty** is good, but what is it? In its name people have accomplished the most contradictory acts; there are all kinds of duties, often conflicting. And what prejudices of race, of caste, of religion or even of family are incorporated in them! I will not start on that again.

Basically, there is only one Duty: it is the **loyalty to the Divine**. And this is why all those who are great have obeyed their inner *daemon* till the end whatever be the name that they gave it. This loyalty alone permits one to discover "the task one has to accomplish", that which one **must** do and what one **must** not do. For the superior man there is no other rule.

This is why I am unable to accept the hardly veiled reproach that I find from your pen, for having renounced a brilliant career, which would have been my **duty** (to society) to follow. And in your thought you almost accuse me of desertion.

But what is the criterion which allows you to judge with such certitude my duty — for me? If you tell me that in exchange for the education and everything that I have received from society, I owe in return my work or a certain amount of

work, I shall reply to you that it has not at all been proved that at present I am not acquitting myself of my debt as much as by working as an engineer in France.

Nobody has yet hazarded to establish a ranking of **cosmic utility** of human activities. Each one sees with his own eyes and not with the eyes of another. The Catholics strongly maintain that a life of prayer in a contemplative order is more useful for the salvation of the world than a life of good works or of philanthropy!

The value of an act considered in itself and independently of its author, is always weak. What constitutes its whole value is that it succeeds in expressing something of the inner life and the way in which it manifests it. Here the subjective still has a predominant **intrinsic value**.

The Americans have conducted popular referendums attempting to rank the great men of history. They have obtained unexpected results. But from the adoration that grips the masses for a Charlie Chaplin or a Rudolf Valentino or from the enthusiasm roused by the prowess of a Lindbergh or a Pivolo, can we deduce anything about the value of their profession? The ideal-type of the humanity too changes: priest, knight, engineer. . . Keyserling sees him today in the role of a **chauffeur**. Clerk, soldier, lawyer, **chauffeur** . . . the masses do not see any higher. Is that a sufficient reason for not lifting up the eyes?

If there were no values in the universe other than the most material ones, we could, along with the American, evaluate people by reducing them to dollars. This simplification is evidently absurd, but if we insist vehemently on comparing men or professions, it is still the only basis which has been suggested.

From a more elevated point of view, one may well examine the **good of humanity** as the goal of all human action. It is to do a great honour to man to see him as the unique interesting being in the universe. Some have devoted their efforts to plants and animals without demeaning themselves. Nature in her entirety surely does not have as her sole preoccupation the progress of the human species and even less the increase of its material well-being. Fortunately modern science has destroyed this blissful anthropocentrism, but it has replaced it with the assertion that the human mind is destined to master and dominate all the natural forces, by using and abusing them. It is the same arrogance of the mind under a scientific robe!

On these subjects we could debate long: and more eloquent persons than us have not come to the end of the matter.

The Good of mankind is again one of those mental labels which cover everything one wants to. The vast majority of those who think sincerely of working for it, work in effect **for the conception that they have of it**, which is not at all the same thing. Again there are those whom I have called the **reformers**. Peace and war, "prohibition" and its opposite, patriotism and internationalism, prostitution and continence, democracy and absolutism, wide-spread luxury and austere frugality, conversion of pagans, clericalism, secularism, Malthusianism and strong birth-rate, capitalism

and socialism, and the dozens of other **-isms** and **-ty's** are all advocated by their followers as striving for the **greatest Good** of humanity. But which one is it? It seems to be even more elusive than **Duty**. The Bolsheviki base themselves on it just as the inquisitors did. These latter even had a much higher ideal: "the greatest glory of **their God**", "*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*"!⁴

One can never be too wary of beautiful ideals and brilliant formulas! How many great souls have allowed themselves to be taken in by their cheap flashiness! Yes, truly, the mind is the great destroyer of the real. To base ourselves on it, is to build on shifting sands and this modern civilisation is beginning to realise it.

To your accusation (of neglecting my debt to society), it is possible to raise an objection. I prefer simply to reply to you that above all, I consider that I have received everything from God, that it is to Him, Him alone, I owe everything and my life is consecrated. It is his guidance that I shall take and it is in Him that I shall discover **the meaning of my life and its worth**.

Just as I regard myself as a trustee of His gifts and of His assets, in the same way I see you, my parents, as the intermediary through whom He has given me some of them: life, education, training, etc. And to regard you thus is not to diminish you or to take something away from you.

After this clearing up, what is left that one can lean on?

If the human mind cannot grasp the knowledge we thirst for, and if it cannot guide our action, if we must abandon all human motives, even the noblest and the most disinterested ones, as equally incapable of guiding us in a right, puissant, ample and true action; if even the chimeras of ideals — Duty, Justice, Motherland, Humanity, etc. — prove to be incapable of inspiring us the moment we pierce their solemn appearance and discover them to be artificial and empty, in short, if everything that is human gives way and collapses, it is because in our very depths, in the silence, the infallible guide reveals himself, the unwavering support, He who is the giver of Light, of Love and of Life.

Yes, just as there exists a principle of knowledge superior to mental knowledge, in the same way one can arrive at a principle of action superior to the human motives and impulsions. It means that first of all we must reach the deep and hidden root of our being, then, after having found it and identified with it, to manifest it in all its plenitude. Is not that accomplishing the **aim** of one's individual existence, the **raison d'être** of one's separate life? Is not that **doing what one ought to do** in the highest sense of the expression? The whole universe being a manifestation of the Divine, the aim is to participate consciously in it, with the perfect knowledge of the play of forces in action, instead of oneself being the plaything.

4. It is rather the motto of the Order of the Jesuits.

Reading the first page, you probably thought that I was preaching a **blind action**, without knowing where I was going and without regard for the consequences.

It is perfectly true that I had not foreseen the consequences of my actions which were only revealed to me long after their completion. It is also true that often at the moment of acting and **to justify mentally** the profound impulse of which I was conscious, I gave myself **reasons** which I subsequently recognised as false. But at the moment of being engaged in an important action, I have always been conscious of the path to which I was committed, of the plunge that I had taken, and of what its acceptance or its refusal meant to me. On that point I was **never** wrong. As for the rest, it simply proves that if I was sufficiently submissive in the inner guidance, my mind was not yet calm and translucent enough for the light to penetrate it in its entirety.

You often reproach me also for not being completely open to you and for not asking you for help and advice at the time of my departure from France. Perhaps now at last you will understand how our way of **functioning** was already entirely different. Whereas you were seeking to **reason out** my decision, to analyse each factor and weigh its worth, I was looking for only one thing: **mental silence**, the quieting of all agitation, in order to perceive in me the light and the guidance I needed. That was why I avoided speaking to you about these subjects because you immediately raised such a storm in my mind that I could no longer see clearly and felt myself out of my depth. Thus, instead of helping me, you hindered me considerably. And this I told you at that time and you remember it perfectly. You have interpreted it as my wish to hide myself from you, which is not true.

To return to my present life, I am surprised to find from your pen this sentence which refers to the details that I have given you about my day to day activities: "It is certainly not for buying cans of preserves or construction materials that you have left everything." It would seem that you are deliberately trying to close your eyes to everything that is not the most banal and the most basic conception. I would have thought that you would understand that the participation of the disciples in the organisation of the Ashram was above all a means of harmonising and of unifying the different parts of their being, of putting their functioning to the test and of bringing about their transformation.

This is precisely a characteristic element of Sri Aurobindo's yoga which embraces within its horizon all the parts and all the activities of the human being. Contrary to many of the ascetic and mystic disciplines, this yoga does not pursue an **escape from the world** in pure contemplation, but an **integral conquest** and a **perfect utilisation** of all the forces of human nature. Moreover, in what especially concerns manual or other work, many Catholic or Buddhist (Zen) monks have discovered the value of asceticism. From this point of view, the exact nature of the work is quite

secondary; what is important is the **inner attitude** and the **manner** in which it is executed.

Besides, what would you suggest to me in exchange of this perfect equilibrium between the inner and the outer that we seek to realise? Do you think that repairing the highways and the byways or even constructing the bridges and the sewers is of a thrilling interest in itself? No work is to be despised, but it must be an integral part of the inner life. Building bridges for some years in one corner of France or another, father of a family, then retired and member of a number of boards of directors . . . And then? This is the ideal that you are offering me (may be with a few small variations that you have in mind)!

Well, no! Too bad if I think myself called to be consciously a part of the universe instead of letting myself be enmeshed in the gears of the world. Once one has touched the **Divine Consciousness**, discovered its possibilities, tasted its munificence and its reality, all the rest seems drab and lifeless. Why then are you so bent on imposing on me the blinkers of the poor human mind which you yourself admit to be so limited and so narrow?

You also speak of **liberty**, of **living one's life**, etc. Is it then among those who are around you and whom you associate with, that you find realised your ideal of liberty? Do you not feel that they are slaves — as much as it is possible to be — of their desires, of their habits, of their preferences, of their collective prejudices? They are so enslaved that they do not perceive their own condition.

And what absurd conception of liberty to oppose the divine to the human! Man's highest destiny is his blossoming in the Divine Consciousness just as the flower's realisation is its blooming at the caress of the sun. For the flower does liberty mean not to bloom? What is man's life, even in that which is the most intense **passion**, compared with the life divine whose intensity and plenitude are shadowless?

Does it mean that I definitely cut myself from the world? Yes and no.

Yes, in this sense that certainly I could never resume the normal and ordinary life; it will be impossible to let myself get enmeshed in the gears of ordinary life.

No, because I do not lead the life of a recluse and I remain in touch with the world. All its activities do not interest us equally, but we follow them and we use those which tally with our realisation.

“In all this, then, our affection for you does not seem to count at all” is a sentence that is perhaps hovering on your lips. I confess that I do not see why our love should be affected, when I am consecrating myself to the noblest of aims which is given to man to conceive. I know that you think me to be far from you, not only in body but also in mind. But if I were beside you, you would find me equally far. And I can do nothing about it. It seems to me that it should be compensated by the understanding that I have found **my path**, that **I am doing what I must**. It is mainly to this end that I am writing this letter.

To be able to understand me, your desire to do so must be **sincere**. It must not be that when you receive a letter from me, you open it with a hope that at last I would have renounced my errors and recovered my reason. This sentiment is, perhaps, human and excusable, but it will not help you to understand me.

Do not, for the present, try to reason out my conduct. Put yourself in the calm and the serenity of your most intimate consciousness! There you will not have any difficulty to follow me. If you go deep in yourself, you will **always** find me there, unflinchingly.

The Truth is simple, but one must place oneself on its grounds to meet it.

As for Sri Aurobindo, he is the one who, I know, will take the initiative to lead me on the path of realisation. As I have already told you, I realised on meeting him that the search I undertook on leaving France is now over. From now on another task is before me, but to carry it out I have his advice and his support. With his **help** and **the Divine Grace**, I have full confidence in the success; moreover, I put myself entirely in the hands of the divine.

This letter is already long, and I think, I have spoken of the essentials. In no way am I trying to convince you, and above all I do not wish to whip up a discussion. My only aim is to furnish to your affection what it asks for: **a means to understand me**.

I am also sending you copies of some letters;⁵ perhaps they will help to put you in the line of our thinking. Two books on India by Romain Rolland are scheduled to appear shortly: although I do not place great value on their spiritual content, I think they are likely to give you interesting pieces of information.

I embrace all three of you affectionately.

Signed: Ph B St Hilaire

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

5. The first lot of four letters addressed to Marquès Rivière dated 22/6/1927, 1/11/1927, 10/9/1928 and 17/3/1929, as well as two letters to Noémi which will be published in a later issue.

INTERVENTIONS (II): PREVISIONS OF PARTITION AND OTHER ISSUES

[‘Interventions (I)’ appeared in the April 2009 issue of *Mother India*]

IF one accepts the perception that Sri Aurobindo “is truly [the] thinker of a post-globalised world, where the idea of human unity is celebrated in a framework of diversity and not uniformity”, if one accedes to the view that he has emerged “as a great thinker of world unity who [has been] largely responsible for imparting a spiritual significance to the idea of internationalism beyond Indian nationalism”¹ then one must also accept that the period between May 1909 and February 1910 was the phase which publicly established him as such a thinker and visionary. And yet this is perhaps the most neglected and the most misinterpreted part of his political activism and interventions. The view that upon his release from the Alipore jail, he took the next available ship to exile in Pondicherry, still colours the numerous so-called intellectual interpretations and discussions of his life and actions that have been widely dished out over the years. A look therefore at this phase, the last of his public interventions, will be necessary in order to show that a number of positions that Sri Aurobindo articulated during this period were made with the future well-being of the Indian polity in mind and contained in them clear indications and the sounding of a note of caution regarding the fate of a united India. It would also show that it was this phase which witnessed the presentation of his integrative philosophy of the nation and her constituent units and the vision of a future world order based on unity, kinship and harmony — a daring vision, considering the fact that the partition of Bengal had not yet been rescinded and most of his nationalist colleagues still remained incarcerated or exiled and the demand for freedom was looked upon as a madness without method. Our much awarded public intellectual in question with whom we had humbly dared to join issue during our last discussion has himself curiously omitted most references to this phase in one of his early “intimate” and widely read analyses of Sri Aurobindo’s political thought. Not that we shall publicly say that he too made a “hash” of its politico-spiritual interpretation. We ought to have no problem with that, simply accepting the fact that most academic assessments of historical figures have been done through the periscope of ideology, received academic conditioning and commitment. But before we attempt to look at one area of Sri Aurobindo’s intervention made during this brief period of about ten months and try and understand its relevance, it would be in order perhaps to attempt to shed some light on the defining concepts that have been thrust on the early revolutionary movement in Bengal, and thus re-align some perceptions of Sri Aurobindo’s political interventions made earlier.

I

The first call for revisiting the view that the early revolutionaries in Bengal represented solely an upper class aspiration for emancipation and had neglected the subaltern aspects of the movement, and were thus unable to assess and represent the ground realities and aspirations of the toiling class and instead envenomed social relations through their approaches to the movement, can now be voiced. Most discussions on the role of the early revolutionaries and their ideas initiated in the sixties, seventies and eighties of the last century, depended on limited source material and a few copies of the Bengali weekly *Yugantar* (1906-08) one of the chief vehicles of advanced nationalist thought inspired by Sri Aurobindo. It is well-known that at Barindra Kumar Ghose's suggestion Sri Aurobindo "agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*" and "himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and . . . always exercised a general control. . ." over it.² It was these discussions based on insufficient sources that gave rise to reductionism while assessing the early phase. The 'Report of the Native Papers in Bengal', a report prepared weekly by the colonial administration with inputs collected from officials on the ground was the standard source material through which an ideological analysis³ of the early revolutionaries was made; such an attempt evidently allowed colonial biases and fabrications to creep into post-colonial historiographical research of this period. Notable exceptions to this trend were Prof. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee who in their *Bharater Swadhinata Andolone Yugantar Patrikar Dan Ba Sri Aurobindo O Banglay Biplabbad* (Contribution of the *Yugantar* journal in the Indian Freedom movement or Sri Aurobindo and the Revolution in Bengal) (Calcutta, 1972), brought to light, based on limited material available then, the influence that *Yugantar* truly wielded at its peak. These pioneering scholars have always displayed a remarkable freedom from bias — ideological and academic — in their approach to new interpretations.

The discovery in the late 1990s of relevant files of the *Yugantar* stacked away in the records room of the historic Alipore Court⁴ calls for a revision of this phase of the Indian nationalist struggle. A survey of the articles contained in those records belies the charge of elitism and portrays instead a palpable concern for and championing of subaltern issues. It disproves the claim that "the new leaders were not intellectually equipped to understand that their task and their supporters' [task] lay in the development of the organisation of the working class and of the mass of the peasantry on the basis of their social, economic and political struggle for liberation."⁵ It reveals instead that they realised well the exigency of such a demand but saw it as one of the tracks that could lead to freedom.

The *Yugantar* was meant to galvanise the masses. The demand for including the *proletariat* that he made way back in 1893-94 was finally being carried out by Sri Aurobindo as a preliminary step through the pages of this weekly and it became

unquestionably “the most important single factor in the development of revolutionary thinking in Bengal between 1906 and 1908.”⁶ Famine, economic exploitation, support to organised strikes by workers and to “resistance movement of share croppers” and other struggles of the working class found regular and prominent space in the pages of the paper. It discussed in detail the cycle of famine–poverty–disease and gave statistics of the last one hundred years to prove its charges. The most affected by these epidemics was the helpless peasant, whose case the *Yugantar* energetically took up. It decried the stranglehold of the moneylender on the poor peasant and his inability to get out of its vicious grip because of the inhuman tax burden imposed by the colonial government. Nor was it sectarian in its approach and attitude.⁷ It extolled Muslim rule and openly stated that the Bengal peasant was better off under the Muslim dispensation rather than the British system. This it did through a series comparing the condition of the peasant under Muslim and British rule. The present framework, it decried, had decimated even that modicum of well-being by imposing, apart from the existing land-tax, a plethora of cess on the ryots in the form of a road cess, local cess, public works cess etc. That the arguments were not mere rhetoric is evident from the fact that the *Yugantar* nearly always armed itself with figures and statistics: the alien government, it concluded, had collected Rs. 12 crore as Road Cess from the people in the last three decades and yet it did not utilise this collected amount to better their lot, or to improve rural infrastructure. The rural roads were in a dismal state of disrepair, the water-bodies were not dredged, thereby allowing the water to stagnate and this in turn led to the outbreak of malaria and other water-borne diseases that vitiated potable water sources while also hampering trade and commerce. This situation was reported as early as the 1830s when a British observer noted that “The roads and tanks and canals which Hindu or Mussulman Governments constructed for the service of the nation and the good of the country have been suffered to fall into dilapidation; and now the want of the means of irrigation causes famines.” Nearly a hundred years after this observation and about three decades after the *Yugantar* phase, the Bengal Irrigation Department Committee in its Report of 1930 stated that, “In every district the *Khals* (canals) which carry the internal boat traffic become from time to time blocked up with silt. *Khals* and rivers are the roads and highways of Eastern Bengal, and it is impossible to overestimate the importance to the economic life of this part of the province of maintaining these in proper navigable order. . . . As regards the revival or maintenance of minor routes, . . . practically nothing has been done, with the result that, in some parts of the Province at least, channels have been silted up, navigation has become limited to a few months in the year.” Another professional observation on the canals and water-bodies may be relevant here in order to support the view that the *Yugantar* editorial group possessed a detailed knowledge of infrastructural conditions on the ground and based their arguments on such empirical evidence. Sir William Willcock (1852-1932) the renowned British irrigation engineer who did pioneering work in Egypt

and Mesopotamia, while making an investigation of water conditions in Bengal, discovered that the “innumerable small destructive rivers of the delta region, constantly changing their course, were originally canals which under the English regime were allowed to escape from their channels and run wild. Formerly these canals distributed the flood waters of the Ganges and provided for proper drainage of the land, undoubtedly accounting for that prosperity of Bengal” which attracted the East India Company. Willcock complained that, “[*not*] only was nothing done to utilise and improve the original canal system, but railway embankments were subsequently thrown up, entirely destroying it. [And that] Some areas, cut off from the supply of loam-bearing Ganges water, have gradually become sterile and unproductive, [while] others improperly drained, show an advanced degree of waterlogging, with the inevitable accompaniment of malaria. Nor has any attempt been made [he pointed out] to construct proper embankments for the Ganges in its low course, to prevent the enormous erosion by which villages and groves and cultivated fields are swallowed up each year.” He severely criticised the modern administration for having done “nothing to remedy this disastrous situation, from decade to decade.”⁸ The *Yugantar* on its part was simply trying to state these truths in a language that the masses understood.

No trace of elitism or ignorance of mass-conditions is evident from any of these well-argued and yet emotionally appealing articles.⁹ The firm belief that the masses — regardless of religious denominations — had to be included in the struggle for freedom from colonial exploitation is clear from the contents in its pages and if we admit that Sri Aurobindo played one of the principal roles in the paper’s ideological and policy formulation — in fact the colonial intelligence in one of its reports observed that Sri Aurobindo was “the chief of the *Yugantar* band, who has exercised greater influence over the revolutionary movement in India than perhaps anyone other man”¹⁰ — then the argument that he followed an elitist and solely religiously-inspired sectarian political action falls through. It reveals instead the grip of grass-roots issues that the so-called upper class revolutionaries possessed. It was because this mass mobilisation approach was perceived to be an effective method of stimulating the province to action that the repression unleashed on its workers was so severe and debilitating, thereby strangling any long-term success. In order to widen the ambit of its reach the paper displayed a remarkable interest not only in national but also in international affairs.¹¹

Closely monitoring the struggles of the “working people” it put forward the need for a great general strike in India against British rule. The words were not based on mere conjectures but rather showed that a detailed study of labour conditions across the world had been initiated. For example in its 25th November 1906 issue, the *Yugantar* discussed the uses and effectiveness of the instrument of *dharmaghat* — strike in a mass struggle and its applicability in the Indian context. The editor of the *Yugantar* was sent a copy of Arnold Roller’s pamphlet “The Social General

Strike”¹² which discussed in some detail Karl Marx’s formulations on strikes. Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), it may be mentioned here, had links, among others, with the legendary Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) whom she met in 1901 near London and her link to the Bengal group of early revolutionaries — especially the *Yugantar* group — is well known. She had, in fact, presented Peter Kropotkin’s books — *Career of a Revolutionist* and *In Russian and French Prisons* — to Bhupendranath Datta (1880-1961) on the eve of his imprisonment in the *Yugantar* sedition case. Therefore it was quite natural for the *Yugantar* radicals to keep a tab on other movements with radical agendas the world over. The *Yugantar* excerpted passages from Roller’s pamphlet. It clearly highlighted that the starting of a national strike by a colonised people against the colonising state was the first and principal step towards achieving national liberation¹³ and that the weapon of strike was an effective revolutionary weapon both in a subject and liberated society.

Reproducing quotes from the pamphlet the *Yugantar* article examined various aspects of strikes and labour movements. The following passage from the pamphlet: “*Karl Marx taught that every revolution always followed an economic crisis which increased the misery of the masses and aroused their revolutionary spirit,*” was quoted at the beginning of the article. It is evident from this that the early nationalists did not practise political untouchability! The article discussed miners’ strike, railway workers’ strike and the concept of sympathetic strike, and as an illustrative situation analysed the Pullman Strike of 1894 which was the first national strike in U.S. history — involving 150,000 people and twenty-seven states — that paralysed the entire national railway system. Siding with the capitalists during the struggle President Cleveland would, for the first time, in face of opposition from the state government, send federal troops who would fire at and kill protesting U.S. citizens. *The Social General Strike* also recommended the use of the sympathetic strike method in such cases so as to render administration by an oppressive government impossible. This, it noted, was done during the 1894 strike, though with limited success. The *Yugantar* also highlighted the concept of a sympathetic strike and made the point that a similar method of a nationwide strike could perhaps neutralise the small force with which the British held India. The article categorically distinguished the uses and methods of strike in a dependent and independent context.¹⁴

Alluding to the possibility of organising a general strike in the British-controlled Indian Jute Mill sector, the article stated that since India fulfilled the American jute demand such a strike would adversely hit both the British jute industry in India and the American jute trade and lead to movements in these respective countries resulting in the world knowing how the tax-burdened *proletariat* in India was pushed to extremes.¹⁵

That strikes could not be conjured up in vacuum was evident to the *Yugantar* when it affirmed that in order to create a nationwide strike situation a group of energetic and sacrificing workers was needed who, fired with idealism and infinite

circumspection, would sow the seeds of disaffection among the labouring classes. And in order to achieve success in this work, in order to establish an organised workforce, the founding of Labour Unions was required. The article interestingly signed off with the appeal that all those eager to know the process of establishing labour unions could contact the editor of the *Yugantar* who already possessed a book on the subject sent to him earlier.¹⁶

Our readers may wonder at our insistent dwelling on such “unspiritual” issues as labour movements and strikes, but our intention in doing so is to floor the accusation that the revolutionary nationalists were an isolated lot living in a make-believe world of religious symbolism and jargons. A detailed study of the advertisements that the *Yugantar* received gives an idea of the wide cross-section that supported it. The *Yugantar*'s policy was to allot space only for *swadeshi* products and an analysis reveals that all sections comprising of zamindars, industrialists, traders and small shopkeepers, contributed advertisements to support and sustain the paper.¹⁷ That the *Yugantar* had also developed a pan-community and cross-region character became evident when a group of Bihari students at the Eden Hindu Hostel in Calcutta captivated by its content and appeal proposed to start a Hindi version of the paper and pledged to initially invest Rs. 500/- for the project. But continuous police action against the weekly made that plan a non-starter. Among the students in the lead role was Dr. Rajendra Prasad, later the first President of the Indian Republic.¹⁸

What elicits surprise is the fact that proponents of people's history, analysts of class struggles, have overlooked these aspects of early revolutionary thought. An interesting but usually forgotten event may be relevant here in this context, since it illustrates, however briefly or locally, that the nationalist group had not allowed the movement to be controlled or manipulated by moneybags. The local zamindars of Baruipur, then in the district of 24 Parganas of Bengal [now in the South 24 Parganas of West Bengal], apprehending loss of revenue due to the Swadeshi movement turned “anti-swadeshi”. The pleaders of the area boycotted the zamindars. The zamindars convened a Twenty-Four Parganas Conference to air their grievances. The pleaders in turn decided to “organise a swadeshi meeting at Baruipur and they invited Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose, Syam Sundar Chakraborty and Hemendra Prasad Ghose to address the gathering. Accordingly, on April 12, 1908 at 6.00 p.m. the Swadeshi meeting was held at Baruipur. It aroused great enthusiasm in the locality. Hundreds of volunteers worked for the success of the meeting and patriotic songs were sung on the occasion.” All the leaders spoke at length and the meeting, which was a great success, ended after three hours.¹⁹

Whatever may have been the readings of people's movements across the world by these early nationalists there appears to be in them at least a genuine attempt at trying to imbibe and implement some of the tactics that would assist in including the masses in the liberation struggle, a factor which they realised to be crucial for success. The understanding of Sri Aurobindo's interventions in this aspect of the movement

therefore calls for a rethink; even though the initiative collapsed under severe administrative repression, it had at least made an attempt to pull the movement down from the annual inane speech-making jamboree that the then Congress platform had become.

II

The absence of an anti-religious or anti-spiritual bias is essential to be able to form a reasonable perspective of the truth of Sri Aurobindo's interventions during the brief period that he was active in Bengal post his acquittal in the Alipore Case. But most historians or social-psychoanalysts who have interpreted this period have done so selectively within the restrictive contour of a certain subscribed ideology habitually inventing an archetypal opponent invariably projected as an antithesis of their assumed progressive vision and readings.

The Indian political scene in the summer of 1909 was a desolate one, "most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression" all around.²⁰ The colonial government meanwhile had begun a crafty three-pronged policy that saw "outright repression on the one hand [to crush the militant nationalists and the nationalist party], concessions to rally the moderates on the other, matched by divide and rule through separate electorates for the Muslims" [done through the enactment of the Indian Councils Act, 1909]. The policies of 'Repression cum Reforms' and 'Rally the moderates' became henceforth the watchword of the colonial policymakers.²¹ Some, who had written off the extremists after the split at Surat in December 1907, saw them now as suffering great setbacks and losing public sympathy and leaders. "Their [extremists'] influence had suffered a great set-back from the wrecking of the Surat Congress, their great Deccanee leader [B.G.Tilak] was working out a long term imprisonment at Mandalay," wrote the "passionate imperialist", old India observer and habitual nationalist baiter Valentine Chirol (1852-1929) who read among a people that he perceived to be fed-up with anarchist violence the first feelings "of suppressed and largely inarticulate alarm and resentment [developing] into a definite reaction in favour of government as by law established."²² A "political paralysis seemed to be creeping over the country drying up the blood-streams of national life", the "promised Dawn" appeared to have indeed receded.²³ Under these bleak, apparently unsympathetic circumstances, where nationalist public meetings were being attended by a few hundred spiritless, lifeless and unenthusiastic passers-by,²⁴ Sri Aurobindo "decided to continue the fight single-handed", he was "determined to continue the struggle" because he clearly perceived that the anti-colonial sentiment "had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by suppression."²⁵ And by re-launching this resolute fight he became the sole spokesperson and chief strategist of

the nationalist party. It was during this period of peak repression and demoralisation that he addressed as many as thirteen public meetings and in almost each one he spoke of hope, of unity, of unfaltering dedication to the religion of nationalism and freedom. In September 1909 he “piloted the Bengal Provincial Conference at Hooghly” himself conducting all intricate political negotiations and despite a deadlock succeeded in substantially re-establishing the nationalists as a politically active force. He had by this time launched two independent weeklies *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* with the aim of reorienting the whole gamut of the national political, cultural and religious discourse. These weeklies would gradually increase in demand and popularity taking a refreshingly original approach to national issues and problems.

A separate discussion is really called for in order to analyse the whole range of Sri Aurobindo’s views as stated in these organs. Our intention in pointing these out is to say that if it was true, as some have averred, that after his release Sri Aurobindo used religion as “a royal road for an honourable retreat”²⁶ then how does one explain this single-handed and one-pointed political activism that he renewed and reorganised in face of an acutely hostile administrative onslaught? If a pre-meditated retreat was the sole objective, surely this was the ideal period to fade into non-confrontational oblivion; what was the point or need to even try and revive a movement that seemed to be approaching apparent extinction as a political creed and programme? Does such an action not signify, apart from an indomitable will, an astute sequential understanding of public movements? Sri Aurobindo knew that at least through this attempt at resuscitation a continuity of the demand for *complete freedom* would be maintained, and the overall objective kept alive would serve as a link between the mass movements of the Swadeshi period and later movements of mass civil disobedience. Had he omitted this intervention made in favour of the nationalist movement, had he actually taken the path and followed methods that analysts of his political action falsely attribute to him, then perhaps the nationalist demands — most of them foundations of later mass movements — would have actually been buried and we would probably witness another tame, predominantly dialogical movement, petitioning for freedom. In an age when public life and activism in the country is represented by chronic party-swapping and ideology-dumping, it is hard to visualise, leave aside assess, such determination on political essentials.

Another point that requires mention — though it lies in the realm of metaphysics and hence beyond our grasp for the moment and not strictly pertaining to our discussion on histories of interventions — is the fact that Sri Aurobindo’s fundamental spiritual realisations were concurrent with his gross political action. It would be therefore relevant to recall here some aspects of that concurrence. Sri Aurobindo started his yoga around 1904-1905; by this time he had already initiated political work in Bengal. But prior to this he had a stream of experiences, now well-known except to some who chose to conveniently ignore them in order to impose their thesis of his political life and action. Recounting these earlier experiences, Sri

Aurobindo recalled that he “felt an immense calm as soon as [he] landed in Bombay.” This was followed by the “experience of the Self, the Purusha” followed by two experiences of contact with the Infinite — one at Poona on the Parvati hills and the other on the Shankaracharya hill in Kashmir, an experience where he “saw in an image of Kali the living Presence”. His spiritual process unfolded along with his political action, e.g. it has to be indicated that two of his early fundamental spiritual realisations followed hectic and crucial political action and achievements. The split at Surat was followed by the *nirvanic* experience at Baroda and it was when immersed in this experience that he delivered the Bombay National Union speech on 19 January, 1909. His next momentous political event, his incarceration at Alipore saw him “practise [there] the Yoga of the Gita” and “meditation with the help of the Upanishad” and realise the “Divine as all beings and all that is”. Also at Alipore during his solitary meditation he “was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking” to him for a fortnight “on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience.” Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual unfolding was thus a continuous process since his days at Baroda; in fact at Uttarpara where “for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and spiritual experiences” he was already reaching in a sense the culmination of a first phase. This continuity, this phenomenon of spiritual unfolding amidst hard political action, is what calls for deeper understanding, for they seem to reveal that religion was not suddenly and cleverly taken recourse to in order to chalk out an “honourable retreat” to political inaction but had been for quite a while an active part of daily living and action.²⁷ It is understandable why a certain class of scholars, imbued as they have been with a social-philosophy that denies the role of the metaphysical in human evolution, have thoroughly misunderstood this phase of Sri Aurobindo’s political action and have seen it as a product of “stress” and “strain”.

Thus in accordance with his core spiritual formulation there was no rejection of action by Sri Aurobindo, no dichotomy between his spiritual pursuits and his daily grind of politics and journalism. Such a situation may seem strange to some historians today who unilaterally interpret secularism in opposition to religion, but it was perfectly intelligible to the masses that spontaneously conferred on Sri Aurobindo the dual role of political leader and spiritual mentor. It would be worthwhile to recollect here some first-hand facts that confirm this dual role. Nolini Kanta Gupta (1889-1984) worker of the revolutionary party in the first phase of his association with Sri Aurobindo, closely observed, while on a tour of Assam in 1909, how common village folk who did not understand English nevertheless “came in crowds . . . just to hear him [Sri Aurobindo] speak and have his *darshan*.” Nolini Kanta asserts that Sri Aurobindo did not confine himself “to political matters alone” for “there were many who knew that he was a Yogi and spiritual guide and they sought his help in these matters too.” “I have myself seen,” he recalled, “how [Sri Aurobindo] would sit up practically the whole night [meditating] and go to bed only for a short

while in the early hours of the morning.”²⁸ A few more points on spiritual life and public action may also be in order here. In fact, strange as it may seem today, when the only uses of “god-men” in politics is for astrological predictions of “winnable” seats and viable coalitions, most nationalist leaders who left a mark in their respective areas of nationalist action during the early part of the last century “were either Yogis or disciples of Yogis” and were inspired by their masters to dedicate their life and their all for the upliftment and liberation of the country without concern for their personal welfare or aggrandisement. Satish Chandra Mukherjee (1865-1948) the founder of the Dawn Society and pioneer of the National Education Movement in Bengal, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta (1858-1919) Sri Aurobindo’s “fellow-worker” in the nationalist movement who among other things mobilised funds for the secret society and Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) were all disciples of the legendary Bengali Yogi Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami (1841-1899). Satish Chandra was asked by his Guru to “devote himself wholly to the education of the youth of the country. He was told that his mission in life was to propagate education.” He was also advised by his master to take to the path of “*Akash-Vritti* (sole dependence on God for material necessities) and not follow any occupation as a means for livelihood.” To this Satish Chandra adhered till death and concentrated all his energies on originating the national education movement. After his release from Buxar Jail (March 9, 1908), Bipin Chandra Pal also spoke of his spiritual realisations while in detention there. Pal’s biographers refer to these six months of his seclusion as “a period of marked internal changes in Bipinchandra himself.” [And that] “In the solitude of his cell he discovered a deeper meaning of India’s battle for liberation. In his flashes of insights he saw in the national movement the manifestations of the Divine Will, the working of a mightier force” and realised that the “*Swaraj* or Independence for which India was passionately struggling was meant not only for her own sake but also for the sake of the world.” The point being made here is that there pre-existed a solid tradition of serious spiritual practices among most leaders of the early nationalist movement; it was not by a sudden convenient freak of mental intuition that they began seeing visions or became spiritual when embroiled in persecutions or afflicted by failures. Such a phenomenon therefore cannot be appropriately analysed if seen in isolation and most certainly not if seen through the tinted glasses of an anti-religious prejudice; one needs to have in mind the usual trajectory of the individual’s spiritual quest in the Indian classical context to be able to read correctly these trends of spiritual revelations and developments and to see that they were and remain a perfectly legitimate and natural process wholly in tune with the Indian religious and spiritual traditions. Discussing the spiritual inspiration that gave strength to the movement Sri Aurobindo later observed that “the influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda worked from behind.” “The Movement and the Secret Society,” he recalled, “became so formidable that in any other country with a political past they would have led to something like the French Revolution.” It is also interesting to

note that in March-April 1908, when Sri Aurobindo had no inkling of his impending arrest a month later, his editorial articles on Bipin Chandra Pal were prophetic in his own context; e.g. covering Bipin Chandra's College Square speech on his release, in the 12th March, 1908 issue of the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo wrote, ". . . he [Bipin Chandra] was removed for a while from the busy scene which was so largely filled with his great personality and far sounding eloquence, removed by a means which man would never have dreamed of, by a chain of petty circumstances which seemed mere fortuity so that for six months his soul might be alone with itself and he might take stock of his personal strength and weakness and realise that his strength was not his own but God's, his eloquence was not his own but God's. . . . All great teachers have to go through this hour of lonely self-communion and deep mental travail in order that they may learn the nature of their commission and whence it proceeds. It is only after this hour has come to them that their mission really begins, and all that went before was merely a preparation for that hour; for they must feel the power within them before they can realise who gave them the power . . ." Sri Aurobindo in a sense anticipates here his own situation and transformation while in detention a few months later. And on emerging from that detention he too spoke of the surety of his mission and included the welfare of humanity in the scheme of Indian liberation. Isn't it stretching things too far if one argues that this too was a pre-planned write-up inspired by pre-meditation on the issue of creating an "honourable retreat" in future using the wand of religion!! The question that seeks clarification instead is whether social history written in the Indian context retains the capacity to accept the truth that the Indian struggle for freedom had a constant spiritual undercurrent to it and if not, then whether it reserves the academic right to denigrate or distort the assessment of such manifestations?²⁹

The simple truth of the observation that "revolutionary Aurobindo and Yogi Aurobindo co-existed in his [Sri Aurobindo's] personality side by side". . . & that "two Aurobindos flourished simultaneously for a long time",³⁰ is usually lost amidst the ideologically motivated analysis of a spiritual phenomenon which becomes fairly simple and natural if seen instead from the classical Indian standpoint — of the *philosopher-statesman*. In fact it is perhaps this truth that places in perspective the phase of Sri Aurobindo's action between release (1909) and withdrawal (1910), a truth that some analysts who have displayed a "remarkable failure of intelligence" and "imagination" in "dealing with the question of religion in public life"³¹ have refused to even consider in a fair academic spirit.³²

(To be continued)

ANIRBAN GANGULY

Notes and References

1. Ramin Jahanbegloo, *The Spirit of India*, pp. 128-29, Penguin, New Delhi, 2008. Interestingly, Jahanbegloo, a distinguished intellectual of Iran, often referred to as the Iranian Gandhi and presently Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, Canada, devotes a whole chapter in his monograph to understanding some key philosophical and political concepts of Sri Aurobindo and arrives at this conclusion through his own independent assessment. While some saw this phase of Sri Aurobindo's political activism as sowing the seeds of a divisive nationalism, Jahanbegloo sees this phase as one that established the foundations of a future possibility of human unity amidst a thriving diversity.

2. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, p. 50, 2nd imp., Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006. A detailed study and research of the *Yugantar* phase and Sri Aurobindo's statement of exercising always a general control of the affairs of the paper is called for in order to deepen our understanding of Sri Aurobindo's political policies and approaches. This could lead one to refute a number of standpoints which argue that Sri Aurobindo's political action was mainly based on and inspired by a de-linked religiosity that refused to look at the more practical aspects of the nationalist movement.

3. Amalendu De, *Sri Aurobindo's Role in Indian Freedom Struggle*, p. 2, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2003.

4. It was Smt. Joya Mitter (1936-1999) then Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Kolkata, who during one of her many exhaustive searches through old records in the city, found these historical documents from the Alipore Court Record Section and with the help of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry, and others, preserved them for posterity. It is perhaps this one discovery, after a long lull, which calls for a reassessment of a number of established notions and concepts regarding the early Indian revolutionaries.

5. R. Palme-Dutt, *India Today*, p. 291, 1940.

6. Peter Heehs, 'The Maniktala Secret Society' in *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism*, p. 19, 2nd imp., Oxford University Press (OUP) New Delhi, 2005. Fifteen months after its launch the paper's circulation was still confined to 200, but the following year after facing four sedition charges the demand for the *Yugantar* jumped to 50,000.

7. The *Yugantar* had as its symbol both emblems of the dominant religions of Bengal — Hinduism and Islam — it had the trident (*trishul*) and disc (*chakra*) representing the former and the crescent and sword representing the latter. Prof. Amalendu De in his study of the *Yugantar* files has pointed this out to be representative of the urge of the early revolutionaries to include all sections in their fight against colonial rule and exploitation. In an editorial entitled 'Hindu, Muslim and the English' the *Yugantar* stated that the Muslims had invaded this country like warriors and had dared the Hindus to fight in open battle — the Hindus fought bravely and accepted defeat, but the English have entered this country like thieves and have exploited the Muslim's simple trust and with the help of traitors have subjugated the entire nation. [See e.g. his editorial note in *Agnijuger Agnikatha* (1906-1908) ed. Angshuman Bandyopadhyay (Beng.) Publication Department, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry & Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 2001.] Prof. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee discussing the *Yugantar* emblem state that the symbols in it represented on the one hand *Shakti* — strength — and on the other a non-communal outlook. They felt that to look for a communal angle in this and in the *Yugantar's* attitude in general would be a distortion of the truth. [See their *Swadeshi Andolon O Banglar Nabajug* (Beng.) p. 122, reprint, Kolkata, 2004.]

8. G. Thompson, *India and the Colonies*, 1838, G. Emerson, *Voiceless Millions*, 1931, Sir William Willcock, *Lectures on the Ancient System of Irrigation in Bengal and Its Application to Modern Problems*, Calcutta University Readership Lectures, University of Calcutta, 1930. Regarding the economic stagnation that had overtaken India under colonial rule, American historian and social commentator Mike Davis in his "*Late Victorian Holocaust: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*" (New York, 2000) makes the unnerving revelation that, "*In the last half of the 19th century, India's income fell by 50%. In the 190 years prior to independence, the Indian economy was literally stagnant — it experienced zero growth.*" [*South Asian History — The Colonial Legacy — Myths and Popular Beliefs* accessed at: http://india_resource.tripod.com/colonial.html]

9. For a detailed exposition of this aspect of the argument see e.g. *Agnijuger Agnikatha* (1906-1908) ed. Angshuman Bandyopadhyay (Beng.), Publication Department, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry & Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 2001. Based on the newly discovered primary sources this work radically alters the existing reading of this period. Also see, Amalendu De, *Sri Aurobindo's Role in Indian Freedom Struggle*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2003 & Goutam Neogi, 'Sri Aurobindo and the Weekly 'Yugantar'', in *Rbhu*, February 21, 2005

pp. 58-72, Kolkata. All these three works on the *Yugantar* phase based on the newly discovered material reflect and elaborate the above position.

10. Angshuman Bandyopadhyay, *Bigyapane Yugantar* [Beng.] (*Yugantar* through Advertisements) p. 5, Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Calcutta [date not stated].

11. *Agnijuger Agnikatha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 22.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 23. German anarchist Siegfried Nacht (1878-1956), assumed the pseudonym "Arnold Roller" and published widely in the anarchist press from 1901 onwards. Nacht, who participated in the Antimilitarist Congress in Amsterdam in 1904, was active in Spain for a few years from 1903, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1912, changed his name to Stephen Naft and was naturalised in 1920. Nacht (Naft) worked as a journalist for the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* in the early 1920s, was Latin America Editor of the *Tass* 1925-33, editor of the French news agency Havas in New York between 1934 and 1935 and also worked as the U.S. Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs during World War II. [John Crump, *The Anarchist Movement in Japan*, 1996 & International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Archives, accessed at: <http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/n/10764459.php>] '*The Social General Strike*', a widely distributed work, was translated and published in Chicago under the pseudonym of Arnold Roller in June 1905 to coincide with the founding conference of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Two hundred socialists, anarchists and radical trade unionists participated in the convention of the IWW, "considered to be one of the most important events in the history of industrial unionism and of American labour movement in general." At its peak in 1923 the IWW had a membership figure of 100,000 and could also mobilise the support of a workforce of around 300,000. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World] It is also known that the "*Social General Strike*" was widely distributed among anarchists in Japan. Kotoku Denjiro (alias Shusui Kotoku) (1871-1911) Japanese socialist and anarchist who played a major role in "introducing anarchism to Japan in the 20th century" by translating major works of European and Russian anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin, got a copy of Nacht's pamphlet in the U.S. and translated it on his return to Japan and in 1907 clandestinely distributed a thousand copies among students and workers. [*The Anarchist Movement in Japan*, *op. cit.*] For Sister Nivedita's links with anarchist leaders see e.g. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 1, p. 37, Calcutta, 1982, Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda: Patriot-Prophet*, pp. 66-67, 2nd revised ed., Calcutta, 1993, Peter Heehs, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 87]

13. *Agnijuger Agnikatha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 182.

14. *Agnijuger Agnikatha*, *op. cit.*, p. 182. Internet access: <http://www.kansasheritage.org/pullman/index.html> & <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman/pul6.html>

15. *Agnijuger Agnikatha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-85.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-87.

17. See e.g. Angshuman Bandyopadhyay, *Bigyapane Yugantar* [Beng.] (*Yugantar* through Advertisements), Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture, Calcutta, [date not stated]. Basing himself on the circulation figure of twenty thousand, Bandyopadhyay argues that around twenty people usually read a copy of the weekly bought by one person at the rate of one paisa per copy. Based on such a break-up he estimates the total readership to have gone up to about 400,000. Since the *Yugantar* had attracted the attention of the masses through its down-to-earth, hard-hitting language and views, he says, it may be safely assumed that each copy was preserved to be read a number of times, thereby increasing its retention value. This suited the advertisers as their product kept receiving a recycled publicity! Discussing political events of that period, decades later, Sri Aurobindo remarked that 'the sympathy of the whole nation was on our side. Even shopkeepers were reading *Jugantar*. . . ours [movement] comprised [apart from the upper middle classes] even the lower middle classes. . .' [Nirodbaran ed. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 14 / 15 December 1938, pp. 26, 27, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2001]

18. Oral statement of Dr. Rajendra Prasad made to Dr. Bhupendranath Datta referred to in *Swadeshi Andolon O Banglar Nabajug*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

19. Amalendu De, *Raja Subodh Chandra Mallik and His Times*, pp. 133-34, National Council of Education, Bengal, Calcutta, 1996.

20. *Autobiographical Notes*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

21. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, p. 281, New Delhi, 2004, R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* Vol. II, p. 244, reprint, Calcutta, 1997.

22. Valentine Chirol, *India, Old and New*, p. 85, 1921.

23. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: A biography and a history*, p. 333, 5th ed. Sri Aurobindo

International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 2006.

24. This did not deter, however, one of the doyens of Indian journalism Ramananda Chatterjee (1865-1943) from presiding over the Swadeshi meeting held at Beadon Square, Calcutta in the inclement afternoon of 13 June 1909 in which Sri Aurobindo was the principal speaker. Ramananda Chatterjee who had a flair for blending 'literary and illustrative journalism' was the editor of the pioneering and widely read English journal *Modern Review* and the Bengali *Prabasi*. In 1909 Chatterjee was referred to as a 'notable representative' of those 'sanest Indians' who 'are for a "nationhood of India", undivided by caste, religion or racial differences.' [A political demand and vision that Sri Aurobindo did much to evolve] and as one who 'seeks through the medium of the Press, to rouse India to a sense of its fallen condition and inspire the natives of the land to help themselves.' [Tribute paid to Chatterjee by W. T. Stead, editor of the influential *Pall Mall Gazette*, cited in Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India — 1850-1922*, pp. 120-21, Cambridge University Press, 1994.] It was not a token attendance on request from nationalists for morale boosting but a clear and bold gesture of support for what Sri Aurobindo and nationalist workers through him were attempting to re-initiate. Chatterjee, it may be mentioned, remained in regular contact with Sri Aurobindo during the latter's political activism in Bengal, not as some would suppose for news scoops, but at a deeper level for the success of the nationalist action. "Public intellectuals" may thus appreciate the fact that Sri Aurobindo did receive unstinted support in his political work from a number of leading public intellectuals of his time.

25. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 124, 5th imp. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006 & *Autobiographical Notes*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

26. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India (1885-1947)*, p. 125, New Delhi, 1983.

27. See for beginning of yoga, Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, p. 19, 5th imp., Pondicherry, 1989, Nirodbaran ed. *Talks*, *op. cit.* p. 106. Vide a detailed note in Nirodbaran ed. *Talks*, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-38 for the experience of hearing Swami Vivekananda's voice in the Alipore Jail. Vide *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 10, pp. 33-37, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2001 for Sri Aurobindo's diary notes on yogic visions and experiences kept during 17-25 June 1909 while he was in the midst of heavy political work.

28. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Smritir Pata* (Beng.) quoted in Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, p. 328, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1981.

29. Vide Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *The Origins of the National Education Movement*, pp. 191-92, 2nd revised ed., Calcutta, 2000, Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *Bipin Chandra Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj*, pp. 80-81, reprint, Kolkata, 2007, Nirodbaran ed. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* Vol. 1, p. 26, *op. cit.*, & Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, p. 750, 5th imp. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1997. Another personality who combined nationalist activism with spiritual pursuits was Dr. Mahendra Chandra Nandi (1855-1932) also known as the 'Tolstoy of Brahmanbaria'. Apart from being a revered philanthropist Nandi was a pioneer in Swadeshi industries especially popularising the manufacturing of matches on a large scale and was a close associate of Sri Aurobindo and father of Ashok Nandi accused in the Alipore Case who died while in detention. [Vide *Samsad Bengali Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 1, p. 406, 2nd ed. Kolkata, 2002, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, pp. 101-03, Jaico, reprint 2008; for Sri Aurobindo's comments on Nandi see Nirodbaran ed. *Talks*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50].

30. For Prof. Binoy Kumar Sarkar's (1887-1949) observations vide Prof. Haridas Mukherjee's S. P. Sen Memorial Lecture, appendix II in *Sri Aurobindo & The New Thought in Indian Politics*, 2nd ed. Calcutta, 1997 & Haridas Mukherjee, ed. *Binoy Sarkar's Baithake* [Beng.] p. 68, reprint, Kolkata, 2003.

31. Sugata Bose, *The Spirit and Form of an Ethical Polity: a Meditation on Aurobindo's Thought*, p. 137, *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 1(2007), Cambridge University Press.

32. In order to further comprehend this failure of imagination, see e.g. Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, New Delhi, 2003. Containing an egregious selection of passages from Sri Aurobindo's early political writings this work displays a remarkable contortion of his views and points to a definite "failure of hermeneutic integrity" in interpreting them.

WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?

(Science fiction?)

WHERE are the others?

It was between 1970 and 1972. We arrived on earth together. There were many of us. We advanced horizontally, or rather in a semicircle as I had been able to see the others on each side.

We were luminous of an intense golden orange colour, very dense. Our consciousness was clear, without the drawback created by thoughts. We simply advanced towards earth. What I perceived in front of us was dim: a dark emptiness.

* * *

On green earth, I feel I have arrived. I am standing solidly not really knowing how to manage my size on this small earth. I am tall, golden orange, containing a power in my members that are fluid yet compact, thick yet without bones or breakable parts. Earth has to be discovered. Where are the others?

* * *

Fitting into a physical human body. Difficult. . . tight. . . very tight. Vision is extremely reduced. One feels rigid, breakable, crushable. I carry the joy of where I come from. Where are the others?

I can feel them. I am aware of them. I can see them with my “big eyes” without being able to place them precisely, but the small eyes of the small body do not see them.

Happily an inner “psychic” body, completely formed and with my own colour, my own frequency, had been prepared. At first I settled there. Then, gradually I spread to other parts: no problem with a body made of the subtle physical substance, that body that had become white. But the form of the material physical body cannot stand the pressure yet, nothing works normally anymore: it melts, it goes off track, it burns. Where are the others?

* * *

Sometimes one can feel in the small human body, like an answer, sparkles of joy.

But that’s not the small body, it’s the substance of which it’s made. Vitality has dropped, locked up inside. I have lost my vast dimension. Limits. . . limits. . . limits. . .

The powerful fluidity of my members would like to overflow from there, free itself from that. Free, but nothing would be done. One must stay in there, one must fix.

The others? Perhaps we are isolated on purpose, still connected to our origin. We must not lose time.

Elsewhere 1999

* * *

I have found some others, they are here. Without identifying their human form.

The colour has slightly changed. There is a roseate tinge in the gold and orange.

Auroville 2007

* * *

I am spreading in the small body from inside and watching from outside. There are places on earth where one can not only be present: we can live our joy and in that joy we spread through each other. Places of indispensable solid tranquillity that gives the possibility to spread into earth.

Somewhere in Auroville 2009

* * *

We have formed a solid block, united, not as we had arrived, but now in the individual psychic beings, all united in all.

A mass of force and sweet harmony, a music, a soft song, a collective smile that dissipates the hardness and hostility, and that is stronger than all adversity, constantly nourished all over the world by our origin.

January 2010

‘PREMA KUNCHIKA’

. . . It would seem that a certain number of individuals — until now it seems to have been more in time, as a succession, but it could also be in space, a collectivity — are indispensable so that this Truth can become concrete and realise itself.

Practically I am sure of it.

. . . It is either a group in time, extending over a period of time, or a group spread out in space — perhaps both — that are indispensable for this Realisation. I am convinced of it.

THE MOTHER

(On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 136-37)

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

(Continued from the issue of June 2010)

DESPITE the fact that the French fought well in many areas, the Germans overran the Allied Forces in the field.

Sri Aurobindo was told what a huge number Hitler had thrown into the battle in the North and he said:

Yes, if Weygand can hold on, it's all right; otherwise a dark lookout. Germany has the advantage of concentrating all its strength at one point, while the Allies have to keep their forces scattered. (9 June 1940, *TW*¹, p. 700)

On 9 June the Germans launched a major offensive on Paris. Sri Aurobindo commented:

. . . Paris has been the centre of human civilisation for three centuries. Now he will destroy it. That is the sign of an Asura. History is repeating itself. The Graeco-Roman civilisation was also destroyed by Germany.

N: But if France does not defend Paris?

Sri Aurobindo: Then he will not destroy it immediately. . . .

(13 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 706-07)

A disciple remarked that Germany had thrown in a huge army to which Sri Aurobindo replied:

A tremendous number. They have lost about half a million, and as many in Belgium, and still they are putting in fresh numbers. Can France stand against it all? (10 June 1940, *TW*, p. 702)

The Germans were advancing rapidly, yet one disciple told Sri Aurobindo of the French claim of having pushed the Germans back five miles. Sri Aurobindo smiled and replied:

That is only in one sector. There are thirty others. . . .

(13 June 1940, *TW*, p. 708)

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

Italy declared war on England and France on 10 June 1940. Sri Aurobindo observed:

So Mussolini has butted in? When he sees that Germany is winning he comes to share the spoils. (11 June 1940, *TW*, p. 704)

Earlier when asked with whom Italy would side, Sri Aurobindo responded:

She can do anything. Today she will declare you her friend and tomorrow join your enemy. . . . (17 April 1940, *TW*, p. 611)

Later he commented on Mussolini:

. . . But nobody knows what Mussolini will do. He is a great bluffer and may keep on bluffing as bluffing is very pleasant to him.

(18 May 1940, *TW*, p. 644)

Sri Aurobindo knew that Hitler too would betray Mussolini and he said:

. . . As long as Hitler has England to fight, he will keep Italy with him.

(21 June 1940, *TW*, p. 736)

On 11 June, Churchill visited France for discussions with the French leaders. In a heated discussion the French demanded every available fighter plane for the French battle. Churchill refused, saying that the decisive battle would come over the skies of Britain, and every fighter would be needed there. Only twenty-five fighter squadrons remained and UK Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Dowding refused to send any more fighters to France.

On 14 June 1940, without any Allied reserves to meet the enemy, Hitler entered Paris. There were no battles as Paris was undefended. Sri Aurobindo remarked:

That is to prevent the destruction of Paris. Hitler is getting remarkable inspiration from his Asura. He doesn't go by reason but only by the voice. He considers all possibilities and when he fixes on something he goes ahead. Only, he did not foresee the British and French intervention on behalf of Poland.

. . .

N: Already he is being hailed as greater than Napoleon.

Sri Aurobindo: That he is not. Napoleon did not have Hitler's resources. If he had had them, he would have conquered England.

(14 June 1940, *TW*, p. 709)

When it was pointed out to Sri Aurobindo that Paris was relatively easy to capture as it was near the frontier, he countered:

Yes, but each yard of fighting costs a tremendous loss. This war is not so bad as the last one, as that was trench warfare. Besides, in the defence the loss is less than in the attack.

S: Even in the open field?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, because in the defence the army remains behind the guns.
(14 June 1940, *TW*, p. 711)

On 15 June Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . Hitler has said that he will enter Paris on the 15th. He may have meant the army.

He continued:

Yes, he is getting remarkable guidance from his Asura. Sometimes the Asuras have an extraordinary foresight that comes true with perfect precision both on the vital and subtle-physical planes, just like that which is possible on the spiritual planes. Of course they are not always infallible. But Hitler committed only one mistake: when attacking Poland he thought that the Allies wouldn't intervene. (*Smiling*) Napoleon did not have such guidance.

(15 June 1940, *TW*, p. 713)

When Sri Aurobindo was told that the French ran the risk of being annihilated, he remarked:

Annihilated? How? They can withdraw towards the south. They still have their fleet.

He added:

If they can defend the Maginot Line and provided they have the supplies and the ammunition, they can stand for a long time. (16 June 1940, *TW*, p. 717)

On 16 June 1940, Prime Minister Reynaud resigned and Pétain was installed. Pétain decided to stop fighting and to negotiate peace terms with Hitler. Referring to Pétain and his Government Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . These people ought to be shot for the betrayal of France.

(18 June 1940, *TW*, p. 726)

When Sri Aurobindo was told that the priests were happy because Pétain was a Catholic, he said:

Oh yes, but our position will be bad. If a Catholic government takes control, then our Ashram won't be allowed to exist. (9 July 1940, *TW*, p. 794)

A disciple observed that France had acted more dishonourably than the Belgian King, to which Sri Aurobindo said:

Oh, yes. Besides, Hitler now becomes the master of Europe.

A moment later a disciple said:

Now the Mediterranean situation will be critical. If Hitler gets the French fleet, then with Italy on his side he will be very powerful.

Sri Aurobindo affirmed:

Yes, and Turkey's position will be dangerous. Now only Hitler's death can save the situation. (17 June 1940, *TW*, p. 721)

A day later the following conversation took place where Sri Aurobindo emphasised the importance of never being subservient and to have the determination to fight back.

N: Some people in India defend France's peace offer. They say, "What can the French do? Their army was being annihilated. As they were defeated they had no other course."

Sri Aurobindo: That is the typical Indian mentality. That is why India is under subjection. Just because an army has been defeated, must it surrender? Will a subject nation then always be a subject nation? Won't it fight for freedom? See what the Poles have done. They have resisted in spite of their severe defeat. The Belgian and the Dutch Governments have not surrendered, they have withdrawn.

P: Besides, the French still have a big army still intact. The navy and the air force are theirs. Why should they surrender?

Sri Aurobindo: Quite so. Moreover, as you go on fighting, moral and spiritual forces may rise up and assert themselves. No, France has become inferior now.

N: France does not believe in moral forces.

Sri Aurobindo: But ancient France did believe.

N: Dilip believes that England also will give up the fight. How can she fight alone?

Sri Aurobindo: She has always fought alone. That again is the Indian subject mentality. No great things can be done unless one sticks on in the face of defeat and failure. Hitler had himself been imprisoned but he stuck on like a bulldog even after defeat. Now he is the master of Europe.

(18 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 725-26)

On the subject of subjection an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo comes to mind:

Those who are deficient in the free, full and intelligent observation of a self-imposed law, must be placed in subjection to the will of others. This is one principal cause of the subjection of nations. After their disturbing egoism has been trampled under the feet of a master, they are given or, if they have force in them, attain a fresh chance of deserving liberty by liberty.

(‘Thoughts and Aphorisms’ 164, *CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 443)

Sri Aurobindo was told that a Berlin paper had said that when Germany asked for peace in the last war, the Allies had not replied for six weeks. So why should they now expect a reply in two days? The Allies had better remember Versailles. Sri Aurobindo then commented:

Then what the Mother says may be true, that the Germans will keep silent so that the French Army may be crushed in the meantime.

(19 June 1940, *TW*, p. 727)

The peace proclamation declared by Pétain demoralised the French troops since they did not want to be killed unnecessarily as an armistice was to be declared soon. The Germans took advantage of the demotivated French soldiers and overran the French army. Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes, the loss at Flanders, the capitulation of Paris and the truce have demoralised them. They may be thinking, “What is the use of being killed when we are going to surrender tomorrow?” Of course as soldiers they will fight, but not with heart. (19 June 1940, *TW*, p. 728)

Earlier, referring to the drop in morale of the French troops in World War II compared to World War I, Sri Aurobindo had said:

. . . Nivedita [a French sadhika] was saying that those French who have joined the war this time have no enthusiasm or idealism. If that is their mentality, they will be defeated. It is a stupid and tamasicly sattwic quality.

(22 May 1940, *ET*,² pp. 734-35)

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

However, one Frenchman who did not have a defeatist mentality was Charles de Gaulle, a key figure of the Second World War. Sri Aurobindo wanted him to be chief of the free French armies in North Africa and ultimately succeeded through the use of Force. De Gaulle was one of the heroic Generals of the French army. At the outset he criticised France's reliance on the Maginot Line as a defence against Germany and advocated a mobile, highly mechanised army. His advice went unheeded and subsequently German forces easily overran France. De Gaulle refused to accept the French government's truce with the Germans and escaped to London, where he announced the formation of a French government in exile. He became the leader of the Free French and Churchill backed him. He was sentenced to death in absentia by the Pétain Government.

De Gaulle escaped by plane to England, fearful that the new collaborationist government would arrest him. On June 18, de Gaulle addressed all of France on BBC radio: "France is not alone!" and proclaimed himself leader of the exiled force of the Free French. Vichy collaborators condemned him to death.

Sri Aurobindo said of him:

. . . This de Gaulle is a remarkable man. He foresaw all these things and knew what was in store for him and left for England beforehand.

(31 July 1940, *TW*, p. 823)

He later commented:

. . . de Gaulle is getting very good support, it seems. He wants to raise a French army and take offensive action in France. (22 September 1940, *TW*, p. 886)

Speaking about the play of forces Sri Aurobindo said in August 1943:

. . . I wanted de Gaulle to become the Chief of the Free French armies in North Africa. There were many obstacles and the Americans came in with their pro-Vichy attitude. But I went on pressing and ultimately it has succeeded. . . .

(7 August 1943, *ET*, p. 768)

On another instance he said:

Have you seen de Gaulle's photo? He seems a strong man and young.

(20 August 1940, *TW*, p. 861)

On 21 June Sri Aurobindo said:

The Armistice seemed to have failed; the envoys came back almost immediately yesterday. Hitler must have pressed for complete acceptance or complete refusal and didn't give any chance for discussion. . . .

He then said,

. . . Pétain is dangerous as long as he is in the Government.

When asked whether the army could now be withdrawn, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes, that is the first thing to do now. If Hitler had got the French fleet, he would have attacked Africa and taken possession of her colonies. . . .

(21 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 735-36)

He later said of Pétain:

. . . if he surrenders the navy and the colonies nothing can be more shameful and more disastrous. (22 June 1940, *TW*, p. 740)

After the fall of France Sri Aurobindo had said:

. . . The situation won't be safe if the French fleet falls into his [Hitler's] hands. (27 June 1940, *TW*, p. 759)

Churchill had earlier obtained promises from the French Navy's Admiral Darlan that the Navy would not fall into German hands. However, Darlan did not follow through on his pledge to sail the French Fleet to British ports. British units then cajoled or coerced the French Navy all over Europe and North Africa. The French ships which did not join the British Fleet were attacked and destroyed, as the Allies did not want them to fall into Hitler's hands. This engendered great resentment as the two Allies became belligerent with each other.

The end came with the surrender of France on 22 June 1940. Hitler insisted on signing the document of capitulation (Franco-German Armistice) in the same railway carriage where Germany was disgraced and compelled to sign the humiliating Treaty of Versailles after their surrender in the First World War in 1918.

Subsequently Hitler had the carriage blown up. France was now divided into two zones: northern France was to be occupied by Germany, while the south east was to remain under the control of Pétain's Vichy-based government. It practically was the end of France. Sri Aurobindo observed:

Oh! I wonder whether it was treachery or cowardice that made them accept these terms. This fool of a Marshal Pétain has sold France.

(24 June 1940, *TW*, p. 747)

The French government of Marshal Philippe Pétain, an aged World War I veteran, had its capital at Vichy in central France. The Vichy regime was authoritarian and collaborated with the Germans. Arguably, the wartime divisions within French society that were created by this arrangement are still not fully healed.

Thus between 10 May and 21 June 1940, the German army accomplished what the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II had not managed to do in four years of desperate fighting in the First World War.

* * *

It may not be inappropriate to give a brief background of the First World War (1914-1918) and the Treaty of Versailles, which perhaps sowed the seeds of discontent leading to the Second World War. Germany had high hopes of winning the First World War — especially after astonishing advances early in 1918. However they suddenly realised in September 1918 that the war was lost. Germany was rapidly falling apart in the last few weeks of the war. By October many soldiers had had enough, and there were mass desertions. On 29 September 1918, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff told Kaiser Wilhelm II that the war was lost and that negotiations for an armistice based on President Wilson's peace proposals should begin at once. The peace conference that led to the Treaty of Versailles began its deliberations in Paris in January 1919 and was dominated by the French Premier, Georges Clemenceau and the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. The Treaty enforced the loss of several German territories. In addition the German army was not allowed to exceed 100,000 men. Further, military aircraft, submarines and tanks were among a number of outlawed weapons. The victors were unable to agree on a final sum for reparations, but 40 million tons of coal was demanded annually. The Germans were particularly outraged by article 231, which demanded of them to make good the damage caused by a war which they and their allies had begun.

The principal weakness of the Treaty of Versailles was that it was harsh enough to incense all Germans. However, they were determined and hopeful to see a revision of the Treaty eventually, where they would recapture their lost land and return to something like the borders of 1913. By 1925, the way was open for a peaceful renegotiation, but Adolf Hitler had an insatiable desire for conquest that could not be sated by such means. Hitler gradually expanded his army and then exploited and manipulated the resentment of the German people against the draconian Versailles Treaty to instigate the Second World War.

Sri Aurobindo blamed England as being accountable for a steadily expanding German army over a period of about fifteen years after the First World War. When a disciple suggested that Hitler's rise to power seemed to have started in the 1920s, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes. The German army had already made preparations but they were afraid of what the Allies would say. Hitler gave them the first start. Of course the British are responsible for all this. They thought that France would become very powerful, so in order to keep the French in check they helped Germany to power. After this war the same trouble will occur again. . . .

(18 May 1940, *TW*, p. 645)

Regarding Northern France being occupied by Hitler, Sri Aurobindo had observed:

. . . He knows that he can't conquer England without the support of France. Hitler's first idea was to get hold of the north of France so as to control the Channel ports. (18 June 1940, *TW*, p. 725)

On the capitulation of France Sri Aurobindo said:

Worse than the fall of the Third Empire. There was mismanagement at that time. But they fought before they lost. (2 July 1940, *TW*, p. 772)

At the time of the Fall of France a disciple remarked that England was preparing vigorously. Sri Aurobindo acknowledged:

Yes, if Hitler gives them one more year, they will become tremendously powerful. Both Daladier and Chamberlain seem to be impotent. They have done nothing at all. . . . (19 June 1940, *TW*, p. 729)

He later added,

. . . If England can hold on for one year at least, or two winters, there is a chance. (20 June 1940, *TW*, p. 735)

The French collapse was as sudden as it was unexpected. It ripped up the balance of power in Europe, and overnight left the strategic assumptions on which Britain had planned to fight Hitler completely obsolete. With France out of the equation, Britain's war was fought in the air, at sea, and in the Mediterranean — but not on the Western Front.

Historians have located the seeds of the French defeat in low morale and a divided pre-war society. This may be so, but in purely military terms, the Germans were a vastly superior force. They used their mechanisation and manoeuvre more effectively, and benefited from domination in the air. The German military doctrine was more advanced, and generally their commanders coped much better with high-tempo operations than did their Allied counterparts. Allied command and control

was cumbersome, and the Anglo-French operational plan was deeply flawed.

The legacy for France itself was complex. Resistance groups formed, but risked bringing savage reprisals on the civilian population if they attacked the occupying forces. The defeat of the powerful Allied army in a mere six weeks in 1940 stands as one of the most remarkable military campaigns in history.

* * *

Let us now take a psychological perspective and dwell on the characteristics and temperament of the Allied and Axis powers in the context of the war. Sri Aurobindo said something to the effect that the English are men of action, due to their vital (not mental) intuition about things and acting on it. He further said,

The English are so successful because they go by this vital intuition. Often they jumble things and make mistakes but in the end that intuition comes to their help and pulls them through. The French are logical; they think and reason.
(5 January 1940, *TW*, p. 330)

When told that the English and French are temperamentally different, Sri Aurobindo affirmed humorously:

Yes, the French will say one thing, and the English will nod their heads to quite the opposite. (18 June 1940, *TW*, p. 724)

Sri Aurobindo also said about the English:

. . . The English lead a practical life; they don't live in ideas. That is why they are so successful in life. In times of crisis or necessity they are driven to take practical steps as the situation demands. (*Ibid.*)

About the different political parties in England, he had earlier said:

During war they stick together. (5 May 1940, *TW*, p. 615)

On another instance he said:

. . . Whenever their self-interest is at stake they come to a compromise. . . .
(12 October 1940, *TW*, p. 920)

While referring to Germany's better planning and organisation, Sri Aurobindo observed:

The Germans have the power to foresee and act accordingly, while the British act from hour to hour: “If this happens, we will do that — if that, then this.”
(9 April 1940, *TW*, p. 598)

When a disciple said that he thought Hitler had not heard the name of Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the meticulous and detailed manner of German planning and organisation:

Oh yes. He knows every detail. In Germany they have schools for giving people such training and they know every town, every street in France and England. In the Kaiser’s time, it is said, he knew even the location of trees in some places. Now it is more thorough. Japan and Germany are the most thoroughly organised countries. (19 June 1940, *TW*, p. 729)

Speaking about the German propensity for warfare he said:

Militarism is in their blood. They were at one time hired as mercenaries.
(13 June 1940, *TW*, p. 708)

Talking of the English, Sri Aurobindo said:

If they want to act, they can do so provided they have the right man. For instance after the Boer War, Sir Campbell Bannerman gave self-government to South Africa. Self-government has also been granted to Iraq and to Egypt. In Egypt they have kept control of the Suez only. That is the advantage of England over Germany that you can deal with England, while with Germany — (*Sri Aurobindo began to shake his head*). (29 June 1940, *TW*, p. 764)

Comparing the British with the Nazis, Sri Aurobindo said:

The British people have two things: first, they are afraid of world opinion; second, they want to play hide-and-seek with their conscience. If it is exposed, they begin to scratch their heads. But the Nazis have no conscience to deal with and no world opinion to reckon with. (1 October 1940, *TW*, p. 900)

Speaking about the Italians vis-à-vis the British, Sri Aurobindo said:

. . . do you know that the Italians have exterminated half the native people in Libya? Whatever independence England has given the Egyptians they will lose it if Italy comes there. Are they so foolish as not to know that? The Arabs know the Italians very well. Hence they are completely supporting Britain though they were fighting with her before. (12 October 1940, *TW*, p. 921)

Apropos the Germany-Italy relationship, a disciple mentioned that Italy had contempt for Germany; Sri Aurobindo corrected this to:

Not contempt but hatred. (18 May 1940, *TW*, p. 644)

Discussing the Japanese, Sri Aurobindo spoke about how European influence had adversely affected Japanese culture:

That means they don't have their old strength. In former times, once Japan occupied a place, it was impossible to dislodge her. That shows what happens if one gives up one's Swadharma. According to the German advice, to grow tall the Japanese are taking raw meat, wearing shoes and adopting other European customs. In former days, eating grains and with bare feet, they used to fight splendidly, as in the Russo-Japanese war. They may have improved their stature by eating meat but have lost in other ways.

(20 June 1940, *TW*, p. 735)

He said later:

. . . The Japanese are becoming bullies now. It is the new spirit of the Nazis and Fascists they have got from the West. (31 July 1940, *TW*, p. 825)

He further said:

. . . the Japanese have lost their clear mind and high vision by Western contact, and their soldiers also are not what they were. (2 August 1940, *TW*, p. 828)

On the flip side Sri Aurobindo also spoke glowingly of the Japanese though he reiterated that the Japanese were losing their heritage and spirituality because of the influence of Western civilisation. He said:

The Japanese are very polite in their manners and conduct, they don't admit you to their private life. They have a wonderful power of self-control. They don't lose their temper or quarrel with you; but if their honour is violated they may kill you. They can be bitter enemies. . . . The Japanese also have a high sense of chivalry. In the Russo-Japanese war when the Russians were defeated the Mikado almost shed tears thinking of the Czar of Russia! That was his sense of chivalry.

When a congregation of fifty thousand persons was caught in a fire due to an earthquake there was not a single cry, not a mutter. All men were standing up and chanting a Buddhist hymn. That is a heroic people with wonderful self-control.

...

But these things perhaps belong to the past. It is a great pity that people who have carried such ideals into practice are losing them through contact with European civilisation. That is a great harm that European vulgarising has done to Japan. Now you find most people mercantile in their outlook and they will do anything for the sake of money. (30 December 1938, *ET*, pp. 211-12)

When Sri Aurobindo was asked about the English being good soldiers and having fought well in India, he answered:

That was only groups of people. Now the whole nation has to be prepared to fight. Besides, they have all become comfortable and ease-loving. Even the French are not as good as in the last war [WWI]. The French peasants and farmers have become rich and used to comforts and they don't like to be disturbed. (13 June 1940, *TW*, p. 708)

Earlier, Sri Aurobindo had spoken of the current French defeatist mentality:

Yes. Z says she has found that the French are going to war with reluctance and with a defeatist mentality. In that case, I don't see how they can beat Hitler.

N: But why is it so?

Sri Aurobindo: I don't know. Perhaps they want to lead a comfortable life. They have given good resistance in other parts — only in the centre the main army has given way. In the battle of the Meuse they forgot even to blow up the bridges during the retreat.

P: Herbert says that Hitler will get what he wants.

Sri Aurobindo: France also? If that is the mentality, they will be defeated. It is a stupid and tamasic quality. . . . (22 May 1940, *TW*, p. 655)

This 'tamasic quality' is spoken of in an aphorism:

Because God has willed and foreseen everything, thou shouldst not therefore sit inactive and wait upon His providence, for thy action is one of His chief effective forces. Up then and be doing, not with egoism, but as the circumstance, instrument and apparent cause of the event that He has predetermined. ('Thoughts and Aphorisms' 131, *CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 438)

Sri Aurobindo was told that Churchill had said that England would continue to fight, even after England was gone, to which he responded:

Yes, that is something new. The English people are very tough; they will go on till they are directly touched. (10 June 1940, *TW*, p. 703)

When a disciple quoted an American newspaper, “Licking rouses the British to a great impetus”, Sri Aurobindo observed:

That is true. They have a great tenacity. (5 May 1940, *TW*, p. 616)

On the question whether the French could still resist and if they gave up could the English resist, Sri Aurobindo said:

Why not? That is why we Indians cannot win. We always think that if you are defeated you have to give up. It is not like that. The greatness lies in not giving up the struggle and refusing to accept the defeat as final. You can defeat me any number of times but I am not going to give up.

The British have stood out alone against victorious powers in the past. . . .

No nation can be great on the principle of maintaining their existence, unless it stands for some great cause or idealism or something else great.

(18 June 1940, *ET*, p. 740)

Emphasising the importance of self-belief and overcoming a defeatist mentality, Sri Aurobindo has written:

Thought is not essential to existence nor its cause, but it is an instrument for becoming; I become what I see in myself. All that thought suggests to me, I can do; all that thought reveals in me, I can become. This should be man’s unshakable faith in himself, because God dwells in him.

(‘Thoughts and Glimpses’, *CWSA*, Vol. 13, p. 200)

Elaborating on the necessity of faith Sri Aurobindo writes:

. . . Faith is indispensable to man, for without it he could not proceed forward in his journey through the Unknown; but it ought not to be imposed, it should come as a free perception or an imperative direction from the inner spirit. . . .

(*CWSA*, Vol. 22, p. 896)

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo writes:

In fact, it is true that without faith nothing decisive can be achieved either in this world or for possession of the world above, and that it is only by laying hold of some sure basis and positive support that man can attain any measure

of terrestrial or celestial success and satisfaction and happiness; the merely sceptical mind loses itself in the void. (CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 204)

On the question of India's independence, when a disciple said this about the British, ". . . They won't let us go so easily", Sri Aurobindo replied:

No, unless they are beaten. (5 May 1940, *TW*, p. 616)

When another disciple said, "But as regards India, the British are not very lovable", Sri Aurobindo remarked humorously:

Lovable? Nobody said they were lovable. They never were. But the question is to love Hitler less. (21 September 1940, *TW*, p. 890)

Nonetheless, Sri Aurobindo did say of the English:

The English have a certain liberality and common sense.

By liberality I don't mean generosity but a sort of freedom of consciousness and a certain fairness. Because of these, along with their public spirit, there is not such confusion in public life in England as in France or in America. The English can vehemently criticise one another in the press — even personally — but that does not affect their private relationship. You have seen how Brailsford has attacked Chamberlain; but their friendship, or private relations, won't be affected by that. (30 December 1938, *ET*, p. 211)

When questioned if France was being defeated due to its past Karma, Sri Aurobindo said:

Of course there is past Karma, but it is not fixed. It can be counter-balanced by the right Karma at present or it can exhaust itself through suffering. Even if France is conquered now, she can rise again through the exhaustion of her Karma by suffering. New forces can come into play.

N: In that case England also has a heavy Karma to pay for.

Sri Aurobindo: Oh yes. It has to be seen what she does.

N: If England had given India freedom, wouldn't that have counted morally?

Sri Aurobindo: Certainly, it would have had a great moral value for her.

. . .

N: Do you foresee all possibilities?

Sri Aurobindo: The possibilities can be foreseen but we don't accept them as fixed or inevitable. They can be changed. (17 June 1940, *TW*, pp. 722-23)

The topic of Will and Karma came up two days later:

S: Some people here say that nothing happens without the sanction of the Divine Will and that nothing happens against Sri Aurobindo's will. I want to know if that is so. Germany's taking Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries and bringing about the war — was all this sanctioned by your will? You said at that time you did not want war.

Sri Aurobindo: The will was that there must be no war. But I didn't want this will to be effected at the cost of betraying Czechoslovakia. Is the fight going on in France due to my will? It is due to her own Karma.

(19 June 1940, *TW*, p. 729)

Emphasising the role of Will Sri Aurobindo once wrote:

. . . This is the great truth now dawning on the world, that Will is the thing which moves the world and that Fate is merely a process by which Will fulfils itself. (*CWSA*, Vol. 13, p. 50)

And then, there are these two lines from *Savitri*:

But what is Fate if not the spirit's will
After long time fulfilled by cosmic Force?

(*CWSA*, Vol. 34, p. 456)

In the chapter 'Karma, Will and Consequence' in *The Problem of Rebirth*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Will, Karma and consequence are the three steps of the Energy which moves the universe. But Karma and consequence are only the outcome of will or even its forms; will gives them their value and without it they would be nothing, nothing at least to man the thinking and growing soul and nothing, it may be hazarded, to the Spirit of which he is a flame and power as well as a creature.

(*CWSA*, Vol. 13, p. 351)

Sri Aurobindo concludes that chapter by stating:

Karma is nothing but the will of the Spirit in action, consequence nothing but the creation of will. What is in the will of being, expresses itself in karma and consequence. When the will is limited in mind, karma appears as a bondage and a limitation, consequence as a reaction or an imposition. But when the will of the being is infinite in the spirit, karma and consequence become instead

the joy of the creative spirit, the construction of the eternal mechanist, the word and drama of the eternal poet, the harmony of the eternal musician, the play of the eternal child. This lesser, bound, seemingly separate evolution is only a step in the free self-creation of the Spirit from its own illimitable Ananda. That is behind all we are and do; to hide it from mind and bring it slowly forward into the front of existence and action is the present play of Self with Nature. (*Ibid.*, pp. 356-57)

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo explains the link between Karma and rebirth and the importance of will in changing fate:

That secret Will is not mechanical, but spiritual; . . . Self-expression and experience are what the soul seeks by its birth into the body; . . . for the principle is not the working out of a mechanism of Law, but the development of the nature through cosmic experience so that eventually it may grow out of the Ignorance. There must therefore be two elements, Karma as an instrument, but also the secret Consciousness and Will within working through the mind, life and body as the user. Fate, whether purely mechanical or created by ourselves, a chain of our own manufacture, is only one factor of existence; Being and its consciousness and its will are a still more important factor. In Indian astrology which considers all life circumstances to be Karma, mostly predetermined or indicated in the graph of the stars, there is still provision made for the energy and force of the being which can change or cancel part or much of what is so written or even all but the most imperative and powerful bindings of Karma. This is a reasonable account of the balance: . . . but behind our surface is a freer life power, a freer mind power which has another energy and can create another destiny and bring it in to modify the primary plan, and when the soul and self emerges, when we become consciously spiritual beings, that change can cancel or wholly remodel the graph of our physical fate. Karma, then, — or at least any mechanical law of Karma, — cannot be accepted as the sole determinant of circumstances and the whole machinery of rebirth and of our future evolution. (*CWSA*, Vol. 22, pp. 840-41)

Sri Aurobindo also reveals that we are controlled by our past because we are involved in the action and its fruit whilst the true will stands back and is free; he writes:

In man the use of consciousness by the mental will is imperfect, because memory is limited. Our action is both dispersed and circumscribed because mentally we live from hour to hour in the current of Time, holding only to that which attracts or seems immediately useful to our egoistic mind. We live in what we are doing, we do not control what has been done, but are rather

controlled by our past works which we have forgotten. This is because we dwell in the action and its fruits instead of living in the soul and viewing the stream of action from behind it. The Lord, the true Will, stands back from the actions and therefore is their lord and not bound by them.

(CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 79-80)

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

Equality is a very important part of this yoga; it is necessary to keep equality under pain and suffering — and that means to endure firmly and calmly, not to be restless or troubled or depressed or despondent, to go on with a steady faith in the Divine Will. But equality does not include inert acceptance. If, for instance, there is temporary failure of some endeavour in the sadhana, one has to keep equality, not to be troubled or despondent, but one has not to accept the failure as an indication of the Divine Will and give up the endeavour. You ought rather to find out the reason and meaning of the failure and go forward in faith towards victory. So with illness — you have not to be troubled, shaken or restless, but you have not to accept illness as the Divine Will, but rather look upon it as an imperfection of the body to be got rid of as you try to get rid of vital imperfections or mental errors.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 664)

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of June 2010)

6. Getting Drawn into the Vedas

EVEN for me who was born in a Brahmin family that followed the Vedic way of life and observed all the prescribed rituals, the Vedas were little more than a remote chanting. Glancing casually at the Sanskrit books which sported Tamil translations, I could not discern any exciting passages. Certainly Jane Austen was more attractive! Elizabeth, Darcy and others were more appealing than sitting cross-legged with the group of ladies on one side of the room while on the other sat ponderous Brahmin priests (along with uncles and grand-uncles) sporting the holy thread and reciting the Vedas. I could only make out the Sama chant. For the men who had specialised in it took one syllable or two and drew them out at length while the boys of the family whispered irreverently that the India-rubber business had begun again.

Occasionally there would be a sonorous interlude when the Brahmins chanted *Sri, Bhū* or *Nīla Suktas*. The glorious Sanskrit terms that one could identify if not understand:

*Hiraṇyavarṇām harinīm suvarṇarajatasrajām
Chandrām hiraṇmayīm lakṣmīm jatavedo ma ā vaha*

For the rest I remained an alien to the springs of my own heritage. I would have remained so till today but for the happy coincidence of taking up Sri Aurobindo's epic as my doctoral subject. When I began reading carefully the available material I was quite surprised to know that he had translated the Vedas and written at length about them. *The Life Divine* itself was a revelation. I had thought that Sri Aurobindo had confined himself strictly to the Vedantic works like the Upanishads and the treatise on yoga uttered on the battlefield by Krishna. Sri Aurobindo himself had said so. Someone had written an article that he had derived his philosophical technique from Shankara. Sri Aurobindo's reply was clear:

That is not true. I have not read much of philosophy. It is like those who say that I am influenced by Hegel. Some even say that I am influenced by Nietzsche. . . .

The only two books that have influenced me are the *Gīta* and the Upanishads. What I wrote was the work of intuition and inspiration working on the basis of my spiritual experience. . . . Experience and formulation of

experience I consider as the true aim of philosophy. The rest is merely intellectual work and may be interesting but nothing more.¹

The early decades in Pondicherry saw him study the Vedas closely. Among those who joined him in his studies almost regularly was the famous Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati. Bharati as a Brahmin had known about the important place given to Vedic recitation in rituals but had thought of them as prayers to deities for various material goods (rains, crops, health, knowledge), happiness on earth and a peaceful passageway from life to the beyond.² The readings of the Vedic hymns suggested by Sri Aurobindo overwhelmed him with joy as he was not particular about ritualism. When it was a question of participating in rituals with mantras that he did not understand, he turned his face away. To his mind questing for knowledge and fired with zeal for our great past, Sri Aurobindo's explanations were literally manna from heaven. Writing about those days, he records:

All new knowledge is "revealed". All truth comes of inspiration. If you ask any scientist how he made his best discoveries, he will tell you that they just came to him from somewhere. It is a common experience with poets that they receive their best songs from Above. A few days ago, I asked Sri Aurobindo Ghose how he got his new and marvellous theory of Vedic interpretation. "It was shown me", he said, and I knew he meant it in a very literal sense. All truth is inspired. The popular mistake is to suppose that this inspiration must ever be the unique privilege of a few souls specially favoured of the Gods. But the Veda tells us that we can all bring forward our complete energy by fully yielding to the Dawn.³

As Sri Aurobindo's essays on the Veda appeared in the *Arya*, Subramania Bharati was a delighted reader. Inspired by them, he wrote a number of essays on Vedic deities like Indra, the Maruts and Agni and these have been published as a brilliant little book, *Veda Rishikalin Kavithai*. The Vedas had thus entered majestically the philosophical realms of Sri Aurobindo and the very first essay of *The Life Divine* has two epigraphs, both from the *Rig Veda*. There is no stopping now. By the time we go through the whole of the book, we get to read quite a few verses of the *Rig Veda* in Sri Aurobindo's translation.

1. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 106.

2. "To Tryambaka our offerings;

To the fragrance-bearer, the increaser of nourishment:

May he release me, like the cucumber from its stem,

From mortal life, not from immortality."

(*Rig Veda*, VII, 59.12. Translated by A. C. Bose)

3. *Agni and Other Poems and Translations and Essays and Other Prose Fragments* (1977 edn.), p. 57.

Living the life divine may be an aspiration I never have been able to realise in life, but living with the volume of *The Life Divine* has brought me rich dividends. Early in life I learnt the value of the phrase “to play the sedulous ape” from Robert Louis Stevenson who had drawn inspirations from great authors by imitating what they wrote. When I was typing the final copy of my thesis on *Savitri*, I was trying to give it some stylish touches. Could I give epigraphs to my chapters? Would the examiners dismiss my tome as pompous? When I expressed my doubts to my father, he encouraged me to go ahead with my idea. “Why don’t you collect some nice quotes from your card index?” he said. My hunt began.

With plenty of handwritten and typed quotes, I was not able to decide, for I wanted the quotes to be arresting. *The Life Divine* came to the rescue with its opening passage from the *Rig Veda*. It is a verse by Kutsa Angirasa:

She follows to the goal of those that are passing on beyond, she is the first in the eternal succession of the dawns that are coming, — Usha widens bringing out that which lives, awakening someone who was dead. . . . What is her scope when she harmonises with the dawns that shone out before and those that now must shine? She desires the ancient mornings and fulfils their light; projecting forwards her illumination she enters into communion with the rest that are to come.⁴

Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the hymns to Usha were familiar enough as I had to go between them and ‘The Symbol Dawn’ for writing the first chapter, under the guidance of my father. One is excused for this desire “to play the sedulous ape” and this is how I chose the command of the Vedic Rishi first:

Meet ye the Dawn as she shines wide towards you and with surrender bring forward your complete energy. Exalted in heaven is the force to which she rises establishing the sweetness; she makes the luminous worlds to shine forth and is a vision of felicity.⁵

At that impressionable age, Sri Aurobindo’s translations were attractive, poetic, thought-provoking. Certainly they seemed more alive in English than the ritual chanting at home. Gradually I began to revere the Vedas and study them in the light of Sri Aurobindo. During the last few decades Sri M. P. Pandit’s studies and the magnificent work of his guru, T. V. Kapali Sastri have been priceless guides. In fact, Kapali Sastri has even written a Sanskrit commentary on the first *Ashtaka* of the *Rig Veda*, named *Siddhanjana*.

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

5. *The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 294.

With such guides, it is always a joy to go back to the Vedic verses used by Sri Aurobindo. For instance, the chapter ‘The Ascent of Life’ (Volume I, chapter 21) has a long epigraph from the *Rig Veda*. The opening line is, “Let the path of the Word lead to the godheads, towards the Waters by the working of the Mind.” Explaining the line, Sri Pandit says:

The Word is the creative Power that builds. All creation has been shaped by the Word which is the Sound-body of Brahman. The Power not only brings out the finite worlds out of the bosom of the Infinite, but also it hews the path along which the growth, the evolution of the manifesting Consciousness takes place.⁶

So that is it! The *Rig Vedic* verse itself is a Rishi’s vision of the ascent of life into the Vijnanamaya Consciousness, the Supermind. I realised that Sri Aurobindo’s choice of epigraphs for the book was deliberate. The somewhat intricate argument needed some visuals that could give us a sense of direction in our search for Truth. This search can be a pathless adventure, so we need such helpful gleams. With the image of the Word, the Sound-body of Brahman leading Life’s ascent, the evolutionary process is now easy to follow for we have also Sri Aurobindo’s splendid poem, ‘Thought the Paraclete’ to help us with another visual. It goes to show how Sri Aurobindo tried several ways to explain the ascent of life. The verse from the *Rig Veda* comes here as a shower of images:

As some bright archangel in vision flies
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities,
Past the long green crests of the seas of life,
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind
Flew my thought self-lost in the vasts of God.
Sleepless wide great glimmering wings of wind
Bore the gold-red seeking of feet that trod
Space and Time’s mute vanishing ends. . . .⁷

For me this going round and round the writings of Sri Aurobindo has been the life divine! Often one has to take in intricate conceptualisation, but the Vedic epigraphs bind us to the argument as if we were watching a video programme.

The second Vedic verse used for ‘The Ascent of Life’ gives us a vision of Involution that helps the evolving life and the help comes because of the Supreme’s Ananda:

6. *Legends in The Life Divine* (1985), p. 60.

7. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 562.

The Lord of Delight conquers the third status; he maintains and governs according to the Soul of universality; like a hawk, a kite he settles on the vessel and uplifts it, a finder of the Light he manifests the fourth status and cleaves to the ocean that is the billowing of those waters.⁸

Out of nowhere in the blue sky a hawk swoops down and the next moment we see it going on and on and up and up with its prey. We associate this action with death and devouring; and that is the action involved in the ascent of life. The hawk stands for Nature which compels the separate ego to get dissolved and be fused with the others. There is, of course, a time for the growth of the individual ego:

But as soon as Nature has secured a sufficient firmness in this respect for the safe conduct of her ulterior operations, she reverses the process; the individual form perishes and the aggregate life profits by the elements of the form that is thus dissolved.⁹

The journey is not over though. There are millennia to go! If Mind is the leader of this ascent of Life, a time has to come when even it has to fall back and yield the place to “that which is beyond Mind”.

It must come by a fourth status of life in which the eternal unity of the many is realised through the spirit and the conscious foundation of all the operations of life is laid no longer in the divisions of body, nor in the passions and hungers of the vitality, nor in the groupings and the imperfect harmonies of the mind, nor in a combination of all these, but in the unity and freedom of the Spirit.¹⁰

It is not too difficult to grasp the ideas of Matter, Life and Mind. But the fourth status, the Vijnanamaya Consciousness, the Power Divine? Helpful as ever, out of the ocean of verses in the *Rig Veda* Sri Aurobindo chooses one that is very familiar to the Indian mind. From childhood, one has heard of the Vamana incarnation, of Mahabali who agreed to give Vamana the three paces of earth and how Vamana became Trivikrama. It is a message found in the Veda and we have returned to it in innumerable Puranas. Sri Aurobindo’s meditation finds in the incarnation the seed-form of the Ascent of Life:

Thrice Vishnu paced and set his step uplifted out of the primal dust; three steps he has paced, the Guardian, the Invincible, and from beyond he upholds their

8. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 210.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

laws. Scan the workings of Vishnu and see from whence he has manifested their laws. That is his highest pace which is seen ever by the seers like an eye extended in heaven; that the illumined, the awakened kindle into a blaze, even Vishnu's step supreme. . . .¹¹

Vishnoryat paramam padam

So Vishnu's strides indicate the evolution of the material world, life-world and mind-world. But Trivikrama has not stopped growing, for it is His will that has begun this ascent. Using the Vedic image and Sri Aurobindo's concept as his warp and woof, Sri Pandit weaves his explanation:

The seers, the Wise ones, who have the inner sight behold this focus of Light ever and always; there is no night to interrupt this shining Sun of the supramental Truth. The awakened and illumined ones kindle this Sun on the summits of their own being and spread its blaze. This is the fourth and highest step of the evolving Godhead above the triple world of Matter-Life-Mind.¹²

Speaking of philosophical concepts we deal with in our search for the meaning of our existence, the ubiquitous question is a never-failing presence: "Why is there evil in this world?" Sri Aurobindo does not skirt the issue. Instead he calls upon a variety of observations on the subject beginning with the *Rig Veda*.

These are they who are conscious of the much falsehood in the world; they grow in the house of Truth, they are the strong and invincible sons of Infinity.¹³

Falsehood is also part of the Reality, it is here for some reason which is not clear as yet. Being brought up in the atmosphere of a holistic view (that all is Brahman, *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*), it was not difficult for me to accept the concept. I was worried about the usage, "of the much falsehood in the world" which seemed a quaint phrase. Was it a printer's mistake? How can there be any dance of devils in this perfect production from the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York? So I realised that Sri Aurobindo had burrowed into a Vedic word and come up with the best possible translation, "much falsehood". Aha, it is *anṛtasya bhure!* (Our national emblem blazons, *Satyameva Jayate*; we should remember it is followed by *Na anṛtam* in the classical text!) Sri Pandit's explanation of the Vedic verse in the light of Sri Aurobindo is helpful:

11. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

12. *Legends in The Life Divine*, p. 65.

13. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 618.

Those who are awakened to the profusion of falsehood in the world obey the divine imperative to follow the path of Truth, to grow in the image of Truth. They cast their lives in the mould of Truth. Theirs is the invincible strength, they are verily the sons of Aditi, the Mother Infinite. They have rejected the falsehood that abounds in this world of ignorance and chosen to live in the truth of God.¹⁴

From these Vedic beginnings through the line of reasoning held up by *The Life Divine* we take a great leap forward in *Savitri* when the victor over Death realises that Death too is a part of existence. In the brilliance of the Eternal Day, Savitri sees a figure of radiance in whom she recognises her recent adversary:

One whom her soul had faced as Death and Night
 A sum of all sweetness gathered into his limbs
 And blinded her heart to the beauty of the suns.
 Transfigured was the formidable shape.
 His darkness and his sad destroying might
 Abolishing for ever and disclosing
 The mystery of his high and violent deeds,
 A secret splendour rose revealed to sight
 Where once the vast embodied Void had stood.
 Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.¹⁵

Wise people have compared the mind to a monkey. It just refuses to stand still. Of course, Savitri recognised Death to be the other face of the Supreme, but why should there be this Death, Evil, Falsehood, this *anṛtam bhure*? Lest we mistake Falsehood to be a deliberate plant by the Supreme, Sri Aurobindo assures us that it has no direct root in the supreme Reality. It is not as if the presence of Falsehood is as basic and absolute as Truth:

But this is not the fundamental truth of the relation of these opposites; for, in the first place, Falsehood and Evil are, unlike Truth and Good, very clearly results of the Ignorance and cannot exist where there is no Ignorance: they can have no self-existence in the Divine Being, they cannot be native elements of the Supreme Nature. If, then, the limited Knowledge which is the nature of Ignorance renounces its limitations, if Ignorance disappears into Knowledge, evil and falsehood can no longer endure: for both are fruits of unconsciousness

14. *Legends in The Life Divine*, p. 65.

15. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 678-79.

and wrong consciousness and, if true or whole consciousness is there replacing Ignorance, they have no longer any basis for their existence.¹⁶

We have to take falsehood and evil as just a “by-product of the world-movement”. We suffer them, endure them and finally overcome them. Why then are we unable to understand Truth alone as Absolute and Falsehood as an expendable by-product? Sri Aurobindo says that our vision is limited by what our physical eye sees. If we have the patience and perseverance (call it tapasya or meditation or what you will), if we look deeper we might get illuminations. We may not be as successful as Aswapati or Savitri as yet, but we will have at least a clear view of our existence in this world and perhaps recognise the powers, Truth and Falsehood that surround us all the time. Though even a powerful recorder as Sri Aurobindo cannot give us an *exact* idea of these powers good and bad, his mantric lines do give us an idea of these supra-physical worlds and at the same time offer us the hope that we shall overcome the machinations of Falsehood as Aswapati did:

A prisoner of a hooded magic Force,
 Captured and trailed in Falsehood’s lethal net
 And often strangled in the noose of grief,
 Or cast in the grim morass of swallowing doubt,
 Or shut into pits of error and despair,
 He drank her poison draughts till none was left.
 In a world where neither hope nor joy could come
 The ordeal he suffered of evil’s absolute reign,
 Yet kept intact his spirit’s radiant truth.¹⁷

As with all the chapters in *The Life Divine*, ‘The Origin and Remedy of Falsehood, Error, Wrong and Evil’ yields an endless shower of intuitive scholarship and poetic passages. True to its origin in the images found in the *Rig Veda*, this is one of the most interesting essays in the book. As one tries to come to terms with the repeated term, ‘consciousness’, illumination breaks in. Aha, vijananamaya consciousness (Supermind, Truth-consciousness) is not to be gained with the shout: “Open Sesame”! Man at one end, carrying his mental consciousness, has to work for aeons, slowly but surely, moving forward towards the other end, the Supermind. This is how evolution works:

. . . a slow and difficult evolution of Inconscience developing into Ignorance and Ignorance forming itself into a mixed, modified and partial knowledge

16. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 620.

17. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 230.

before it can be ready for transformation into a higher truth-consciousness and truth-knowledge.¹⁸

Living with *The Life Divine* can be a great comfort, for Sri Aurobindo allows us no time to weep with self-pity. Do you find yourself in the doldrums now and then because of partial understanding or misunderstanding or malevolent understanding? Do not worry! “Our imperfect mental understanding is a necessary stage of transition before this higher transformation can be made possible.” All we need to have now is faith in the words of the Mother:

May his [Sri Aurobindo’s] teaching enlighten and guide us, and what we cannot do today, we shall do tomorrow.¹⁹

Meanwhile what joy in reading this grand book, and wandering in the woods of the Vedic hymns, to the very dawn of our civilisation and humming with joy, praying to Varuna the God of Vastness and Purity and Mitra, the God of Love:

Ṛtena yāvṛutāvṛudhāvṛutasya jyotiṣaspati . . .

Masters of the Truth-Light who make the Truth grow by the Truth.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

18. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 638.

19. *Words of the Mother — I*, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 16.

Few are those from whom the Grace withdraws, but many are those who withdraw from the Grace.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 613)

A RARE AND PRECIOUS COLLECTION

(*Champaklal's Treasures*: Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram. First edition 1976, edited by M. P. Pandit; third edition 2008, revised and enlarged by Roshan.)

WHO does not know Champaklal, the golden child of the Divine Mother whom She called Her lion and “one of the hundred” she wanted for the great Work of terrestrial transformation. He had the rarest of privileges: to be a personal attendant of both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. No wonder his treasure-house of memories and collections is full of rare divine jewels that he collected over the years. And indeed what a collection: not a facet is left out. All that one needs as essential elements for the inner life is found here in these letters, memos, diary notes and the interviews, of which Champaklal kept a careful record. Champaklal was not only very observant and meticulous in all that he did, he was also generous and childlike at heart. Full of an innate simplicity born of one who is closely in touch with his soul, he radiated and shared freely the Light and Love that he had received from the Master and the Divine Mother. This collection therefore assumes a deep significance since it is the treasure of someone who knew the true value of outer and inner things and had over the years acquired a ripe and rich inner life. So when he chooses to share some of the gems from his collection it means that he did so under sanction from the Divine Mother and it is more an action than just another book.

The book itself is arranged in five parts — Letters of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and Correspondence with early disciples (parts one and four) occupy the bulk of the book. It includes correspondence with disciples such as Barindra (Sri Aurobindo’s brother), Champa-ben and Punamchand (two early disciples from Gujarat), Motilal Roy (an early aide of Sri Aurobindo from the revolutionary days), Rajani Palit (a young disciple), Chinmayee and René (two young children from the family of the Nizam of Hyderabad), Chittaranjan Das (Sri Aurobindo’s lawyer in the famous Alipore case) and Swami Satyanand Giri. These letters are important for three reasons. First of all, they provide invaluable guidance straight from the Master’s pen on diverse issues of life and yoga. Secondly, because the background of the letters is provided, things are placed in the proper context; this gives a deeper meaning to the letter than when it is read in a de-contextualised way. It surely enhances the appreciation and the understanding when we know the issue that is being addressed and the question to which the response has been given. Thus, for example, in the letters to René or even to Sri Aurobindo’s brother, Barin or to Motilal Roy, one can trace a certain development in the relation between the Master and the disciple, the wise and patient guidance, the deep Compassion and loving Grace that is moulding

each one according to their own nature. One cannot appreciate this if one is simply reading the letters without knowing to whom and under what circumstances they have been written. Thirdly, they reveal the tremendous patience and love, the vast and deep compassion with which both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother dealt with the disciples.

The letters that form the major portion of the book are so well selected that they form a complete guide to those who wish to lead an inner life. They relate to practically every issue of spirituality and life, including subjects such as insanity and health. Besides the treasure-house of letters, there are talks and interviews given by the Master as well as notes, prayers and reflections of the Mother. Finally, there is a Miscellany that is like the icing on the delicious cake of divine delight. This contains some precious remarks and observations by the Mother on Her Blessings, Her signature, the Symbols, the Blessing packets and the Sanskrit names given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In fact, compared to the previous edition, the book has been considerably enlarged with the addition of nearly thirty more pages, more photographs and sketches and paintings. All this makes for a visual delight, a real treasury of rare gems that sparkle and shine chasing away all darkness and gloom. The book is really a potent antidote to all doubts and depression because of the special atmosphere that it carries with it.

That this book is Champaklal's offering is itself invitation enough to read through it, preferably without a break! For when Champaklal begins to reveal the treasure-house of his collections, bringing out one precious gem after another, it is difficult to resist or turn away to anything else till one has seen the whole treasure-chest. And what a treasure indeed! Apart from all this, the book has an inspiring value that comes not only from its subject matter but also the subjects whose consciousness permeates its atmosphere. To read it is to be bathed in Their love, for such is the mystery of the God-lover that even as he talks about the Lord he adores, the Lord becomes manifest before him, and all who hear from his lips can feel through his heart. Bringing us in contact with the consciousness of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the book serves as a means of yoga; it is a bridge between our blind and ignorant humanity groping for sight and That which the eyes cannot behold and the speech cannot utter. And yet, and this is the beauty of the book, it brings something of that Glory close to our range of seeing and its words fill our mind and understanding, nay our very heart and soul with a touch of that Delight that builds the worlds. All that one can say is, "Glory to Champaklal who brings Sri Aurobindo and the Mother closer to us; and glory to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who gifted to us among the many countless invaluable treasures the earth needs, such a fine and beautiful human being as Champaklal." Words fail in the end and as one goes through the book the heart is uplifted in adoration, and gratitude fills each nook and corner of our being. The book has come to embody Their Love which has left nothing untouched by its alchemy.

The book carries with it a special atmosphere, the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, of Their Light now illumining, now penetrating the darkest corners of our human nature; and at the end, not only showing us the path towards the future, but lifting us towards the goal by Their luminous Presence.

It is this Presence and Influence that come through the pages of this book and make of it truly a treasure, a treasure that one would love to share with all.

ALOK PANDEY

It is not intended to supramentalise humanity at large, but to establish the principle of the supramental consciousness in the earth-evolution. If that is done, all that is needed will be evolved by the supramental Power itself. It is not therefore important that the mission should be widespread. . . .

The questions about the supermind cannot be answered profitably now. Supermind cannot be described in terms that the mind will understand, because the terms will be mental and mind will understand them in a mental way and mental sense and miss their true import. It would therefore be a waste of time and energy which should be devoted to the preliminary work — psychicisation and spiritualisation of the being and nature without which no supramentalisation is possible. Let the whole dynamic nature led by the psychic make itself full of the dynamic spiritual light, peace, purity, knowledge, force; let it afterwards get experience of the intermediate spiritual planes and know, feel and act in their sense; then it will be possible to speak last of the supramental transformation.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 11-12)