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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIV

No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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MUSA SPIRITUS

O Word concealed in the upper fire,
 Thou who hast lingered through centuries,
Descend from thy rapt white desire,
 Plunging through gold eternities.

Into the gulfs of our nature leap,
 Voice of the spaces, call of the Light!
Break the seals of Matter's sleep,
 Break the trance of the unseen height.

In the uncertain glow of human mind,
 Its waste of unharmonied thronging thoughts,
Carve thy epic mountain-lined
 Crowded with deep prophetic grotts.

Let thy hue-winged lyrics hover like birds
 Over the swirl of the heart's sea.
Touch into sight with thy fire-words
 The blind indwelling deity.

O Muse of the Silence, the wideness make
 In the unplumbed stillness that hears thy voice;
In the vast mute heavens of the spirit awake
 Where thy eagles of Power flame and rejoice.

Out, out with the mind and its candle flares,
 Light, light the suns that never die.
For my ear the cry of the seraph stars
 And the forms of the Gods for my naked eye!

Let the little troubled life-god within
 Cast his veils from the still soul,
His tiger-stripes of virtue and sin,
 His clamour and glamour and thole and dole;

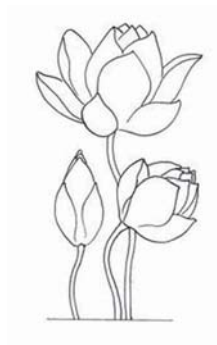
All make tranquil, all make free.
 Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God

As He comes from His timeless infinity
To build in their rapture His burning abode.

Weave from my life His poem of days,
His calm pure dawns and His noons of force.
My acts for the grooves of His chariot-race,
My thoughts for the tramp of His great steeds' course!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 531-32)



THE KARMA YOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

Karmayoga; the Ideal

Chapter IV

VII. Elemental Evolution.

THE evolution of the cosmos has not only spiritual and psychical aspects; it has also from the moment of its inception a material element. Spirit exists from the beginning and was before any beginning, infinite and sempiternal; but Matter also is an eternal entity. In the Parabrahman, the absolute inconceivable Self, Spirit and Matter are one and undifferentiated, but the moment evolution begins Spirit and Matter manifest equally and coevally. We have seen that the first spiritual evolution from the pure self-existent Atman is Prajna of the Sleep-State, Eternal Wisdom, a supporting spiritual presence which contains in itself the whole course of cosmic evolution even as a single seed contains in itself the complete banyan-tree with all its gigantic progeny. We have seen that corresponding to this Eternal Wisdom, there is a first psychic evolution, Ananda or Will, an inspiring psychical force in man & the cosmos which makes all the workings of Nature possible. Spirit however, even when operating as Will, is not a working force in the sense that it itself carries on the operations of Nature; it is an inspiring, impelling force, whose function is to set in motion a powerful material energy of the Self; and it is this material energy which under the inspiration of Will and at the bidding of Prajna sets about the evolution of the Cosmos. Self in its dealings with the Cosmos is a dual entity, underlying spiritual presence and superficially active material energy, or as they are called in the terminology of the Sankhya philosophy, Purusha and Prakriti; — Purusha, that which lies concealed in the Vast of universal existence, Prakriti, active or operative energy thrown forward from the concealed spiritual source. The whole of Evolution spiritual, psychical, material, is the result of Purusha and Prakriti acting upon each other; the three evolutions are really one, coincident and coeval, because throughout it is one Reality that is manifesting and not three. It is Self manifesting as spirit, Self manifesting as soul, Self manifesting as matter or body. The three manifestations are coincident in Time and Space and each condition of phenomena is a triple state with Spirit and Matter for its extreme terms and Soul for its middle. In the evolution of the spirit-

states Purusha determines itself so as to inform and support the progressive manifestations of Self as soul and body; in the evolution of the psychic states Prakriti worked on by Purusha creates for the manifestations of Self as spirit psychic sheaths or coverings which will at the same time inform and support the manifestations of Self as matter; in the evolution of the causal, subtle and gross bodies Prakriti shapes itself so as to create the material out of which the psychical coverings of Self as spirit may be made and the medium in which the Self as soul may operate. The three evolutions are dependent on each other, and that it is really one entity and not three which is evolving, is shown by the fact that while in the first stage of the downward evolution and the last of the upward Matter seems so refined as to appear identical with Spirit, in the last of the downward and first of the upward Spirit seems so densified as to appear identical with Matter. This possibility of evolution from and involution into each other would not be conceivable if they were not in essence one entity; and we may legitimately deduce from the oneness of such diverse phenomena that they *are* no more than phenomena, merely apparent changes in one unchanging reality.

In the first stage of evolution Matter appears as an aspect or shadow of Spirit, and like Spirit it is infinite, unanalysable, undifferentiated. Just as Spirit then has only three positive attributes, infinite and undefinable existence, consciousness and bliss, so original Matter has only three positive attributes, infinite and undefinable Time, Space and Causality — or, as Hindu thought phrases it, Condition. For the essence of Condition being change from one state to another, and each change standing in the relation of cause or origin to the one that follows it, Condition and Causality become convertible terms. From this indefinable noumenal condition of Prakriti the Self forms for its uses matter in its most refined and simple form, undifferentiated and undeveloped, but pregnant with the whole of material evolution. The causal state is called by the Sankhyas Pradhana, the first state or arrangement of matter and its essential principle. The relation of Spirit and Matter in this causal or seed-state is admirably expressed in the Puranic image of Vishnu, the eternal Purusha, asleep on the waveless causal ocean with the endless coils of the snake Ananta, the Infinite, for his couch. The sea of causal matter is then motionless and it is only when Vishnu awakes, the snake Ananta stirs and the first ever widening ripples are created on the surface of the waters that the actual evolution of matter has begun. The first ripple or vibration in causal matter creates a new & exceedingly fine and pervasive condition of matter called akasha or ether; more complex motion evolves out of ether a somewhat intenser condition which is called Vayu, Air; and so by ever more complex motion with increasing intensity of condition for result, yet three other matter-states are successively developed, Agni or Fire, Apah or Water and Prithivi or Earth. These are the five *tanmatras* or subtle elements of Sankhya philosophy by the combination of which subtle forms in subtle matter are built.

Here it is necessary to enter a caution against possible misunderstandings to

which the peculiar nomenclature used by the Rishis & the common rendering of *tanmatra* & *bhuta* by the English word elements may very easily give rise. When we speak of elements in English in a scientific sense, we always imply elemental *substances*, those substances which when analysed by chemical processes, cannot be resolved into substances simpler than themselves. But when Hindu philosophy speaks of the five elements, it is not dealing with substances at all but with elemental states or conditions of matter, which are not perceptible or analysable by chemical inquiry but underlie substances and forms as basic principles of material formation. The old thinkers accepted the atomic theory of the formation of objects and substances but they did not care to carry the theory farther and inquire by what particular combinations of atoms this or that substance came into being or by what variations and developments in detail bodies animate or inanimate came to be what they are. This did not seem to them to be an inquiry of the first importance; they were content with laying down some main principles of material evolution and there they left the matter. But they were anxious to resolve not substances into their original atoms but matter into its original condition and so discover its ultimate relations to the psychical and spiritual life of man. They saw that perpetual motion involving perpetual change was the fundamental characteristic of matter and that each new motion was attended by a new condition which stood to the immediately preceding condition in the relation of effect to cause or at least of a new birth to the matrix in which it had been enembryoed. Behind the solid condition of matter, they found a condition less dense which was at the basis of all fluid forms; behind the fluid condition, another still less dense which was at the basis of all igneous or luminous forms; behind the igneous, yet another and finer which was at the basis of all aerial or gaseous forms; and last of all one finest and most pervasive condition of all which they called Akash or Ether. Ether was, they found, the primary substance out of which all this visible Universe is evolved and beyond ether they were unable to go without matter losing all the characteristics associated with it in the physical world and lapsing into a quite different substance of which the forms and motions were much more vague, subtle, elastic and volatile than any of which the physical world is aware. This new world of matter they called subtle matter and analysed the subtle as they had analysed the gross until by a similar procession from denser to subtler they came to a finest condition of all which they described as subtle ether. Out of this subtle ether a whole world of subtle forms and energies are evolved which constitute psychical existence. Beyond subtle ether matter lost its subtle characteristics and lapsed into a new kind which they could not analyse but which seemed to be the matrix out of which all material evolution proceeded. This they termed causal matter.

In the course of this analysis they could not help perceiving that consciousness in each world of matter assumed a different form and acted in a different way corresponding to the characteristics of the matter in which it moved. In its operations in gross matter the forms it assumed were more firm, solid and durable but at the

same time more slow, difficult and hampered, just as are the motions and acts of a man in his waking state as compared with what he does in his dreams. In its operations in subtle matter the forms consciousness assumed were freer and more rapid, but more volatile, elastic & swiftly mutable, as are the motions and acts of a man in a dreaming state compared to the activities of his waking condition. To consciousness acting on gross matter they gave therefore the name of the Waking State, to consciousness acting on subtle matter the name of the Dream State. In causal matter they found that consciousness took the shape merely of the pure sense of blissful existence; they could discover no other distinguishing sensation. This therefore they called the Sleep State. They farther discovered that the various faculties and functions of man belonged properly some to one, some to another of the three states of consciousness and its corresponding state of matter. His vital and physical functions operated only in gross matter, and they determined accordingly that his physical life was the result of consciousness working in the Waking State on gross matter. His mental and intuitional processes were found to operate freely and perfectly in subtle matter, but in gross matter with a hampered and imperfect activity; they considered therefore that man's mental life belonged properly to the Dream State and only worked indirectly and under serious limitations in the Waking State. They determined accordingly that mental life must be the result of Consciousness working in the Dream State on subtle matter. There remained the fundamental energy of consciousness, Will-to-be or shaping Delight of existence: this, they perceived, was free and pure in causal matter, but worked if consciously, yet through a medium and under limitations in subtle matter, in hampered & half effectual fashion when the subtle self acted through the gross and sub-consciously only in gross matter. They considered therefore that man's causal faculty or spiritual life belonged properly to the Sleep State and worked indirectly and through less & less easy mediums in the Dream and Waking States; and accordingly determined that it must be the result of Consciousness working in the Sleep State on causal matter. The whole of creation amounted therefore to a natural outcome from the mutual relations of Spirit and Matter; these two they regarded as two terms — call them forces, energies, substances, or what you will, — of phenomenal existence; and psychical life only as one result of their interaction. They refused however to accept any dualism in their cosmogony and, as has been pointed out, regarded Spirit and Matter as essentially one and their difference as no more than an apparent duality in one real entity. This one entity is not analysable or intellectually knowable, yet it is alone the real, immutable and sempiternal Self of things.

It will be clear even from this brief and condensed statement of the Vedic analysis of existence that the elements of the Upanishad are not the elementary substances of modern chemistry but five general states of matter to which all its actual or substantial manifestations belong. It will also be clear that the names of the five elements have a conventional, not a literal value, but it may be as well to

indicate why these particular names have been chosen. The first and original state of subtle matter is the pure ethereal of which the main characteristics are extreme tenuity and pervasiveness and the one sensible property, sound. Sound, according to the Vedic inquirers, is the first evolved property of material substance; it precedes form and has the power both to create it and to destroy it. Looking around them in the physical universe for a substance with these characteristics they found it in Akash or Vyom (sky), implying not our terrestrial atmosphere but that which is both beyond it and pervades it, — the fine pervasive connecting substance in which, as it were, the whole universe floats. They therefore gave this name, Akash, to the ethereal condition of matter.

The next matter-condition evolved from Ether and moving in it, was the pure aerial or gaseous. Here to pervasiveness was added a new potency of sensible and varied motion bringing with it, as increased complexity of motion necessarily must do, increased differentiation and complexity of substance. All the variety and evolutions of gaseous matter with their peculiar activities, functions and combinations have this second state or power of matter as their substratum; it is the basis also of that universal Prana or vital energy, starting from action, retention and reaction and culminating in organized consciousness, which we have seen to be so all-important an agent in the Vedic theory of the Cosmos. In this second power of matter a new property of material substance is evolved, touch or contact, which was not fully developed in pure ether owing to its extreme tenuity and primary simplicity of substance. Seeking for a physical substance gaseous in nature, sensible by sound and contact, but without form and characterized chiefly by varied motion and an imperfect pervasiveness, the Rishis found it in Vayu, Wind or Air. Vayu, therefore, is the conventional term for the second condition of matter.

Evolved out of the pure gaseous state and moving in it is the third or pure igneous condition of matter, which is also called Tejah, light and heat energy. In the igneous stage pervasiveness becomes still less subtle, sensible motion no longer the paramount characteristic, but energy, especially formative energy, attains full development and creation and destruction, formation and new-formation are at last in readiness. In addition to sound and contact matter has now evolved a third property, form, which could not be developed in pure Air owing to its insufficient density and the elusive vagueness and volatility of gaseous manifestations. The third power of matter is at the basis of all phenomena of light and heat and Prana by its aid so develops that birth and growth now become possible; for light and heat are the necessary condition of animate life-development and in their absence we have the phenomenon of death or inert and inanimate existence: when the energy of light and heat departs from a man, says the Upanishad, then it is that Prana, the vital energy, retires into mind, his subtle or psychical part, and withdraws from the physical frame. The physical substance which seemed to the Rishis to typify the igneous state was fire; for it is sensible by sound, contact and form and, less pervasive than

air, is distinguished by the utmost energy of light and heat. Fire therefore is the conventional or symbolic name of the third power of matter.

Next upon the igneous state follows the liquid or fluid, less pervasive, less freely motional or energetic, and distinguishingly marked by a kind of compromise between fixity and volatility. In this state matter evolves a fourth property, taste. The liquid state is the substratum of all fluid forms and activities, and in its comparative fixity life-development finds its first possibility of a sufficiently stable medium. All life is gathered out of "the waters" and depends on the fluid principle within it for its very sustenance. Water as the most typical fluid, half-volatile, half-fixed, perceptible by sound, contact, form and taste, has given a symbolical name to the fourth condition of matter.

The solid state is the last to develop in this progression from tenuity to density, for in this state pervasiveness reaches its lowest expression and fixity predominates. It is the substratum of all solid forms and bodies and the last necessity for the development of life; for it provides life with a fixed form or body in which it can endure and work itself out and which it can develop into organism. The last new property of matter evolved in the solid state is odour; and since earth is the typical solid substance, containing all the five properties sound, contact, form, taste and smell, Earth is the conventional name selected for the fifth and final power of matter.

These five elemental states are only to be found in their purity and with their characteristic qualities distinct and unblended in the world of subtle matter. The five elemental states of gross matter are impure; they are formed out of subtle matter by the combination of the five subtle elements in certain fixed proportions, that one being given the characteristic name of ether, air, fire, water or earth in which the subtle ethereal, gaseous, igneous, fluid or solid element prevails overwhelmingly over the others. Even the last and subtlest condition to which gross matter can be reduced is not a final term; when realised into its constituents, the last term of gross matter disintegrates and matter reaches a stage at which many of the most urgent and inexorable laws of physics no longer operate. It is at this point where chemical analysis and reasoning can no longer follow Nature into her recesses that the Hindu system of Yoga by getting behind the five Pranas or gross vital breaths through which Life manifests in gross physical matter, is able to take up the pursuit and investigate the secrets of psychic existence in a subtler and freer world.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol 17, pp. 244-52)

THE NEEDED SYNTHESIS

What is the Synthesis needed at the present time?

UNDOUBTEDLY, that of man himself. The harmony of his faculties is the condition of his peace, their mutual understanding and helpfulness the means of his perfection. At war, they distract the kingdom of his being; the victory of one at the expense of another maims his self-fulfilment.

The peculiar character of our age is the divorce that has been pronounced between reason and faith, the logical mind and the intuitive heart. At first, the declaration of war between them was attended by painful struggles, a faith disturbed or a scepticism dissatisfied. But now their divorce has created exaggerated tendencies which impoverish human life by their mutual exclusiveness, on the one side a negative and destructive critical spirit, on the other an imaginative sentiment which opposes pure instinct and a faith founded on dreams to the sterile fanaticism of the intellect.

Yet a real divorce is impossible. Science could not move a step without faith and intuition and today it is growing full of dreams. Religion could not stand for a moment if it did not support itself by the intellectual presentation, however inadequate, of profound truths. Today we see it borrowing many of its weapons from the armoury of its opponent. But a right synthesis in virtue of a higher and reconciling truth can alone dissipate their mutual misunderstandings and restore to the race its integral self-development.

The synthesis then of religious aspiration and scientific faculty, as a beginning; and in the resultant progress an integrality also of the inner existence. Love and knowledge, the delight of the Bhakta and the divine science of the knower of Brahman, have to effect their unity; and both have to recover the fullness of Life which they tend to banish from them in the austerity of their search or the rapture of their ecstasy.

The heart and the mind are one universal Deity and neither a mind without a heart nor a heart without a mind is the human ideal. Nor is any perfection sound and real unless it is also fruitful. The integral divine harmony within, but as its result a changed earth and a nobler and happier humanity.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 439-40)

‘THE INTEGRAL REALISATION OF THY ETERNAL ONENESS’

Geneva, March 6, 1914

AFTER having suffered acutely from their suffering, I turned towards Thee, trying to heal it by infusing into it a little of that divine Love which is the source of all peace and all happiness. We must not run away from suffering, we must not love and cultivate it either, we must learn how to go deep down into it sufficiently to turn it into a lever powerful enough for us to force open the doors of the eternal consciousness and enter the serenity of Thy unchanging Oneness.

Surely this sentimental and physical attachment which causes an agonising wrench when bodies are separated, is childish from a certain point of view, when we contemplate the impermanence of outer forms and the reality of Thy essential Oneness; but, on the other hand, is not this attachment, this personal affection, an unconscious effort in men to realise outwardly, as far as possible, that fundamental oneness towards which they always move without even being aware of it? And precisely because of that, is not the suffering that separation brings one of the most effective means of transcending this outer consciousness, of replacing this superficial attachment by the integral realisation of Thy eternal Oneness?

This is what I wished for them all; this is what I ardently willed for them, and that is why, assured of Thy victory, certain of Thy triumph, I confided their grief to Thee that by illuminating it Thou mayst heal it.

O Lord, grant that all this beauty of affection and tenderness may be transformed into glorious knowledge.

Grant that the best may emerge from everything and Thy happy Peace reign over the earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 89-90)

A VISION

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

(2)

The Mother's account of these visions was brought out in 1906 and 1907 in the Revue Cosmique, a monthly review published in Paris. Although these accounts are unsigned, the fact that they begin with the same words, are written in the same style and develop on the same lines of experience, makes it almost certain that they are by the Mother.

In recounting her visions the Mother used a few terms taken from the "cosmic philosophy" expounded in the Revue. They have been rendered only approximately in translation so as to preserve the literary quality of the text. These terms are identified in the text by footnotes.

In this issue we are publishing the second of the seven visions.

I SLEPT and now I am awake. I am travelling swiftly towards the east, borne along by a small violet cloud which completely envelops me and prevents me from seeing anything on the way.

After a while I feel myself being set gently upon the ground, and the cloud withdraws; I am standing beside a high white wall. As I look at it, I see shadows creeping stealthily along the wall — men passing one behind the other at a distance, as if they did not wish to be observed. They are dressed in long violet tunics, with round hoods pulled down over their heads, concealing their faces almost completely. One after the other they disappear through a little door in the wall. Invisible to all, I follow them to see where they are going with such caution.

After passing through a small bare white room I find myself in a courtyard surrounded by arches and planted with orange-trees bearing their fine golden fruits. At the centre of the courtyard there is a fountain, with a basin of opulent blue, green and white mosaic, spouting a thin stream of water. The murmur of the fountain is the only sound that breaks the silence, for the courtyard is deserted; I cross it and pass through two more rooms, which also are empty. Finally I reach a staircase, and I climb up it onto a square terrace.

In a corner I see, reclining on cushions, a man half-veiled by an aura of splendid crimson, full of tiny moving golden sparkles. The man rises. He is a fine looking old man; both his hair, visible beneath a violet cap, and his beard are as white as snow; his bearing is noble and dignified. He is dressed in an ample violet robe girdled with a crimson belt; in his hand he holds a pair of golden scissors. He seems

to be waiting for someone.

And now, even as I observe the old man, the men whom I saw creeping along the wall enter one by one. In silence they range themselves in a circle around the edge of the terrace, and after them come others dressed in white, who go and stand in front of the first-comers.

All are motionless, all are silent. The one who appears to be their leader stands, very solemn, facing the head of the staircase. Gradually a soft glow pervades the air, shedding its light upon the still figures; as I turn round to identify the source of this light, I see a young boy of about fourteen years climbing the stairs that lead to the terrace; he is surrounded by a beautiful white radiance in which iridescent gleams can be seen. His flaxen hair falls in shapely curls upon his shoulders; his complexion is fair and delicate; his long eyelashes rest upon rose-tinted cheeks, for his eyes are downcast. He is dressed in a pale azure robe, girdled with a white silken cord, and wears sandals on his feet. Drawing forward slowly, he comes to a standstill one step away from the old man, and bows his head in silence. Then the old man speaks in a deep, gentle voice, but he speaks in a language unknown to me and I do not understand . . .

I have slept, and now I understand the meaning of the old man's words. He tells the child, "Thus you are about to fulfil the task entrusted to you, which you have accepted of your own free will; you will accomplish it in accordance with the instructions I have given you, without fear or weakness, for you know that we are one and that neither our love¹ nor our protection will ever fail you. You know the magnitude of the work you are about to perform, as well as all the pitfalls and dangers you will no doubt meet on your way; but be of good heart, for though the struggle be arduous, the victory is sure. You shall proceed towards the west, my child. May our highest blessing be with you."

Saying these words, he bends forward and impresses a deep kiss upon the white brow of the adolescent; then with the golden scissors he snips off one of the beautiful flaxen locks and slips it under his robe.

Then, without word or gesture, the child slowly and solemnly turns, and re-descends the stairs that lead to the terrace. I follow him, and see him leave the house and walk swiftly along the wall, his head high, looking straight before him.

Suddenly I find myself enveloped once more in the cloud, which bears me away, hiding everything from my sight. Once only does it open again, allowing me to look with wonder on a great river, its waters flowing silver beneath the moonlight, its banks overgrown with a splendid and luxuriant vegetation. Everything here is on a gigantic scale: the river that is broad as a lake, the trees with their crests that seem to touch the sky and behind, the mountains stretching out of sight, their summits covered with perpetual snow.

1. *Pathétisme*: divinised love.

In the midst of this immensity I see a tiny oval of moving white light; it is the child walking firmly and surely upon his way, his head high, without fear or weakness.

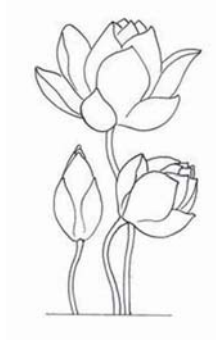
This scene is full of grandeur; I contemplate it and muse, I muse and understand: what a man at the height of his strength would find hard to achieve if he were alone, a child can accomplish almost without difficulty if he is sustained by the power and love¹ of those who are one with him.

Surely indeed, hierarchic grouping by affinity is the path that leads to victory!

THE MOTHER

(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, November 1981)

1. Ditto.



KNOWLEDGE BY UNITY WITH THE DIVINE — THE DIVINE WILL IN THE WORLD

CONSCIOUSNESS is the faculty of becoming aware of anything whatsoever through identification with it. But the divine consciousness is not only aware but knows and effects. For, mere awareness is not knowledge. To become aware of a vibration, for instance, does not mean that you know everything about it. Only when the consciousness participates in the divine consciousness does it get full knowledge by identification with the object. Ordinarily, identification leads to ignorance rather than knowledge, for the consciousness is lost in what it becomes and is unable to envisage proper causes, concomitants and consequences. Thus you identify yourself with a movement of anger and your whole being becomes one angry vibration, blind and precipitate, oblivious of everything else. It is only when you stand back, remain detached in the midst of the passionate turmoil that you are able to see the process with a knowing eye. So knowledge in the ordinary state of being is to be obtained rather by stepping back from a phenomenon, to watch it without becoming identified with it. But the divine consciousness identifies itself with its object and knows it thoroughly, because it always becomes one with the essential truth or law inherent in each fact. And it not only knows, but, by knowing, brings about what it wants. To be conscious is for it to be effective — each of its movements being a flash of omnipotence which, besides illumining, blazes its way ultimately to the goal dictated by its truth-nature.

Your ordinary consciousness is very much mixed up with unconsciousness — it fumbles, strains and is thwarted, while by unity with the Supreme you share the Supreme Nature and get the full knowledge whenever you turn to observe any object and identify yourself with it. Of course, this does not necessarily amount to embracing all the contents of the divine consciousness. Your movements become true, but you do not possess all the manifold riches of the Divine's activity. Still, within your sphere, you are able to see correctly and according to the truth of things — which is certainly more than what is called in yogic parlance knowledge by identity. For, the kind of identification taught by many disciplines extends your limits of perception without piercing to the innermost heart of an object: it sees from within it, as it were, but only its phenomenal aspect. For example, if you identify yourself with a tree, you become aware in the way in which a tree is aware of itself, yet you do not come to know everything about a tree for the simple reason that it is itself not possessed of such knowledge. You do share the tree's inner feeling, but you certainly do not understand the truth it stands for, any more than by being conscious of your own natural self you possess at once the divine reality which you secretly are. Whereas if you are one with the divine consciousness, you know —

over and above how the tree feels — what the truth behind it is, in short, you know everything, because the divine consciousness knows everything.

Indeed, there are many means of attaining this unity. It may be done through aspiration, or surrender, or some other method. Each followed with persistence and sincerity leads to it. Aspiration is the dynamic push of your whole nature behind the resolution to reach the Divine. Surrender, on the other hand, may be defined as the giving up of the limits of your ego. To surrender to the Divine is to renounce your narrow limits and let yourself be invaded by it and made a centre for its play. But you must bear in mind that the universal consciousness so beloved of Yogis is not the Divine: you can break your limits horizontally if you like, but you will be quite mistaken if you take the sense of wideness and cosmic multiplicity to be the Divine. The universal movement is after all a mixture of falsehood and truth, so that to stop there is to be imperfect; for, you may very well share the cosmic consciousness without ever attaining the transcendent Truth. On the other hand, to go to the Divine is also to attain the universal realisation and yet remain free of falsehood.

The real bar to self-surrender, whether to the Universal or to the Transcendent, is the individual's love of his own limitations. It is a natural love, since in the very formation of the individual being there is a tendency to concentrate on limits. Without that, there would be no sense of separateness — all would be mixed, as happens quite often in the mental and vital movements of consciousness. It is the body especially which preserves separative individuality by not being so fluid. But once this separateness is established, there creeps in the fear of losing it — a healthy instinct in many respects, but misapplied with regard to the Divine. For, in the Divine you do not really lose your individuality: you only give up your egoism and become the true individual, the divine personality which is not temporary like the construction of the physical consciousness which is usually taken for your *self*. One touch of the divine consciousness and you see immediately that there is no loss in it. On the contrary, you acquire a true individual permanence which can survive a hundred deaths of the body and all the vicissitudes of the vital-mental evolution. Without this transfiguring touch, you always go about in fear; with it, you gradually develop the power to make even your physical being plastic without losing its individuality. Even now, it is not entirely rigid, it is able to feel the conscious movements of others by a sort of sympathy which translates itself into nervous reactions to their joys and sufferings: it is also able to express your inner movements — it is well known that the face is an index and mirror to the mind. But only the divine consciousness can make the body responsive enough to reflect all the movements of the supramental immortality and be an expression of the true soul and, by being divinised, reach the acme of a supreme individuality which can even physically rise superior to the necessity of death and dissolution.

In conclusion, I should like to draw your attention to one point, for it very frequently obstructs true union. It is a great error to suppose that the Divine Will is

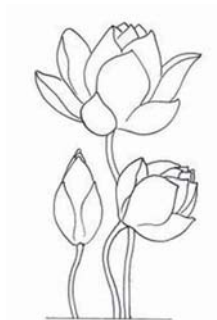
always acting openly in the world. All that happens is not, in fact, divine: the Supreme Will is distorted in the manifestation owing to the combination of lower forces which translate it. They are the medium which falsifies its impetus and gives it an undivine result. If all that happened were indeed the flawless translation of it, how could you account for the distortions of the world? . . . Not that the Divine Will could not have caused the cosmic Ignorance. It is omnipotent and all possibilities are inherent in it: it can work out anything of which it sees the secret necessity in its original vision. And the first cause of the world is, of course, the Divine, though we must take care not to adjudge this fact mentally according to our petty ethical values. But once the conditions of the cosmos were laid down and the involution into nescience accepted as the basis of a progressive manifestation of the Divine out of all that seemed its very opposite, there took place a sort of division between the Higher and the Lower. The history of the world became a battle between the True and the False, in which the details are not all direct representations of the Divine's progressive action but rather distortions of it owing to the mass of resistance offered by the inferior Nature. If there were no such resistance, there would be nothing whatever to conquer in the world, for the world would be harmonious, a constant passage from one perfection to another instead of the conflict which it is — a game of hazards and various possibilities in which the Divine faces real opposition, real difficulty and often real temporary defeat on the way to the final victory. It is just this reality of the whole play that makes it no mere jest. The Divine Will actually suffers distortion the moment it touches the hostile forces in the Ignorance. Hence we must never slacken our efforts to change the world and bring about a different order. We must be vigilant to co-operate with the Divine and not placidly think that whatever happens is always the best. All depends upon the personal attitude. If, in the presence of circumstances that are on the point of occurring, you take the highest possible attitude — that is to say, if you put your consciousness in contact with the highest consciousness within your reach — you can be absolutely certain that in such a case what happens is the best that can happen to you. But as soon as you fall from this consciousness and come down into a lower state, then it is evident that what happens cannot be the best, since you are not in your best consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo once said, "What happened had to happen, but it could have been much better." Because the person to whom it happened was not in his highest consciousness, there was no other consequence possible; but if he had brought about a descent of the Divine, then, even if the situation in general had been inevitable, it would have turned out in a different way. What makes all the difference is how you receive the impulsion of the Divine Will.

You must rise very high before you can meet this Will in its plenary splendour of authenticity; not before you open your lower nature to it can it begin to manifest in terms of the Truth. You must, therefore, refrain from applying the merely Nietzschean standard of temporary success in order to differentiate the Divine from

the undivine. For, life is a battlefield in which the Divine succeeds in detail only when the lower nature is receptive to its impulses instead of siding with the hostile forces. And even then the test is not so much external as internal: a divine movement cannot be measured by apparent signs — it is a certain kind of vibration that indicates its presence — external tests are of no avail, since even what is in appearance a failure may be in fact a divine achievement. . . . What you have to do is to give yourself up to the Grace of the Divine; for, it is under the form of Grace, of Love, that it has consented to uplift the universe after the first involution was established. With the Divine Love is the supreme power of Transformation. It has this power because it is for the sake of Transformation that it has given itself to the world and manifested everywhere. Not only has it infused itself into man, but also into all the atoms of the most obscure Matter in order to bring the world back to the original Truth. It is this descent that is called the supreme sacrifice in the Indian scriptures. But it is a sacrifice only from the human point of view; the human mind thinks that if it had to do such a thing it would be a tremendous sacrifice. But the Divine cannot really be diminished, its infinite essence can never become less, no matter what “sacrifices” are made. . . . The moment you open to the Divine Love, you also receive its power of Transformation. But it is not in terms of quantity that you can measure it; what is essential is the true contact; for, you will find that the true contact with it is sufficient to fill at once the whole of your being.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 167-72)



“TYAGA”
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Is this sonnet too “fade”?

RENUNCIATION

O vanished Face beyond the reach of thought,
Beauty the soul must love ere eyes can view! —
Shed lustre once again: have I not through
Forgetfulness of human faces sought,
Dark year on year, Thy memory divine?

~~peacefulness~~

The old alchemic touch of peace renew: [1]
Within my meditation’s blinded hue

~~aureal~~

Thy aureate immortality enshrine! [2]

Craving, O Vast, no lesser radiance,
I bare my dream of earth-vicissitude —
Rich curling vapour, mountain-majesty,
Oceanic rapture’s royal resonance!
Shall not my trancèd sacrificial mood,
Stripped of the universe, grow one with Thee?

[*Amal’s question written in the right margin*]

[2] I have suggested “aureal” to avoid too many “t”s.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

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

[2] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “aureal”*]

No — it is very good.

9 January 1934

*

Sri Aurobindo —

Please consider this version of my sonnet instead of what I sent up in the afternoon. I have made some important alterations in the sestet. Line 5 of the octave is also a little changed.

O vanished Face beyond the reach of thought,
 Beauty the soul must love ere eyes can view! —
 Shed lustre once again: have I not through
 Forgetfulness of human faces sought,
 Year on dark year, Thy memory divine?
 The old alchemic touch of peace renew:
 Within my meditation's blinded hue
 Thy aureate immortality enshrine!

Craving, O Vast, no lesser radiance,
 I bare of all change-garb my reverie —
 Pine-odorous sway, cloud-richnesses that rove,
 Oceanic rapture's royal resonance!
 Shall not my trancèd sacrificial love, [1]
 Stripped of the universe, grow one with Thee?

[*Amal's question written in the left margin*]

[1] Is it better to put “sacrificial” before “trancèd”? But, then, will it not disagree rhythmically with “royal” in the line preceding?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] It is better as it is.

Both versions are good — each has its merits.

9 January 1934

* * *

[Version from *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 450:*]

TYAGA

O vanished Face beyond the reach of thought,
 Beauty the soul must love ere eyes can view! —
 Shed lustre once again: have I not through
 Forgetfulness of human faces sought,
 Year on dark year, Thy memory divine?
 The old alchemic touch of peace renew:
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 I bare of all change-garb my reverie —
 Pine-odorous sway, cloud-richnesses that rove,
 Oceanic rapture's royal resonance!
 Shall not my tranceful sacrificial love,
 Stripped of the universe, grow one with Thee?

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

Poetry as an art is older than prose because the emotional and imaginative in man is older than the intellectual, and the moment the more deeply established part of us is stirred the impulse to poetry is there.

Amal Kiran
 (*Talks on Poetry*, p. 11)

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

Monday, 12 July 1926

My mind is becoming quieter and I am able to separate myself better from its workings. There is also a kind of broadening of consciousness; I feel in touch, all around the head, with a living medium. It is still very dim, only a beginning.

What I am doing is mostly to remain passive, allowing the Force to flow down and work. It then goes down to a little above the navel and expands.

I am watching the working of the Force. It seems to me not very spiritual.

... ? ...

I mean it is of the nature of a sensation — not of course a physical sensation — but not very distinct from it.

There is no such distinction between spiritual and material, in the sense that the Force is working on a material level, so to say — here, the psycho-physical — and it is not surprising that you feel its working. But it comes from above and has a set purpose: to render the body a fit instrument for the spirit.

It happened twice during meditation that my head was slowly bending backwards. Has this any meaning?

I don't see it very well.

I did not come last week because I was then in the midst of a struggle and did not find myself worthy of coming. It has been a difficult time — overpowered by the mind. But now it is better. Always the alternate coming of night and day.

You spoke of a broadening of consciousness. That is an important part of the process. If that were firmly established, all would go well. The essential thing to do is to watch the forces closely, to follow the divine Force in its workings and see how it works, to see what happens and how it happens. The Force may come down for organising the parts of the being, it may work from above or it may organise experiences. All this has to be watched.

Sometimes, in meditation, images appear in the field of vision. But they are not very vivid and they have the same character as the images of a dream. Moreover, I never noticed any element in them unknown to my consciousness. They are remembrances or due to the habitual linking of thoughts. I have always tried to reject these images. Is it all right?

The faculty of observing images should not be opposed. It may be that the present images are nothing but thought-images, but it may cover a more delicate working, and this may be the basis for something higher. You should not discourage this faculty, but you should keep watching the images without being carried away by them.

When looking at such images, I begin to think, "What is that? Oh, this is so and so" and so on, and my thinking (my inner conversation) begins to influence the images themselves, which shape themselves differently.

Of course, this thinking has to stop, for it spoils everything. What is needed is passivity without losing oneself.

* * *

Monday, 19 July 1926

This week has been calm and quiet — the meditation good. There is a slow improvement in the separation from the acting mind — and also an increasing peace and joy. There is nothing else to be said.

I received a letter from my friend Y, whose wife is at Geneva. He sent me a lecture of his about internationalism and it will perhaps show you better what the man is.

(After reading it) It is more about nationalism than internationalism! He still uses crude language.

... ? ...

Yes, he talks about love between nations. Love between nations is an absurdity. The love that a man can become conscious of for his fellow-beings is the experience of identity, and only a few can have it. If the leaders, the brains of a nation, could have it, that would be all right, but nothing more can be expected. And to speak about love in such a way is only to prepare war.

Why so?

Because it is a false ideal — false because not practical. Of course, the League of Nations is actually based upon greed and vanity. But to break it all of a sudden is an impossible task in the present state of humanity. Something can be done, but to hope that love can be the next motto for it is foolish.

About him, I feel that these ideals are coming more from the vital plane than from elsewhere. He is not a mental man and has always had the ideal of a mission to fulfil, of being guided towards it by higher entities. In what way can I help him?

Of course, the life energy he speaks of is a vital energy and it catches ideals and ideas to support itself. This is a common fact and it is all right for those who are not destined for the spiritual life. In such a case one has to recognise that such ideals are not final and to understand their true nature. But to destroy this would mean that you would have to have something higher to give him.

He seems to be perfectly happy today. In his letter he says that his soul is full of joy.

Then it is better to leave him, not to meddle with his evolution, until he demands something higher.

May I come more often to the evening sittings?

Yes, you may come.

* * *

Monday, 26 July 1926

I feel distinctly the overshadowing presence of a Force above me. A small part of that Force comes down and works in me.

What kind of work does it effect?

I cannot see very distinctly. It is a pressure that tries to expand. More than this I cannot say. But I feel that only a small part comes down. It also presses upon the physical mind and tries to calm and quiet it.

There are two movements I make: one is to be passive and open to that working. The other is to go above and try to unite with that Force. I have then a sensation of broadening, of a vast and compact consciousness.

It happened two or three times that I saw before me a long, endless road. But this image had no distinct character that indicated an origin other than the ordinary mental images.

It is still a mental image, and all mental images have the same character, only it may come from the higher mental plane. Once you open to them, you receive knowledge of things you do not know in the ordinary mind.

The image of a road is a very common image of the higher mental; its meaning is that of the path that has to be travelled on.

If the images are all around us, how is it that they do not come into our mind?

They come often into a man's mind, but he believes them to be his own thoughts. Moreover, one must have something that corresponds to them; otherwise they make no impression and do not come out of the subconscious. But once you begin to open, images arise more frequently and you need to discriminate among them.

What kind of image has to be rejected and what kind accepted?

What has first to be rejected is the ordinary working of the mind and the images of material life that surround us. Afterwards one has to remain passive. What seems to come from above is not necessarily pure and then one has to discriminate.

Mr. G has spoken to Mr. V, head of the college here. There is a possibility of my becoming an examiner for the baccalauréat here. This will bring me students. But I will owe this position to Mr. G. And it is impossible to obtain it without his support.

I don't see why you should not accept it. It does not bind you?

Not at all. I have only to be thankful for it.

That is all right. What is to be avoided is your being drawn into politics.

Certainly. There is no chance of that.

* * *

Monday, 2 August 1926

There is nothing new to report. Quiet meditation becoming deeper. At times flashes of light pass before my eyes, but I know they have no outward reality. They are the same kind as those flashes that are seen when one presses one's eyes.

These flashes of light are the first sign of the coming down of the Light into the physical consciousness. They need not come and the sense of Light may remain mental, but if it comes down, flashes are seen. But you must not jump to the conclusion that they are the same kind as light created by ocular compression. People generally view their new experiences from the standpoint of their accumulated experience. Some people, for instance, when they first see that Light, look around to see if a lamp is lit or if sunlight is coming in. It is necessary to view them from a higher point of view.

But how does it give such a physical impression of light, though it is not physical? You said also that a tendency to blindness may be created at that time.

Because the centre of vision is affected and we have the habit of referring every new experience to what we already know. It need not affect the physical sight if we can remain aloof from it.

As for the tendency to blindness, it has two main causes. First, many people, when these visions come, get into the habit of continually keeping their visual attention inward and thus create a disturbance in the physical sight. Then the light which is seen is very brilliant and it has the same effect as if somebody was continually gazing at a dazzling light.

Madame X has had these experiences and says she nearly became blind.

But a balance has to be cultivated that enables one to remain above, undisturbed and unaffected.

* * *

Monday, 9 August 1926

Nothing new. As I have done some mental work, my mind has caused me some trouble. There are two kinds of mental work as regards their effect upon me. When I am preparing my tuitions or reading an easy book, my mind is only superficially interested, but when I am trying to solve a question for myself, for instance a problem of mathematics, and if I take interest in it, my mind gets dispersed again and carries me away. Then it rushes out with accumulated force — and it sees nothing else, it does not allow me to meditate and it cuts my connection with the higher life.

It need not be cut. There is nothing wrong in being interested in some work. But the mind that works is not the whole mind and there is a part which stands apart if you do not identify yourself with the working mind.

I cannot make this separation in practice. When I am reading, if I try to look at my mind which is reading I lose the significance of what I read.

That has always been a difficulty with me. As soon as I do any action in life — it may be a manual or an intellectual work — I cut myself off from my higher aspiration. It is impossible to practise Yoga in life.

Because the vital and physical parts of the mind have remained untouched. They must be opened.

The Mother told me that my vital being had been repressed. There is some truth in it. My education has been purely scientific and I had no artistic culture. I did not derive any help from art. I am far from clinging to conventional ideas of morality, but I have repressed certain tendencies of the vital in order to get a relative freedom and mastery. I have respect, but very little, for sentimental emotion. So the vital is of very little use to me. But what is to be done? I suppose it will open to the higher Light and nothing is to be tried from below.

It will open in the process of Yoga. But something more than a passive self-surrender is necessary. In this Yoga, a mere waiting upon the Force to come down if it wills, won't do. You have done nearly all that could be done by the mind above, and the opening through a pure mental process would no doubt take a long time. Therefore you have to rely on the higher Force. But simply waiting is not sufficient; you have to call it down and see how it works, make demands upon it. And this must be done in the vital as well as in the mind.

What is the difference between a vital demand and a mental demand?

This you have to find out. You have to see what is there in the vital, see the possibilities and potentialities, and what is to be kept. You will rely on the higher Light to decide, but you must not remain purely passive. The higher Light will show you what has to be done, but you must make an active demand for transformation. This will not be perfect at first and some resistance will be there.

Especially in your case, such an active demand is necessary. Some people need moderation, for they are continually pulling down, being vitally and emotionally eager. But this is not your case.

I have always been afraid of mental laziness, but I suppose that was wrong. Even if I don't do any mental work except what is strictly necessary for my tuitions, there is no harm in it.

It is sometimes good to change one's habitual way of working for a certain time.

* * *

Monday, 16 August 1926

Last week has been better on the whole; it has been more easy to meditate and the Force has come down with more power. It presses down at the level of the navel. My mind also is more quiet and does not require as much incentive.

You spoke of the opening of the mind and the vital. What do you mean exactly by these terms?

It is first the opening to a higher Light and Power and also the opening to the influences of that plane, becoming conscious of the forces of that level.

Does the mind always open before the vital?

It is generally so. But the vital can be prepared before the mind opens. The mind may get partially opened and the vital is then able to receive the higher Light. But the total opening of the mind may come only later. In your case the fact that the Force is working now on the vital level shows that it can pass through the mind without being hampered. You have to open to the higher Light and Power.

Should I try to pull the Force down?

No, just open yourself to it. It will act on its own.

Has my recent illness any connection with sadhana? At any rate, there is a distinct physical cause for it: I got a chill.

No. I don't think there is any connection with sadhana.

Now another question. Mr. G spoke to the Governor about me and my position as a teacher and as an examiner. I wonder whether it would not be good to pay a visit to the Governor. He is said to be a kind man, with an interest in Theosophy. I would like to say to him, diplomatically, that though he will not meet me in social gatherings my abstention only comes from the kind of studies I am pursuing.

Let me consider that point. I will let you know later.

(Later Barin-da told me that I could go and visit the Governor, but that it would probably be better not to emphasise my private life as regards Yoga.)

* * *

Wednesday, 18 August 1926

(I report my conversation with the Governor, who besides had asked for me. He received me quite sympathetically and asked me if I could possibly devote some time to giving lessons at the school. Not only does he excuse my abstention from social life but he approves of it. In short, interview successful.)

* * *

Saturday, 28 August 1926

I have been very busy outside with the examination, but for the first time the contact with the outside world has not disturbed me as it used to do. Coming home I was able to take up meditation rather easily.

Meditation has been, on the whole, satisfactory. The mind was relatively quiet and transparent to the Force that came down. The chief place where the Force works is above and around the navel. Sometimes I felt a distinct sense of strong power rising in me.

The vital centre is beginning to open in you.

The principal difficulty in meditation comes from the most external part of the mind. Sometimes it is quiet and passive, but sometimes intruding thoughts are very obstinate; they are connected with the physical arrangement of things. For instance, I am thinking whether I should place a shelf here or not, what I have to buy, the things that may come by the next mail and so on. That was what I meant when speaking of the part of the mind which is interested in collecting stamps. On the other hand, the preparation of my tuitions and the tuitions themselves do not disturb me. But if I take interest in a work for myself, then I am easily carried away.

But these thoughts do not disturb you in meditation, do they?

When I am in a favourable state, they don't, but sometimes I cannot get rid of them, especially in the morning meditation, which is generally very defective. The best one is in the evening, between six and seven. The noon one is between these two.

The reason may be that the things you throw away in the waking state are able to come back through the subconscious and they come in mostly at night.

That may be.

Now, something happened a few days ago. I received a letter from my friend Y, speaking about his wife. After that, in meditation I found myself thinking of that lady, but in a peculiar way. I was directing to her a kind of force that came from the mental vital. It was not purposely done by me nor was it a vital rush, but a quiet and mild pressure and it was put forth from the top of the head.

Twice I had similar experiences of finding myself working on the higher planes without purposely intending to do it. The first one was when C.S. was ill. At the evening gathering, you asked the news about him and then remained silent for a while. Then I felt myself carried to his room and working there. Another time, when a gale was raging during our evening meeting, I found that I was putting forth a kind of force in that direction. K also felt it.

It is because the consciousness is beginning to awake on the higher planes and to work consciously there. There is nothing of pure imagination in it. It is a fact.

Today I brought photos of my friend's wife so that you may know what she is like.

Can you leave them with me? I shall show them to the Mother.

(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.]

Spiritual capacity means simply a natural capacity for true spiritual experience and development. It can be had on any plane, but the natural result is that one gets easily into touch with the Self and the higher planes.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 325)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

Chapter X (Continued)

The Daily Routine of Spiritual Life

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
Easter 1932

Dear Maman,

We had a music recital at the Ashram this afternoon: Indian music and European music, *veena*, Tamil and Bengali songs, Handel's *Largo* and a piece from Schubert – I do not know the name. At first sight, it may seem quite a profane activity for yogis. But in fact, there is hardly anything which cannot be used for yoga and which, by an inner attitude of offering and of opening to the divine Consciousness, cannot take its place in the disciple's life. Instead of being a hindrance and an occasion for the dissipation of the consciousness, it becomes an aid and a means of communion with the Divine.

This is what we are trying to do daily with the work, whatever it may be, and it can be done through art or any other activity. Naturally it is difficult because we must break all the mechanical ways of doing things, we must liberate ourselves from all old reactions and even from the habitual functioning of the human consciousness. But it is a certitude for all of us, and the experience of some, that it can be done.

On this subject there are some interesting things in a *Conversation* with Mother (n° 14) which I shall send you later. Today I am sending you n° 10 and n° 11.

I hope that winter has not been too hard for you. We hear a lot about the general craze in France for winter sports. This is a happy change. But is it not mainly a matter of fashion and is there not a certain snobbism in this sudden interest?

In all that he does, man does not know how to find the balance, he throws himself violently from one side to the other, hurls himself headfirst into everything that is presented to him, takes excessive agitation for a sign of power and health, and in his haste to enjoy life, forgets the secret of happiness.

I would like to bring something to Papa's notice. In the *Mercure de France* of July 15, 1931, there is an article *The Vatican and Italy* which mentions, in addition to the well-known prophecy of Saint Malachy, expressed in vague terms and not of much interest, another prophecy made by a monk of Padua in 1740 which apparently contains the names of all the successive Popes. Obviously, it is difficult to gain access to the original, if it exists; but the prophecy seems to have been published in France in the *Review of Heraldic Questions* in March 1899. Since this date there have been three Popes, and the author of the article in the *Mercure de France* affirms that their names have been given correctly.

Would it interest Papa to find out whether this prophecy is genuine by consulting the above named Review? Perhaps he will find it in the library of the Automobile Club. If the three names were quite correct, it would be a guarantee of authenticity and the thing would be interesting.

About myself, I have nothing special to tell you. My health is excellent and my heart hymns the continual action of grace. I hope to get a letter from you soon, and I embrace you very affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
May 18, 1932

Very dear Parents,

Papa has always had a weakness for history. On my part, I have often asked myself how could one accord the least bit of credence to what the historians — even those who are of good faith — tell us. I do not even speak of the hidden sense of history, the real reasons for the events, the currents of thought and the forces which are at work behind men, but I have seen so many mistakes, so much confusion,

wrong interpretation slipping into the accounts of the events which I have been part of, that I have lost confidence in the historic accuracy of the facts themselves.

It is, moreover, well known that the accounts of the smallest news item — for example, an automobile accident, a brawl — always differ according to the witnesses, and often on important points. Recently I was sworn in as the assistant magistrate at the Assizes Court, and there was, among other matters, a murder case. I realised how difficult it was, even with the detailed accounts of eye witnesses, to reconstruct an event. And one could ask further questions, interrogate other witnesses, study the scenes of the crime. When it concerns ancient events of which one has only incomplete accounts and sometimes contradictory ones, what role do the historian's imagination and bias not play in his reconstruction!

Here is a small, perfectly characteristic personal incident. We received the short account of a lecture given by a certain M. Demarquette at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Paris, entitled *Sri Aurobindo Ghose, the mysterious Mahatma of South India*. It was chockfull of inaccuracies and errors, and above all of incomprehension. But on this last count, one could hardly blame this gentleman except for wanting to speak of something that he barely knew and grasped even less. These errors were, evidently, not all due to ignorance; most were intended to give more colour and relief to the talk. I had met this person, and here is the account of his visit:

I was shown into a room where a gentleman dressed in white, covered with veils, but certainly European in appearance, even though he had the most beautiful black hair and beard, came towards me. He was French, bearing an illustrious name, the son of one of the greatest French Orientalists, himself an old alumnus of the 'Polytechnique' and holding a Doctorate in Science . . .

Now, I was not covered with veils, my beard and my hair are not the most beautiful black. Papa is not a great Orientalist (there was obviously a confusion with Barthélemy Saint Hilaire) and lastly, I do not have a Doctorate in Science. Needless to say, during this visit, we did not speak of myself, and some other persons were responsible for supplying this information. That is a lot of mistakes in a few lines. And this concerns first-hand information! Moreover, if one wanted to learn about the Ashram from all that is said in town, one would have a fine collection of inanities.

I have just received Maman's letter written during Easter.

But Maman, I have not said that suffering **was** a vital perversion — although it is certain that suffering cannot touch us if there were not one part of our vital being which called it and indulged in it. I have called vital perversions only those doctrines which justify pain and that mysticism which says that it pleases God and believes that the wrath of God was appeased by the torture of his son. The dogma of the

expiatory sacrifice and Redemption, the mortifications and the culture of suffering to gain merits, the motto “to suffer” (*pati*) of the Catholic mystics, the massacres of the heretics and the infidels carried out with the idea that death and suffering are a purification and that the blood that was shed could please God, the religious sentimentality which takes pleasure in the contemplation of Christ’s wounds — these are the perversions of which I wanted to speak. Besides, they also exist elsewhere than in the Catholic religion, but the latter is the most affected because it rests entirely upon the dogma of Redemption. This dogma is certainly a deformation of a more ancient tradition which we find in the Mysteries (of Osiris, of Dionysius) which alludes to the holocaust of the Divine Consciousness accepting to assume the inconscience and obscurity of matter in order to transform and divinise it.

But this leads us far away. And then it is better not to speak of these subjects except when one has attained a direct and immediate knowledge of them. Without that, instead of relying on a living and personal experience, one dwells in the domain of intellectual speculations which can be very brilliant, but which are still of a doubtful stability and which are, finally, of little practical interest.

From Papa, I have not received anything since his letter of the middle of December.

I have seen in the next issues of the *Mercure de France* that the prophecy of Padua was quite suspect and that the author of the article in question had simply omitted to mention that the prophecy was already found to be wrong. Thus it loses almost all its interest.

At present, I have two English books with me:

Eddington. *Stars and Atoms* (translated into French under the title: *Étoiles et atomes*),

Jeans. *The Universe Around Us* (translated under the title: *L’Univers*).

I do not know if Papa has already read Jeans’ book which I had already told him about. It is perhaps much too technical, but Eddington’s is simpler and more pleasing. These books are interesting because they demonstrate very well the unity towards which science is tending at present.

I am sending you the *Conversations* n° 12 and n° 13, with my most affectionate thoughts.

I embrace all of you.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. I would like very much to have, for exchanging, the stamps of my letters and I thank you in advance.

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
August 28, 1932

My dear Papa,

Our letters have crossed and I received yours at the time when mine should have reached you.

I see that I was mistaken. I should never have sent you these *Conversations* which are not, as you seem to think, a literary composition but a shorthand account of conversations which had actually taken place. Please excuse me for having caused you pain unintentionally. I think it would be best if you return them to me, so that we could erase my mistake.¹

I hope, all the same, that you will keep me informed about your life in which I am always interested, even though you seem to think otherwise. On my side, I shall not leave you without news of me.

I was glad to receive a postcard from Albert. I am happy that he is having a pleasant voyage.

I embrace all three of you.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Pondicherry, November 8, 1932

Dear Maman,

I have received your sweet letter from Bourbonne. It is indeed a very favourable place for rest; it should be possible to do nothing else but rest, at least that is the impression I retain of the journey that we had made together before the War. Was it not while going to Bourbonne in the old De Dion car that Marcos To reversed into another car?

Actually, by car, La Minelle is not so badly placed either: Bourbonne, Vittel, Luxeuil and mainly, all of Vosges. It is amusing to remember the time when it was an expedition to go from the house of the Marquis² to La Minelle: one got the station-wagon ready . . .

1. The *Conversations with the Mother*, their exact title, were not returned and were found with the letters of 1931-1932.

2. It is the house of the Marquis de Landreville which Paul had rented on arriving at Corrès. It is situated in the market town itself, and so about two kilometres from La Minelle.

I hope that you will be lucky with your new staff and that it will cause a little less worry to Papa. What has happened to the co-operative? Have there been changes which I am not aware of or does it still function without you?

You will receive this letter in Paris. Let us hope that it will not be cold this winter; thinking of the house in Rue Pigalle always gives me an impression of cold, above all the dining room . . . In that connection, I have often asked myself if the day you had Monsieur Dandelot come to lunch, did he not suffer from the cold since he was used to the tropical heat?

Here we have the rains, it is the season, but in spite of that it is still 25°C. And yet we find it nippy. How quickly the human body adapts itself; basically, it is very supple and robust. If we do not disturb it constantly with our ideas and the constraints we impose on it, it will probably not cause us any trouble. For example, it knows very well what it needs and what does it good and what harms it, but it is because our mind wants to decide in its place and says: 'This is good, this is bad', or again because we obey our vital desires, that this faculty becomes atrophied. Animals have it still; they know how to recognise and do not eat poisonous plants; they never overeat.

I also think that the Europeans can live very well in the tropical climates, provided they change their lifestyle and above all their food habits. It is absurd to want to eat as much here or in Saigon as in France. The same goes for clothes. To think that the soldiers who conquered Cochin China [South Vietnam] had great-coats, and red pants and kepis! Truly, it was madness!

Albert must have had a good voyage even though these cruises organised for the rich are never interesting. I have seen too many of these caravans of American tourists in Japan to be tempted by voyages of this kind. I would prefer to board a cargo vessel, be the sole passenger aboard, stop at the ports of call for three or four days while the goods are loaded and thus take twice or thrice the time to make the journey. But I am hardly thinking of travelling. You can, say the ancient Chinese sages, know the whole world without leaving your room. I think it is true, literally.

I hope that you are in good health and I send you my most loving thoughts. I embrace you.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Pondicherry, May 7, 1933

My dear Papa,

I have received the stamps that you sent me around New Year with the simplicity of heart that you expected from me and I too thank you very simply for them, but very sincerely, as an evidence of affection.

Where are you going to spend the Summer this year?

Here, during the very hot season, it is customary, especially among the Government officials, to holiday in the mountains of South India which are much frequented by the English of the Madras Province. It is, it seems, absolutely like the fashionable spas or beaches of Europe. In Pondicherry, there are some days, especially in June, when one yearns for a little coolness, but on the whole one cannot complain about the climate. There is always the sea breeze which moderates the heat of the sun. It is so wonderful to have the sun every day; when it rains, one is completely taken by surprise and one does not know what to do. I must add that the rains are not light and that in a few days one makes up for the lost time.

I had recommended to you Maurice Magre's book, *Death and the Future Life*. I liked it very much, not that I believe all his ideas, but I like the way the subject has been broached and treated. The author is intelligent and shows a certain modesty at once for himself and for what concerns mankind. On the other hand, what I have found difficult to accept in Bergson's last book are his constant allusions to the superiority of man and above all of "civilised" man — civilisation, naturally, being limited to the Mediterranean basin: to the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian world.

In this context, there is a first-rate book which I recommend to you, it is *Introduction to the Study of Human Doctrines* by René Guérin. It is worth reading. Other works of Guérin are second-rate. If you read it, you will understand my astonishment that an eminent philosopher like Bergson could seemingly ignore an entire aspect of the problems which he seeks to fathom.

Maurice Magre's small book, *Why am I a Buddhist?* is absolutely charming. Recently I have read several very interesting works of an entirely different order of ideas: *New Standards* by H. Dubreuil, and the *Memoirs* of the Prince of Bülow.

How is your health this year, and how is Albert? I hope that his business, Pyrolac does not cause him too much worry.

I have resumed the study of Astrology, a little more than a year ago or thereabouts. In Albert's horoscope, as in yours, one finds the risk that associations may not be happy, be they loss by the associates, disagreement or bickering! I say this by the way, without insisting, because it may well be, and I do so wish, that this prediction is proved wrong.³

3. This prediction turned out to be, I think, quite right about Paul, but wrong about Albert.

According to the astrologers there is a relation between the moment of conception and that of birth. What I have read on this subject leaves me a little sceptical, but it is evidently not impossible. Several times I wanted to ask you — then I forgot to do it — the date of your marriage and whether you left for your honeymoon immediately afterwards. When did you settle down in Corrès?

I am fine. My thoughts are often with you and I lovingly embrace all three of you.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Pondicherry, September 18, 1933

My dear Parents,

I am happy about the good news that your kind letters brought me and I congratulate Maman on her success at bridge. *L'Illustration* spoke of a Franco-American bridge tournament that Papa directed. Judging from the accounts, it must not have been easy. If these tournaments become widespread and take on the popularity of championships, I wonder how cheating could be avoided, that is to say, the understanding among the players of the same team. Has Albert inherited your talents? I saw in the *Génie civil* an article which has given me some information about the varnish Pyrolac, which I had asked for from Albert some time back, but to no avail. I understand the business angle.

I thank Papa for Lakhowski's book, even though its value seems minimal to me. From the scientific point of view, it is full of glaring mistakes and childishness, and if there is something valid in the thesis — that which experience alone can decide — it is put in a quite unpleasant form and not at all justified by the writer's fanciful ideas. There are many like Lakhowski; they catch the tail of an intuition and they adapt it for all sauces, attempting to apply it to everything and pose as unrecognised and persecuted geniuses. No doubt they do useful work by stirring up the inertia of official scientists and lead to new research.

I thank Papa for his advice, but it is not at all my type, and what I am seeking to realise is of a different order even when I study Astrology. It is not that I am interested in death and the beyond, as Papa seems to think. I was surprised because there is nothing in all that I have written or communicated to him since I have been here which shows a special interest in these things. I have even declared to him quite often that our aim is a spiritual realisation here in this world, in this life, and not in another life and in another world.

If I mentioned Maurice Magre, it is because there is in his books a sincere

aspiration towards the truth without preconceived ideas, much sensitivity and true modesty, and then he is not one of those who revel in words and that he is, to a certain extent, free from the influence of the collective western thought. But I do not at all share all the ideas expressed in his books; particularly I do not believe that escape from this world, an idea he holds, can be a solution to the problem that man has to face.

I am getting on very well from all the points of view and I embrace all three of you very affectionately.

Your son.

Signed: Philippe

P. S. Have you found in any cupboard in my old room or in La Minelle, my stereoscopic photos of the War? There were a good many (negatives and positives). I often wish I had them. But it is not urgent. I am just asking you to keep them safe for me. Those which you had sent to me in Japan were views of the Alps and the hydraulic factories taken in 1920. There were none of the War among them.

* * *

Pondicherry, December 6, 1933

My dear Parents, my dear Albert,

The end of the year is approaching and I want to send you my loving wishes in time for the one that is going to begin.

I have received the sweet letter which Maman has sent me from Saint-Gervais and I hope that the health of the three of you does not feel the effects of winter and that your occupations and business bring you the interest and the satisfaction one may expect from them in these times of insecurity and conflict.

But, Maman, in my last letter, I do not think I have written anything which can afflict you in this manner. I just wanted to say that I was not one of those who deprive themselves in this world or resign themselves to a miserable life, hoping that their suffering or their resignation will buy them a small place in paradise — or a better fate in another life. The life I lead here is not a deprivation; the spiritual realisation which is our aim, with the amplitude, beauty, knowledge, harmony that it brings, must be realised here in this world, in the physical life and not after death. In this hope — or rather in this certitude — there is nothing that can grieve you, is there?

At this point of completing my forty years, I can affirm, dear Parents, that this intimate conviction that I am where I ought to be, and that I have found, if not the

Truth, at least the shortest and the surest way to know it and to manifest it, is not only a pious expectation, but that it is confirmed by daily experience, monitored and developed through these last years. I would like that, once and for all, you have peace of mind about me. It is my dearest wish.

I embrace all three of you very lovingly. My thoughts are with you.

Signed: Philippe

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

We seek indeed a larger and completer affirmation. We perceive that in the Indian ascetic ideal the great Vedantic formula, "One without a second", has not been read sufficiently in the light of that other formula equally imperative, "All this is the Brahman". The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation. Its meaning in Matter has not been so well understood as Its truth in the Spirit.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 27-28)

THE NOTION OF PROGRESS IN DARWINIAN THEORY

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

The Third Terms of Life

This third status is a condition in which we rise progressively beyond the struggle for life by mutual devouring and the survival of the fittest by that struggle; . . . The individuals and the aggregates who develop most the law of association and the law of love, of common help, kindness, affection, comradeship, unity, who harmonise most successfully survival and mutual self-giving, the aggregate increasing the individual and the individual the aggregate, . . . will be the fittest for survival in this tertiary status of the evolution.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 216)

INCLUSIVE fitness altruism — the altruism shown to offspring and kin, which is a trait shared by many social animals and reciprocal altruism fall in this category. In nature, survival of the group is often dependent on the members of the group helping to ward off predators and this trait is extremely developed in certain species where there are specialised roles to defend the colony. This is also referred to as soft-altruism since it is not true altruism but essentially a form of selfishness where the individual expands to kin-group or even a cultural group in early human societies. Presence of these traits are ultimately tied to Darwinian selection for the members' sacrifice ultimately benefits the group and via the group its own genetic lineage. In fact many neo-Darwinists refuse to look beyond this fact when it comes to altruism and ethics. Not only do they deny the possibility of any true ethics but insist on the true root of all altruistic behaviour being in the genetic make-up of the species which essentially means that such behaviour is similar to instinct. E. O. Wilson, an expert on ants and the father of the discipline of Sociobiology writes,

One is tempted to leave the matter there, to accept the purest elements of altruism as simply the better side of human nature. Perhaps, to put the best possible construction on the matter, conscious altruism is a transcendental quality that distinguishes human beings from animals. But scientists are not accustomed to declaring any phenomenon off limits, and it is precisely through deeper analysis of altruism that sociobiology seems best prepared at this time to make a novel contribution. (Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, Harvard University Press 1978, 2004, p. 150)

On the matter of extreme altruism he goes on to cite the cases of several social insects where a “caste” is created, the sole purpose of the members being to protect the colony from invaders by self-sacrifice. Wilson goes on to comment,

Sharing the capacity for extreme sacrifice does not mean that the human mind and the “mind” of an insect (if such exists) work alike. But it does mean that the impulse need not be ruled divine or otherwise transcendental, and we are justified in seeking a more conventional biological explanation.

(Ibid., pp. 152-53)

He adds further,

My own estimate of relative proportions of hard-core (true ethics) and soft-core altruism in human behaviour is optimistic. Human beings appear to be sufficiently selfish and calculating to be capable of indefinitely greater harmony and social homeostasis. This statement is not self-contradictory. True selfishness, if obedient to the other constraints of mammalian biology, is the key to a more nearly perfect social contract. *(Ibid., p. 157)*

and concludes,

Individual behaviour, including seemingly altruistic acts bestowed on the tribe and nation, are directed, somewhat circuitously, toward the Darwinian advantage of the solitary human being and his closest relatives. The most elaborate forms of social organisation, despite their outward appearance, serve ultimately as vehicles of individual welfare. Human altruism appears to be substantially hard-core when directed at close relatives, although still to a much lesser degree than in the case of the social insects and the colonial invertebrates. The remainder of our altruism is essentially soft. The predicted result is a *mélange* of ambivalence, deceit, and guilt that continuously troubles the individual mind.

(Ibid., pp. 158-59)

There is a lot in what Wilson says that Sri Aurobindo would agree with. Insofar as life is still trying to consolidate its domain, self-preservation is its primary instinct. Mind then is at the command of the senses and it too is preoccupied with the struggle. There is an element of truth in seeing the mind as a sensory command centre, for a more effective control on the senses will be a tremendous survival tool. However, it would be a mistake to see that as the primary objective of the mind as most neo-Darwinists are prone to do. This is typical of a reductionist approach where the qualities of the lower term explain the higher, so mind as a product of Darwinian evolution will serve only the Darwinian struggle and its products — imagination,

information gathering, knowledge, morals and ethics too will be ultimately Darwinian in their primary purpose. Moreover it would be a mistake to apply the laws of Life to Mind just as it is an error to apply the laws of the physical world to Life. Both Life and Mind are emergent principles, with their own laws and while some of their workings overlap the domain of matter, they cannot be explained in terms of the lower.

However, we have seen that unlike Wilson, Ernst Mayr accepts the ability of the human mind to unyoke itself from the genetic machinery and arrive at true ethics. Primatologist Frans de Waal has spent a lifetime observing primates, humans' closest relatives and in his writings there is a perceptible shift from the neo-Darwinist position towards giving Mind freedom from the genetic make-up (and hence geared for survival) and a stress on the role of learning. He writes,

Human behaviour is seriously modified by experience.

This may sound too obvious to mention, but is a radically different way of putting things than the way biologists used to talk. In the 1960s, almost every noticeable tendency of the human species was labeled an "instinct". . . .

He continues,

The problem with the term instinct, however, is that it downplays the role of learning and experience.

And further,

it is undeniable that we have inborn predispositions, yet I don't see us as blind actors carrying out nature's genetic programmes. I see us rather as improvisers who flexibly adjust to other improvisers on the scene with our genes offering hints and suggestions.

(Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape*, Riverhead Books, 2005, p. 234)

de Waal stresses the tendency of nature to keep things in a balance — this applies to strategies for survival as well as tendencies like competition and cooperation, selfishness and sociability, strife and harmony, since,

the very capacities that promote peace, such as reconciliation after a fight, would never have evolved in the absence of conflict. In a bipolar world, every capacity hints at its very opposite. (*Ibid.*, p. 233)

Moreover, applying the language of ethics to material nature is misleading. Much of what appears to be altruism or selfishness in nature is born out of vital recoil,

usually from anything that threatens the continuation of life and is essentially blind instinct. Sri Aurobindo writes,

Animal or vital Nature is also non-ethical, although as it progresses it manifests the crude material out of which the higher animal evolves the ethical impulse.
(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 103)

Using the language of ethics at this level and then extrapolating it to the domain of the Mind is a mistake, for,

This recoil or dislike is the primary origin of ethics, but is not itself ethical. . . . Disapproval of that which threatens and hurts us, approval of that which flatters and satisfies refine into the conception of good and evil to oneself, to the community, to others than ourselves, to other communities than ours, and finally into the general approval of good, the general disapproval of evil. But, throughout, the fundamental nature of the thing remains the same. Man desires self-expression, self-development, in other words, the progressing play in himself of the conscious-force of existence; that is his fundamental delight. Whatever hurts that self-expression, self-development, satisfaction of his progressing self, is for him evil; whatever helps, confirms, raises, aggrandises, ennobles it is his good. Only, his conception of the self-development changes, becomes higher and wider, begins to exceed his limited personality, to embrace others, to embrace all in its scope.
(*Ibid.*, pp. 103-04)

The neo-Darwinian viewpoint tends to see the world (and that includes humans), as the selfish, self-serving product of a process that creates by cruel elimination of the unfit. In other words, they ascribe the qualities of the process to the product. Frans de Waal sums it up neatly — he calls it the “Beethoven Error”. Just as Beethoven has produced some of the best music ever from a dirty and unkempt apartment in Vienna, it is wrong to assume as neo-Darwinists often do that a cruel and pitiless process of Natural selection could only have produced cruel and pitiless creatures — humans. (Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, Princeton Science Library, 2009, pp. 57-58) Science, and especially evolutionary science is almost committed not to look into the future, for driven by random mutations and natural selection, the living world is forever destined to respond to the prevailing criteria for fitness. However, if we step aside and look at 4.5 billion years of Earth’s history we see Life and Mind emerging out of what literally was once gas. The idea is to look at humans too as transitory beings which may transform to something better.

Sri Aurobindo points the way out from this “altruism and ethics” dilemma, appealing to the same evolutionary process that transformed instinct into conscious thought,

. . . ethics is a stage in evolution. . . . And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may be that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics. The ethical impulse and attitude, so all-important to humanity, is a means by which it struggles out of the lower harmony and universality based upon inconscience and broken up by Life into individual discords towards a higher harmony and universality based upon conscient oneness with all existences. Arriving at that goal, this means will no longer be necessary or even possible, since the qualities and oppositions on which it depends will naturally dissolve and disappear in the final reconciliation.

If, then, the ethical standpoint applies only to a temporary though all-important passage from one universality to another, we cannot apply it to the total solution of the problem of the universe, but can only admit it as one element in that solution. To do otherwise is to run into the peril of falsifying all the facts of the universe, all the meaning of the evolution behind and beyond us in order to suit a temporary outlook and a half-evolved view of the utility of things. The world has three layers, infra-ethical, ethical and supra-ethical. We have to find that which is common to all; for only so can we resolve the problem.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 104-05)

While the neo-Darwinist position is characterised by viewpoints that differ in their acceptance of randomness and chance, we have now theories that suggest that Darwinian evolution is not all that there is. They point out that the evolutionary mechanisms in Life's early stages were distinctly non-Darwinian. Of late several authors have suggested that due to the evolutionary biologists' bias for studying animals and birds (larger life-forms) the role of neo-Darwinian mechanisms is overstressed. They point out that symbiosis plays an important role in driving evolution especially in plants and protoctists. Similarly the painting of all ethics and morals with the Darwinian brush is also for many a misguided attempt. We can clearly see that evolution does not (and does not need to) employ the same mechanisms throughout. There was a definite pre-Darwinian stage followed by a Darwinian one. We are already looking at newer theories that look at the entire earth as one giant living system. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy distinctly points to a post-Darwinian stage where one can harmonise individuality along with the unity with the cosmos. In his view of gradual unfolding of the Supramental Truth-Consciousness that is self-involved in matter, Life is an intermediate stage between Matter and Mind, and during this journey from inert consciousness of Matter till the creative action of Mind and then beyond, the same principle of understanding evolution's workings cannot apply for it is the higher that explains the lower and not vice-versa.

For science, which must remain agnostic by its very definition and rely on sense data for confirmation, the way must be that of true quest and not trenchant

positions that are to be defended with religious zeal. Christian de Duve points a way forward for science in a statement which I consider a very bold one for a scientist,

. . . I feel that science should not be arrogant. The human mind may be only a link — perhaps even a side branch — in an evolutionary saga that is far from completed and may be some day produce minds more powerful than ours. According to the predicted lifetime of the sun, on our planet alone the thinking biosphere has another five billion years to go, one thousand times the duration of the step from ape to man. We must bow to mystery. (*Vital Dust*, p. 301)

(Concluded)

SAHASTRARASHMI

After all the triumphs and marvels of Science the explaining principle, the rationale, the significance of the whole is left as dark, as mysterious and even more mysterious than ever. The scheme it has built up of the evolution not only of this rich and vast and variegated material world, but of life and consciousness and mind and their workings out of a brute mass of electrons, identical and varied only in arrangement and number, is an irrational magic more baffling than any the most mystic imagination could conceive. Science in the end lands us in a paradox effectuated, an organised and rigidly determined accident, an impossibility that has somehow happened, — it has shown us a new, a material Maya, aghaṭana-ghaṭana-patīyasī, very clever at bringing about the impossible, a miracle that cannot logically be and yet somehow is there actual, irresistibly organised, but still irrational and inexplicable. And this is evidently because Science has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila. I say “begin” because the Divine Reality is not so simple that at the first touch you can know all of it or put it into a single formula; it is the Infinite and opens before you an infinite knowledge to which all Science put together is a bagatelle. But still you do touch the essential, the eternal behind things and in the light of That all begins to be profoundly luminous, intimately intelligible.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 197)

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

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

As an epilogue or rather an end-note let us now examine and explore the meaning of will and force — the *raison d'être* of this article. Let us consider their several facets and implications and their importance in the sadhana. The characters in this story could perhaps enrich our imagination, inspire us to be more determined in our spiritual endeavour, push and spur us to surpass ourselves, through single-mindedness and one-pointedness.

As the Mother said:

And in all circumstances one must will to exceed oneself.

(CWM, Vol. 4, p. 355)

In another context, she spoke of using criticism as an occasion “. . . to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine.” *(CWM, Vol. 3, p. 138)*

She has also said:

Our worth lies only in the measure of our effort to exceed ourselves, and to exceed ourselves is to attain the Divine. *(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 18)*

The Mother had revealed one of the marvels of psychology, that even the weakest can become as strong as anyone. She said:

It [concentration] is to bring back all the scattered threads of consciousness to a single point, a single idea. Those who can attain perfect attention succeed in everything they undertake; they will always make a rapid progress. And this kind of concentration can be developed exactly like the muscles; one may follow different systems, different methods of training. Today we know that the most pitiful weakling, for example, can with discipline become as strong as anyone else. One should not have a will which flickers out like a candle.

The will, concentration must be cultivated; it is a question of method, of regular exercise. If you will, you can.

But the thought “What’s the use?” must not come in to weaken the will. The idea that one is born with a certain character and can do nothing about it is a stupidity. *(CWM, Vol. 4, p. 5)*

To reinforce the point I re-quote what the Mother had said on determination whilst speaking on the legless pilot, Douglas Bader:

That is exactly the kind of determination one must have to practise the yoga of integral perfection. (*CWM*, Vol. 16, p. 278)

Elsewhere she had said:

All human beings have a spiritual destiny which is near or far depending on each one's determination.

One must will in all sincerity. (*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 30)

Surely, there must be innumerable instances of sadhaks making giant strides in their sadhana through determination and will. To illustrate the point, I will restrict myself to only one instance (amongst several), one who had that Bader-type of determination to reach his goal.

Speaking of Pavitra-da's passing on 16 May 1969, the Mother said:

It was very interesting, the experience I had that night. Nothing like it I ever had in my life. It was the night before the day he passed away. The time was nine o'clock. I felt he was withdrawing, withdrawing in an extraordinary manner. He was coming out of himself and gathering and pouring himself into me. He was coming out consciously and deliberately with the full force of a concentrated will. He continued to do so steadily, ceaselessly for hours. It ended at about one o'clock, I looked at the time.

There was no slackness or interruption or stop at any moment. It was throughout the same steady continuous flow, without a break, without a diminution in the strength. Such a concentrated undiminishing stream it was. The process continued until he was wholly within me as though he was pumping and exhausting all he was in the body till the last drop. I say it was wonderful — I never experienced such a thing. . . . Not many Yogis, not even the greatest among them could do such a thing. There he is within here, quite wakeful, looking in a rather amused way at what you people are doing. He is merged in me wholly, that is dwelling within me, not dissolved: he has his personality intact. . . . A remarkable story. A great and very difficult thing Pavitra has done. (*CWM*, Vol. 13, pp. 181-82)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

* * *

[*Quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are reproduced below to elucidate the significance of will and the role of force. — G.M.*]

The goal of yoga is always hard to reach, but this one is more difficult than any other, and it is only for those who have the call, the capacity, the willingness to face everything and every risk, even the risk of failure, and the will to progress towards an entire selflessness, desirelessness and surrender.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 545)

*

By readiness, I did not mean capacity but willingness. If there is the will within to face all difficulties and go through, no matter how long it takes, then the path can be taken. (*Ibid.*)

*

A mere restless dissatisfaction with the ordinary life is not a sufficient preparation for this yoga. A positive inner call, a strong will and a great steadiness are necessary for success in the spiritual life. (*Ibid.*)

*

If one has a fundamental sincerity, a will to go through in spite of all things and readiness to be candid, that is the best security in the sadhana.

(*Ibid.*, p. 551)

*

The difficulties have to be faced and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner they will be overcome. The one thing to do is to keep the mantra of success, the determination of victory, the fixed resolve, "Have it I must and have it I will." Impossible? There is no such thing as impossibility — there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine*, but no impossibles. What one is determined fixedly to do will get done now or later — it becomes possible. Drive out dark despair and go bravely on with your yoga. As the darkness disappears, the inner doors will open.

(*Ibid.*, p. 629)

*

Knowledge and Force or Will — for all conscious force is will — are the twin sides of the action of consciousness. (*CWSA*, Vol. 23, p. 494)

*

The Force also produces no definite and lasting fruit unless there is the will and resolution to achieve within the sadhak. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1717)

*

Certainly, the main stress should be on the Force but the active assent of the sadhak is needed; in certain things his will also may be needed as an instrument of the Force. (*Ibid.*)

*

The Force can bring forward and use the will. (*Ibid.*, p. 1718)

*

I have never classified the different forms of Force; they can be hundreds or thousands in number. Force uses its form according to the work it has to do.
(*Ibid.*, p. 1204)

*

So long as there is not a constant action of the Force from above or else of a deeper will from within, the mental will is necessary. (*Ibid.*, p. 1717)

*

The will can make itself work — it is in its nature a force or energy.
(*Ibid.*, p. 1718)

*

The energy which dictates the action or prevents a wrong action is the will.
(*Ibid.*)

*

Force is the essential Shakti; Energy is the working drive of the Force, its active dynamism; Power is the capacity born of the Force; Strength is energy consolidated and stored in the Adhar. (*Ibid.*, p. 1204)

*

When the will and energy are concentrated and used to control the mind, vital and physical and change them or to bring down the higher consciousness or for any other yogic purpose or high purpose, that is called Tapasya.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 596)

*

It is not the right kind of will-power then, probably they use some fighting or effortful will-power instead of the quiet but strong will that calls down the higher consciousness and force. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1718)

*

There must be a fixed will for the spiritual life, that alone can overcome all obstacles. (*Ibid.*, p. 1702)

*

There is no hopelessness except when the will chooses the worse path. (*Ibid.*)

*

I have never said that yoga or that this yoga is a safe and easy path. What I say is that anyone who has the will to go through, can go through. . . . You must become single-minded, then the difficulties of the mind and vital will be overcome.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 1641-42)

*

There is a will in the mind and not merely the power of thought.

(*Ibid.*, p. 1718)

*

The higher action does not preclude a use of the will — will is an element of the higher action. (*Ibid.*, p. 1717)

*

There can be no persistence or insistence without will. (*Ibid.*, p. 1718)

*

It is so with all things in the path of sadhana — one must persist however long it takes, so only one can achieve. (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 623)

*

Whatever method is used, persistence and perseverance are essential. For whatever method is used, the complexity of the natural resistance will be there to combat it. (*Ibid.*)

*

By development it [the will] becomes fit to merge into the Mother's will. A will that is not strong is a great hindrance to sadhana. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1719)

*

I suppose it must be because you have not been in the habit of using the will to compel the other parts of the nature — so when you want it done, they refuse to obey a control to which they are not accustomed and it also has not any habitual hold upon them.

The will is a part of the consciousness and ought to be in human beings the chief agent in controlling the activities of the nature. (*Ibid.*, p. 1720)

*

If there is a constant use of the will the rest of the being learns however slowly to obey the will and then the actions become in conformity with the will and not with the vital impulses and desires. (*Ibid.*, p. 1719)

*

To be conscious is the first step towards overcoming — but for the overcoming strength is necessary and also detachment and the will to overcome.

(*Ibid.*, p. 1718)

The will ought to have the same mastery over impulses as over the thoughts.

(*Ibid.*, p. 1325)

To practise Yoga implies the will to overcome all attachments and turn to the Divine alone. (*SABCL*, Vol. 25, p. 122)

*

You have only to remain quiet and firm in your following of the path and your will to go to the end. If you do that circumstances will in the end be obliged to shape themselves to your will, because it will be the Divine Will in you.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 629)

*

Peace is not a necessary precondition for the action of the will. When the being is troubled, it is often the business of the will to impose quiet on it.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1719)

*

Why cannot you see that this condition is not a true consciousness, but only a clouding of the truth, a clouding which you can always get rid of if you firmly chose to do so? What you express here is not a lack of understanding, but a lack of will — and this lack of will is not your own, but is forced upon you by a lower consciousness which overpowers you and forces you to reverse all the true values of feeling and knowledge. (*Ibid.*, p. 1702)

*

Will is will whether it is calm or restless, whether it acts in a yogic or unyogic way, for a yogic or an unyogic object. Do you think Napoleon and Caesar had no will or that there were yogis. You have strange ideas about things. You might just as well say that memory is memory only when it remembers the Divine and it is not memory when it remembers other things.

(*Ibid.*, p. 1719)

*

Determination is needed and a firm patience, not to be discouraged by this or that failure. It is a change in the habit of the physical nature and that needs a long patient work of detail. (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 630)

*

Vital difficulties are the common lot of every human being and of every sadhak. They are to be met with a quiet determination and confidence in the Divine.
(*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1640)

*

There is no process. The will acts of itself when the mind and vital agree as in the case of a desire. If the desire is not satisfied, it goes on hammering, trying to get it, insisting on it, repeating the demand, making use of this person or that person, this device or that device, getting the mind to support it with reasons, representing it as a need that must be satisfied etc. etc. till the desire is satisfied. All that is the evidence of a will in action. When you have to use the will for the sadhana, you have not the same persistence, the mind finds reasons for not getting on with the effort, as soon as the difficulty becomes strong it is dropped, there is no continuity, no keeping of the will fixed on its object.
(*Ibid.*, p. 1719)

*

If there is a constant use of the will the rest of the being learns however slowly to obey the will and then the actions become in conformity with the will and not with the vital impulses and desires. As for the rest (the feelings and desires etc. themselves) if they are not indulged in action or imagination and not supported by the will, if they are merely looked at and rejected when they come, then after some struggle they begin to lose their force and dwindle away. (*Ibid.*, pp. 1719-20)

*

It depends. If the consciousness is developed on the side of knowledge it will warn only. If on the side of will or power it will help to effectuate.
(*Ibid.*, p. 1723)

*

In the case of Socrates and that of the habitual drunkard raised by you, the difference you make is correct. The weak-willed man is governed by his vital and physical impulses, his mental being is not dynamic enough to make its will prevail over them. His will is not “free” because it is not strong enough to be free, it is the slave of the forces that act on or in his vital and physical nature. In the case of Socrates the will is so far free that it stands above the play of these forces and he determines by his mental idea and resolve what he shall or shall not do. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 473)

*

That [lack of will] is the suggestion that has been impressed on you by the physical inertia. It has covered up your will and persuaded you that there is no will left and no possibility of any will. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1720)

*

[Source of inability to stand up against the opposing forces:] In the indolence of the will which does not want to make a sustained effort for a long period. It is like a person who moves slightly half a leg for a second and then wonders why he is not already a hundred miles away at the goal after making such a gigantic effort. (*Ibid.*)

*

It [the weakness of the will] is a first result of coming down into the physical consciousness or of the physical consciousness coming up prominently — formerly you were much in the mind and vital. The physical consciousness is full of inertia — it wants not to move but to be moved by whatever forces and that is its habit. This inertia has to be cured by putting it into contact with the right forces from above. That is why I asked you to aspire for the higher wideness, purity and peace, so that that may occupy the physical and the true Force work instead of these invading ideas and impulses. (*Ibid.*, p. 1439)

*

A long, difficult stage of constant effort, energism, austerity of the personal will, *tapasyā*, has ordinarily to be traversed before a more decisive stage can be reached in which a state of self-giving of all the being to the Supreme Being and the Supreme Nature can become total and absolute.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 19, p. 929)

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There can be no doubt about the Divine Grace. It is perfectly true also that if a man is sincere, he will reach the Divine. But it does not follow that he will reach immediately, easily and without delay. Your error is there, to fix for God a term, five years, six years, and doubt because the effect is not yet there. A man may be centrally sincere and yet there may be many things that have to be changed in him before realisation can begin. His sincerity must enable him to persevere always — for it is a longing for the Divine that nothing can quench, neither delay nor disappointment nor difficulty nor anything else.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 625)

*

Aspiration is to call the forces. When the forces have answered, there is a natural state of quiet receptivity concentrated but spontaneous. (*Ibid.*, p. 566)

*

Aspiration is a call to the Divine, — will is the pressure of a conscious force on Nature. (*Ibid.*)

*

Aspiration, constant and sincere, and the will to turn to the Divine alone are the best means to bring forward the psychic. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1100)

*

Hardly anyone is strong enough to overcome by his own unaided aspiration and will the forces of the lower nature; even those who do it get only a certain kind of control, but not a complete mastery. Will and aspiration are needed to bring down the aid of the Divine Force and to keep the being on its side in its dealings with the lower powers. The Divine Force fulfilling the spiritual will and the heart's psychic aspiration can alone bring about the conquest.

(*Ibid.*, p. 1670)

*

Aspiration should be not a form of desire, but the feeling of an inner soul's need, and a quiet settled will to turn towards the Divine and seek the Divine. It is certainly not easy to get rid of this mixture of desire entirely — not easy for anyone; but when one has the will to do it, this also can be effected by the help of the sustaining Force. (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 567)

*

If there are good desires, bad desires will come also. There is a place for will and aspiration, not for desire. (*Ibid.*)

*

Naturally, the more one-pointed the aspiration the swifter the progress. The difficulty comes when either the vital with its desires or the physical with its past habitual movements comes in — as they do with almost everyone. It is then that the dryness and difficulty of spontaneous aspiration come. This dryness is a well-known obstacle in all sadhana. But one has to persist and not be discouraged. If one keeps the will fixed even in these barren periods, they pass and after their passage a greater force of aspiration and experience becomes possible. (*Ibid.*, p. 569)

*

Yes, but it is an absence of the one-pointed aspiration more than of strength of will — they [some sadhaks] left because some desire or other got hold of them which was incompatible with the steadfast single-minded aspiration to the Divine Realisation.

If Buddha had the will only after *tapasyā*, how was it that he left everything without hesitation in the search for Truth and never once looked back, regretted nor had any struggle. The only difficulty was how to find the Truth, his single will to find it never faltered; the intensity of his *tapasyā* itself would have been impossible without that strength of will. People less strong than Buddha may have to develop it by endeavour. Those who cannot do that have to find their strength in their reliance on the Divine Mother. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1642)

*

Everyone whose psychic being calls him to the spiritual path has a capacity for that path and can arrive at the goal if or as soon as he develops a single-pointed will towards that alone. But also every sadhak is faced with two elements in him, the inner being which wants the Divine and the sadhana and the outer mainly vital and physical being which does not want them but remains attached to the things of the ordinary life. The mind is sometimes led by one, sometimes by the other. One of the most important things he has to do, therefore, is to decide fundamentally the quarrel between these two parts and to persuade or compel by psychic aspiration, by steadiness of the mind's thought and will, by the choice of the higher vital in his emotional being the opposing elements to be first quiescent and then consenting. So long as he is not able to do that his

progress must be either very slow or fluctuating and chequered as the aspiration within cannot have a continuous action or a continuous result. . . .

. . . Our help is there always, it is not given at one time and withheld at another, nor given to some and denied to others. It is there for all who make the effort and have the will to arrive. But you have to be steady in your will. . . .

(Ibid., pp. 1644-46)

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The first opening is effected by a concentration in the heart, a call to the Divine to manifest within us and through the psychic to take up and lead the whole nature. Aspiration, prayer, bhakti, love, surrender are the main supports of this part of the sadhana — accompanied by a rejection of all that stands in the way of what we aspire for. The second opening is effected by a concentration of the consciousness in the head (afterwards, above it) and an aspiration and call and a sustained will for the descent of the divine Peace, Power, Light, Knowledge, Ananda into the being — the Peace first or the Peace and Force together. *(Ibid., p. 1167)*

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It is of course a fluctuation of the mental will that often prevents a knowledge gained from being put into steady practice. If the will is not strong enough, then the greater Will behind which is the will of the Mother, her conscious Force in which knowledge and will are united, must be called in to strengthen and support it. Very often, however, even if the will as well as the knowledge are there, the habit of the vital nature brings in the old reactions. This can only be overcome by a steady undiscouraged aspiration which will bring out more and more of the psychic and its true movements to push out and displace the wrong ones. The gradual and steady replacement of the old ignorant consciousness and its movements by the true psychic and spiritual consciousness is the nature of the transformation that is to be accomplished in the yoga.

(Ibid., p. 1708)

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Gautam Malakar)

THE IMPACT OF THE MOTHER'S MUSIC

I HAVE been listening to the Mother's music for a long time now — about thirty minutes every day.

With the starting of the music, I would put in a great deal of effort to meditate. I would work hard to clear my head of all the floating thoughts that came crowding into my brain. It turned out to be a battle. Sometimes I could just hold back my thoughts for 10 minutes before I was lost in my vagabonding thoughts. At times, it was even worse. It happened within 60 seconds. I would then feel guilty for not showing respect to Her music and for my failure to meditate.

I would then restart the whole process all over again with a firm determination to stay on course — not to permit any stray thoughts to come in. I was still unable to meditate the way it should happen.

Four years ago, I came back to live permanently in Pondicherry. I began to discover the magic in the Mother's music. I realised that the music created different kinds of responses in me and it kept varying with my own state of mind at the time.

There were times when the music flooded my mind with thoughts — mostly unpleasant, unfolding my worries of all kinds.

When I began to fight back, just a few thoughts remained and the rest disappeared. I began to observe closely the pattern in my thoughts day after day. I discovered that the more I forced my mind to obey, the more destructive it became. I decided that I would permit my mind to travel as much as it liked, that I would not interrupt its process.

Within a couple of months, I noticed that whatever problem was troubling me at the time of meditation was my creation. I began to analyse closely the issues with as much objectivity as possible. At first, I was perturbed and hesitant to admit my weaknesses. After a few weeks, my meditation turned into self-examination. I suddenly felt liberated. The Mother's music had a new meaning for me. I would focus my attention on each of my weaknesses, one at a time, and wait for solutions. Now I let the music drive me. It began to unfold like a book, chapter by chapter. Once my response to the music had changed, I did not feel guilty any longer. The music had become an instrument of self-examination. The meditation became very engaging and constructive. I was living much less in my wandering thoughts than I did before.

However, a new struggle began. I started to evaluate whether I was having any success to overcome my weaknesses. What was most disconcerting was that I was confronted with many more weaknesses I was not even aware of. These made me feel sad, like a traveller who has lost his way in a lonely place and can receive no help.

The awareness of my defects was like little signals, warning me in advance about any act or words that I might regret later. At times, I was able to pull back and avert the mistake. But most of the time, the repentance occurred after the event. I could readily wash my dirty linen during the music sessions. It was not being washed in public!

However, the continuous process of policing began to have some effect. I was improving my hit-rate.

Her music is priceless. It is as fluid as water which takes the shape of the container. You can draw in Her Presence; its intensity depends wholly on the intensity of the effort.

There are moments when I find peace. My thoughts tell me, “As long as there is the continuous effort, there is nothing to worry.” Then there are no thoughts, no feelings, not even any aspiration. In fact, at the end of it, I begin to wonder whether I have fallen asleep! I feel detached and safe.

What I learnt was that I should not force anything on myself while I listen to the music. I should let myself go. Her music works in a mysterious way. Her music is another medium that can lead us on the path of yoga.

It is a journey on which one travels one day at a time, and it will never end.

RAMRAJ SEHGAL

It is not by knowledge of music that the understanding [of the Mother's music] comes; nor is it by effort of the mind — it is by becoming inwardly silent, opening within and getting the spontaneous feeling of what is in the music.

*

It is a prayer or an invocation that Mother makes in the music.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 366)

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of December 2010)

11. Krishna's Panchajanya

If *Savitri* is the Flute of Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* remains his Panchajanya conch, calling the aspirant out to battle. Why does the Panchajanya come automatically to my mind in this context? There is great fascination in keeping a conch close to the ear and listening to the sound of waves. It is not unlike the subject and the style of *The Life Divine*. The Panchajanya not only announces the forthcoming battle but also assures ultimate victory. There is also an unceasing sound of thought-waves that fascinate us no end.

My own feeling is that *The Life Divine* appeared for the English-educated Indian as a challenge. When it was being published in 1914, English language and literature had struck strong roots in the Indian soil. Already famous Indian lawyers like Sachchidananda Sinha, V. Krishnaswami Aiyar and S. Srinivasa Iyengar had huge personal libraries, the shelves lined with English classics and rows of books on law. Except for a few Indians who had managed to keep in touch with traditional lore and the philosophical systems associated with their religions, the rest veered towards western philosophical texts. But how can an Indian's soul forget the terminology nurtured from the Vedic-Upanishadic past? When the Soul of India spoke of the living philosophy of the Upanishads in a language that the 20th century Indian could understand, it gave birth to the matrix of a new time.

Descartes gave modern philosophical texts of the West their firm ground in the phrase, *Cogito, ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am. The mere fact that one wonders about one's existence (Do I exist? Is it just a deception?) proves that one exists. Sri Aurobindo's clear exposition of the great philosophical issues was a comfort to the reader who was munching works by Paine, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard. Generally these philosophers were trying to understand the presence of man in the world of today. They erected grand edifices that challenged the intellectuals but the Supreme Secret eluded them. Wittgenstein, the Austrian philosopher summed up well in the concluding line of his great work of philosophy, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, one must pass over in silence."

So much for conches that blow with no definite purpose in view. But Krishna's Panchajanya was blown only when there was a purpose. At other times it ceased to be fearsome and remained only as the Lord's ornament. Sri Aurobindo was not just going to ask us to think so that we can assure ourselves of our existence. He wanted us to reflect upon man, Nature and God so that we could become the promised

future for mankind. Think, so that you can be! Think, but think positively, think creatively!

An early positive thought that is gifted by *The Life Divine* to us caught in the din of today's living reconciles stillness and movement with a smooth flourish.

It is out of this Silence [of the Brahman] that the Word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the Word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence. It is an eternal passivity which makes possible the perfect freedom and omnipotence of an eternal divine activity in innumerable cosmic systems. For the becomings of that activity derive their energies and their illimitable potency of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the immutable Being, its consent to this infinite fecundity of its own dynamic Nature.¹

So very positive! Instead of making me wonder whether I exist at all, Sri Aurobindo assures me that not only do I exist but that I am part of a great movement, a significant spark of energy engaged in creating a great future. Usually the idea of sheer silence can be daunting. I had moved in with my mother-in-law who had lost her hearing when she was barely twenty. For the next sixty years and more, the world became silent to her. This gave her a feeling of isolation though this drawback inspired her to become a great achiever as a writer and social worker. But I could see in her occasional asides the pain of having to contend with total silence.

Perhaps silence may not affect those who are born like that. But to have heard speech for twenty years and then to have lost the world of sounds so utterly was certainly a greater tragedy. I asked her once what she considered to be her greatest loss because of this tragedy. Without a moment's thought she said: "Not being able to hear the prattle of my grandchildren." I then knew that what seemed a nuisance to me was nectar to her. Then one day I found that she had bought a harmonium and was trying out the keys. She was in her late sixties at that time. When I sat near her she said with a self-conscious smile: "I had learnt to play the harmonium when I was a child. But married at five and a housewife at thirteen had made me a stranger to the instrument. Then I became deaf. This silence overwhelms me at times. So I want to play the harmonium and imagine that I am hearing those sounds again."

Decades of silence. I realised that she had created an amazing world of letters (Gandhian journalism, essays, novels) out of that silence. Otherwise her talents may have been lost. If this is so in our everyday life in the material plane, how right it must be in the spiritual plane! I now come closer to understanding what Sri Aurobindo is saying. From the Silence of the Brahman proceeds the Word that creates the innumerable worlds. It is not easy to be silent, to meditate in such a manner that the external sounds cease to flow into us, but why not try? *Svalpamapyasya dharmasya!*

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 31.

Try to follow Dharma even in a small measure, says Lord Krishna. . . .

So the Silence is not a silence as we know of the term. It is the golden womb of creation. Again, these are images. For each one of us the answer has to come from within. It comes, provided we willingly assist the process by conscious meditation. If we are incapable of achieving meditative silence, is there no hope for us? I think there is. We can gain silence by reading *Savitri* as a meditation. The poem has innumerable helpdesks for the process. After all, our guide is Savitri who is herself a power of Silence!

She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down.²

Reading the lines silently and getting back to *The Life Divine*, one suddenly hears the Panchajanya calling us to battle. We are not alone in this battle for the future! The Divine is very much with us as it keeps “innumerable cosmic systems” in action. The ball is now in our court. We should not be disheartened by the life around us and throw down the bow and arrow. That is what we do though. So much of “I can’t”, “I won’t” and “I wouldn’t dare” gets spilled all the time. We are not prepared to act though the Mother has exhorted us to act and not speak. Like Arjuna sporting the powerful Gandiva bow gifted by Varuna, we also have been granted one of the best of instruments fashioned by Nature in our brain. But we sink into self-pity saying man has no future, iniquities are overwhelming and man cannot transform this evil-ridden world. The best thing to do would be to retire to one’s private garden and reach out for Release as Arjuna who throws down the Gandiva and says, “I will not fight.” In short, modern man has thrown down his brain, his thinking power, as also the emotional identities a brain is capable of in relating the human to the Divine.

Living with *The Life Divine* means appreciating the *Essays on the Gita* too. Both books were serialised in the *Arya* about the same time. Here is an incisive portrait of the modern man, *us*! Also, how we can learn to live in the human mould and yet remain tuned to the Divine:

2. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 314.

But the point here is that the modern mind has exiled from its practical motive-power the two essential things, God or the Eternal and spirituality or the God-state, which are the master conceptions of the Gita. It lives in humanity only, and the Gita would have us live in God, though for the world in God; in its life, heart and intellect only, and the Gita would have us live in the spirit; in the immutable Being who is “all creatures” and the Gita would have us live also in the Immutable and the Supreme, in the changing march of Time, and the Gita would have us live in the Eternal.³

Of course, taking in God, the spirit and the Supreme into our lives is no banishment of humanity, life, heart and intellect. Nor is it mere co-existence. Sri Aurobindo’s message in *The Life Divine* comes out loud and clear as the sounds of Krishna’s Panchajanya. It is to be a natural integration. We get an idea of this in the autobiographical speech of Satyavan when he meets Savitri for the first time:

I know that mighty gods are friends of earth.
Amid the pageantries of day and dusk,
Long have I travelled with my pilgrim soul
Moved by the marvel of familiar things. . . .

My spirit satisfied within me knew
Godlike our birthright, luxuried our life
Whose close belongings are the earth and skies. . . .

A visioned spell pursued my boyhood’s hours,
All things the eye had caught in coloured lines
Were seen anew through the interpreting mind
And in the shape it sought to seize the soul.
An early child-god took my hand that held, . . .⁴

An early child-god! Krishna, who else? The handsome charioteer expertly managing the horses on the Kurukshetra battlefield who is also a management expert with all of us, including Satyavan. Krishna the image of love is himself the symbol of such integration, showing the way by his proficiency with the work on hand and yet nonchalantly engaged in conveying the message of Jnana Yoga to his disciple. This image had apparently engaged the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda. Once a friend wished for the Swamiji’s opinion about a picture of the Gitopadesa he had drawn. Swamiji was not satisfied and explained to the friend patiently how it was

3. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 32.

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 400, 404.

not impossible to present “activity combined with firmness and serenity”. Like Silence which carries the seed of infinite variety. Swami Vivekananda said:

Look here, thus does he hold the bridle of the horses — so tight that they are brought to their haunches, with their forelegs fighting the air, and their mouths gaping. This will show a tremendous play of action in the figure of Krishna. His friend, the world-renowned hero, casting aside his bow and arrows, has sunk down like a coward on the chariot, in the midst of the two armies. And Shri Krishna, whip in one hand and tightening the reins with the other, has turned Himself towards Arjuna, with his childlike face beaming with unworldly love and sympathy, and a calm and serene look — and is delivering the message of the Gita to his beloved comrade.⁵

The Swami added:

Ay, that’s it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky. This is the central idea of the Gita — to be calm and steadfast in all circumstances, with one’s body, mind, and soul centred at His hallowed Feet!⁶

A. B. Purani underlined this aspect of Sri Aurobindo as a man of action when he lectured on *The Life Divine* in 1962 during his American tour. The book is “not an armchair philosophy, it is not a mere academic product.” Half a century ago Purani-ji said that we were getting overwhelmed by the consumerist gadgets and considering this physical as the only Real. This is but a partial truth of existence. It is an exclusivism that would deter the evolution of the perfect man or a perfect society.

Is not efficiency enough for life? Is not an expertise with the bow and arrow enough for winning the day at Kurukshetra? Purani-ji argues that efficiency alone can never be the goal of life. One can add that the argument applies to Arjuna, the representative of humanity. It is not enough for him to win the Kurukshetra battle. He must posit a victory over his self, neither sorrow nor feel happy at the goings-on in the Kurukshetra battlefield. In short, man must aspire for an “integral perfection”. This is done by accepting both Matter and Spirit as divine. Purani-ji conveys it all with a touching, childlike simplicity:

Both as divine; the Cosmic Consciousness on one side is the active Brahman and on the other side it is the inactive Brahman. There is no contradiction in

5. Swami Vivekananda, *Collected Works*, Volume 7, p. 272.

6. *Ibid.*

these aspects, it is not as if the one denies and the other affirms the cosmic illusion. The Cosmic Consciousness has behind its active aspect the background of its tremendous impersonal, silent aspect. It is from that passive and silent aspect that the worlds are created. Sri Aurobindo shows that silence does not mean void, it only means consciousness held back from expression. What is contained in the silence expresses itself as the Word.⁷

How lucky we were in those days long ago, having the privilege of being first-generation learners from the direct disciples of Sri Aurobindo! Purani-ji strives every moment to make the message of *The Life Divine* sound simple to his listeners. He says that Omnipresent Reality is the foundation for achieving the life divine. Of course, once we say Omnipresent Reality is the foundation, it is obvious that it has also caused ignorance, pain and death. However, for those who accept Omnipresent Reality, ignorance, pain and the rest cease to be what they seem to be. Taken as a process of life, even death loses its sting. This disintegration is necessary for rebirth, for a higher evolution. Silencing the mind from hysteria at happenings (triumph as well as defeat) is what makes entry into cosmic consciousness possible.

Purani-ji has accurately gauged the significance of the chapter 'Reality Omnipresent' by making a reference to Sri Aurobindo, the man of action. At the height of his active career in Indian politics, Sri Aurobindo had learnt to still his mind. That was the time when the British bureaucracy saw him as the key player managing the entire underground organisation in Bengal. When he was imprisoned in Alipore, the jail became his Cave of Tapasya!

Wasn't Sri Aurobindo shaken — wasn't he at least disturbed — by the chain of events: the framing of charges, the committal to sessions, the killing of Gossain, the martyrdom of Kanailal and Satyen, the closure of the *Bande Mataram*? What was the meaning of it all? Weren't blind or evil forces operating, turning everything awry? But no! Sri Aurobindo's faith stood like a rock in the storm. His recently acquired calm remained as a settled thing, and declined to be ruffled any more. What had happened, and what was happening, only called for a spirit of reverence and an attitude of total surrender. The gains of his first weeks in prison — the inner poise and equanimity, the total trust in God, the constant feeling of the Mother's embrace — stood the test of these new difficulties and challenges.⁸

We get it clear that the description of Omnipresent Reality early in *The Life Divine* is thus not colourful writing or metaphysical tight-rope walking. This was

7. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine* (1966), pp. 35-36.

8. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history* (1985), p. 309.

actually experienced by Sri Aurobindo. Presently, he effortlessly held on to the cosmic consciousness in Pondicherry amid all the many worries including lack of finances and unwanted attention from the police and British spies. This biographical background is always with me whenever I gaze upon my icon. What was the utter mood of self-sacrifice that made him leave his Professorship at Baroda? He, the lover of books! How did he withstand the surging emotions within and go away from his married life? Whither came the strength of mind to remain divorced from his favourite occupation of writing poetry? Bhavani Bharati had called him to the front and he had marched forward to enter the fray. Wasn't he the author of 'Baji Prabhau'?

And Baji answered him:

“Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
Is a man's manhood seated. God within
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
And covers One alone. We but employ
Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh
Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm.
I ask for fifty swords.”⁹

So like Baji Prabhau Sri Aurobindo went to the fray. Obviously, gaining cosmic consciousness is not an impossibility. At the same time, it is no child's play. Heroes of the spirit like Baji Prabhau and Sri Aurobindo demonstrate what is said in *The Life Divine*.

Not cosmic consciousness alone. None of the terminology in the book need frighten us because Sri Aurobindo knows our ability (or inability) to comprehend. Like any fond teacher, he keeps assuring us not to be frightened of this massive metaphysical structure. The Unknowable: well, the very term makes us draw away! But the Master holds our hand and draws us towards the term with a lovely explanation. Is this Supreme escaping our attempts to keep it within our heart along with our human inspirations? Do not worry, says Sri Aurobindo. It is a constant test to raise us to our highest capacity:

The Unknowable is Something to us supreme, wonderful and ineffable which continually formulates Itself to our consciousness and continually escapes from

9. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 297-98.

the formulation It has made. This it does not as some malicious spirit or freakish magician leading us from falsehood to greater falsehood and so to a final negation of all things, but as even here the Wise beyond our wisdom guiding us from reality to ever profounder and vaster reality until we find the profoundest and vastest of which we are capable. An omnipresent reality is the Brahman, not an omnipresent cause of persistent illusions.¹⁰

Now I know why the Mother has asked us to be very, very close to nature. In the cosmic consciousness, everything is real. The jasmine creeper swaying in the breeze, the monolith from which the grand Nandikeswara has been carved for the Big Temple at Thanjavur, the student hunched over his notebook in the class, the haystacks lining the farmyard . . . all, all are real. But all are divine too. With this understanding, we become fully awake to the Panchajanya's call to have faith in this two-in-one vision.

To conclude with the words which close the argument in the chapter 'Reality Omnipresent':

This creed is given, indeed, to humanity to support it on its journey, until it arrives at a stage of development when faith will be turned into knowledge and perfect experience and Wisdom will be justified of her works.¹¹

(To be concluded)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

10. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 35.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Then conchshell and bugle, trumpet and horn and drum, all suddenly were smitten and blown, and a huge rushing sound arose. Then in their mighty car erect, their car with snow-white steeds, Madhava and the Pandava blew their divine shells, Hrishikesh on Panchajanya, on Devadatta, god-given, Dhanunjoy blew, and on his great shell from far Bengal blew Bhema wolf-belly, the man of dreadful deeds, and on Anantavijay, boundless conquest, Yudhishthira the king, even Coonty's son, and Nacool and Sahadev on Sughosha, far-sounding and Manipushpaca, jewel-flower.

(From Sri Aurobindo's translation of the Bhagavad-Gita,
Translations, SABCL, Vol. 8, pp. 77-78)

A LABOUR OF LOVE

*Sanctuaries and Wildlife of Karnataka*¹ by S. G. Neginhal is an excellently produced guide, with a wealth of information about the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries of this state in South India. The author, a retired officer of the Indian Forest Service, writes with great insight and extensive personal experience of the places and wildlife that he describes. The text is interspersed with many fine photographs that enhance the book's appeal. Each national park or sanctuary is dealt with in some detail, beginning with a section titled "At a Glance" that provides information about its location, formation, area, altitude, weather, best season to visit, visiting hours, forest type(s), getting there, tourist spots, where to stay and contact addresses. This is followed by a more detailed description of the physical features, the faunal diversity sub-divided into sections on mammals, avifauna and reptiles, proceeding to floral structure and listing the more common or important trees and other plants found in each forest type or sanctuary.

S. G. Neginhal looks back with some nostalgia at a time early in his career when there was considerably more forest and wildlife in Karnataka. He provides a number of anecdotes which throw interesting light on the behaviour of wild animals, as well as personal encounters with prominent wildlife experts and photographers. This book is a labour of love and is wholeheartedly recommended to the interested reader. If there is any shortcoming in it, it is that occasionally the language slips into unidiomatic usage or the odd solecism. But this is more than compensated for by the content and photographs of the highest standard. As a devotee of the Mother, Shri Neginhal dedicates this book, published in 2009, to the Mother, as also to his parents and brother.

Contemplating on the plight of forests and wildlife, decimated and in sharp decline worldwide, the urgency and importance of biodiversity conservation and eco-restoration can hardly be over-emphasised. *Sanctuaries and Wildlife of Karnataka* can be a useful guide for endeavours in that direction, apart from being a handy reference book for anyone intending to visit any sanctuary in Karnataka.

* * *

1. *Sanctuaries and Wildlife of Karnataka* by S. G. Neginhal. Published by the Author, Bangalore, 2009, 230 pp. Price: Rs. 595.

[Appended below are a few passages on plant and animal life selected from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.]

The soul of a plant or an animal is not dormant — only its means of expression are less developed than those of a human being. There is much that is psychic in the plant, much that is psychic in the animal. The plant has only the vital-physical elements involved in the form; the consciousness behind the form of the plant has no developed or organised mentality capable of expressing itself, — the animal takes a step further; it has a vital mind and some extent of self-expression, but its consciousness is limited, its mentality limited, its experiences are limited; the psychic essence too puts forward to represent it a less developed consciousness and experience than is possible in man. All the same animals have a soul and can respond readily to the psychic in man.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 22, pp. 292-93)

* * *

Even the animal is more in touch with a certain harmony in things than man.

(*Ibid.*, p. 499)

* * *

The emotional being of animals is often much more psychic than that of men who can be very insensitive. There were recently pictures of the tame tigress kept by a family and afterwards given by them to a Zoo. The look of sorrow on the face of the tigress in her cage at once gentle and tragically poignant is so intense as to be heart-breaking.

(*Ibid.*, p. 500)

* * *

Yes — to watch the animals with the right perception of their consciousness helps to get out of the human mental limitations and see the Cosmic Consciousness on earth individualising itself in all forms — plant, animal, man and growing towards what is beyond man.

(*Ibid.*, p. 501)

* * *

. . . from time to time Thy sublime light shines in a being and radiates through him over the world, and then a little wisdom, a little knowledge, a little disinterested faith, heroism and compassion penetrates men's hearts, transforms their minds and sets free a few elements from that sorrowful and implacable wheel of existence to which their blind ignorance subjects them.

But how much greater a splendour than all that have gone before, how marvellous a glory and light would be needed to draw these beings out of the horrible aberration in which they are plunged by the life of cities and so-called civilisations! What a formidable and, at the same time, divinely sweet puissance would be needed to turn aside all these wills from the bitter struggle for their selfish, mean and foolish satisfactions, to snatch them from this vortex which hides death behind its treacherous glitter, and turn them towards Thy conquering harmony!

(CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 63-64)

P.

O Nature, Material Mother, thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate and there can be no limit to the splendour of this collaboration.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 173)

MEMORABLE VIGNETTES OF LIFE EXPERIENCE

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. Sethna) straddles many worlds and disciplines. He is a poet, patriot, historian, editor, journalist, correspondent and seeker on the path of Integral Yoga, all in one. Fortunately still in our midst, his writings, full of wit, humour and wisdom, never fail to surprise us. They are a perennial source of inspiration on the path of self-discovery.

As the title of the book¹ aptly suggests, Amal's meditations on the human existence show the working of an eclectic mind, forever agile and radiant, in search of answers to the perplexing issues of life. His quest here covers an incredibly wide gamut of human experience — poetry, literature, history, Christianity and philosophy. All issues are handled with ease, care and confidence in the Aurobindonian light; all answers are given in a lucid and insightful manner. This is a book that casts a spell upon us. There is a desire to return to it again and again.

There is an underlying method in Amal's essays. Regardless of the topics discussed — money, yoga, sex, national and international culture, poetry, dreams, politics, — the approach is invariably an exploratory one. The chapters show the working of a creative mind that avoids reductive or exclusive answers.

Amal tells us that the binaries that the conventional mind creates are artificial. Attached to *Samskaras* of the past, habitual ways of thinking, prejudice and predilections, they impede our growth. Polarities such as East-West, religious-secular, national-international, provincial-metropolitan, yoga-common life, and so on, are baseless constructs that seek legitimacy in orthodoxy and received wisdom. The Truth, to use a cliché, is many-sided and complex. It has to be discovered in all its fullness and plenitude.

Those who see the problems of life in Manichean terms of black and white and treat God as a cruel Being, perhaps of the Hebraic kind, would look at the misfortunes of life and deprivations, as part of Divine punishment meted out to poor mortals for their sins and aberrations. In reality, however, the significance is different. In the essay entitled 'Money and the Spiritual Aspirant', Amal tells us that "Sometimes . . . financial difficulties come as a test and in order to increase one's spiritual intensity; they are not really punishments by Asuric forces but part of the working out of a Yogic development in one." (p. 48) When there is genuine need and aspiration, the answer comes as a breath of Grace. We see this in the lives of the Avatars like Sri Aurobindo.

1. *The Sun and the Rainbow: Approaches to Life through Sri Aurobindo's Light: Essays, Letters, Poems, Short Stories*, by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna). Published by Clear Ray Trust, Puducherry, 2008; first published 1981; pp. 214. Price: Rs.150.

A sincere seeker, Amal reveals from his own experience, is never let down by the Divine. In February 1953, he had a desperate need of money. He had to settle matters quickly in Bombay and reach Pondicherry with his wife Sehra. Clueless, he was in a quandary, when he received a message from an American journalist named Harvey Breit who was in India “with a scheme of the Ford Foundation for a special India-Supplement to the *Atlantic Monthly*”. (p. 54) Breit commissioned Amal to write an article on ‘Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram’. The article was written and submitted. For reasons of space, it could not be used in the journal. However, Breit kept his word and paid the money. A cheque for Rs. 500 was received and it came in handy.

A propos American financial support to the Ashram, the Mother had once said: “I have a feeling that we may have something to do with Henry Ford.” Apparently Ford believed in reincarnation and wanted an audience with the Mother to discuss this matter. A visit was arranged by Margaret Wilson, the daughter of the one-time President of the U.S., Woodrow Wilson for him to meet the Mother. Unfortunately, there was a delay in his coming and Ford passed away.

Similarly, an issue that engages the attention of any sincere *sadhak* on the path of Yoga is the role of Divine Grace. Amal narrates his experience of starting the monthly journal *Mother India* in 1949. For the inauguration of the issue, he receives an encouraging message from the Nobel laureate, Aldous Huxley: “I wish you all success in your venture. You will, of course, be a voice crying in the wilderness. But if a few individuals pay attention, something will have been accomplished.” (pp. 57-58)

Completely unsure of himself, perplexed about his ability to handle this Mission, Amal spoke to the Mother:

“Mother, I have to be an expert political thinker and writer. But I have no turn for politics and no touch with it.” She smiled a cool sweet smile and answered: “Neither have I.” The Editor got a start: “Well, then what shall I do?” Again the imperturbable sweetness and then the reply: “There is Sri Aurobindo. He will guide you in everything.” A sudden flood of power swept over the hearer. “Oh, yes,” he said, “Sri Aurobindo will surely do the impossible.” And Sri Aurobindo did. (p. 58)

As the date for launch of the journal approached, many well-meaning journalists advised that the launch be postponed for there was not enough matter to sustain the journal as “six months’ stuff in hand” was the standard rule. “*Mother India* was in a quandary. To commence and then flop was an unbearable prospect. . . .” (p. 59)

The Editor wrote to the Mother.

Amal received a message from the Mother on 27 January 1949: “Stick to the date. Live on Faith. Blessings. — Mother.” (p. 60) He reposed complete faith in the

Divine and the endeavour was launched.

Amal deals with a subject of great significance in his chapter, 'Sex and Spirituality'. This is an article that was initially found unsuitable for the Ashram journal *Advent* for its frankness, and was published in a revised form in the Bombay weekly, *The Social Welfare*. It deals with an issue that has been the source of misconceptions, half-truths and outright falsehood. Many seekers have been completely misguided into taking extreme positions with regard to sex: Life-denying asceticism or hedonistic indulgence. Amal explains to us the *raison d'être* of the sex drive in Man as Nature's blind way of perpetuating the race. While the force is part of ordinary human nature, the spiritual seeker, he cautions us, must learn to sublimate and conquer it. As he observes correctly: "So far in the world's history the *rationale* of sex has stayed unchallenged. . . . it cannot be discarded by the race until a finer substitute is found." (p. 67) He rejects all compromises and maintains that we need to fight against this Force and remember Sri Aurobindo's reassurance that matter can be divinised.

Two chapters that I greatly liked stand out in scintillating wit and humour. In the essay entitled, 'The First Americans in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram', Amal offers brilliant pen portraits of the McPheeters, Vaun and Janet, who came to Pondicherry before Amal arrived on 16 December 1927. The American couple, Amal tells us, occupied the upper floor of a two-storeyed house, given by the Mother. Recalling that the McPheeters had a spiritual teacher called 'Debbitt', Amal remarks jokingly that perhaps, Sri Aurobindo, their new Guru, was 'Credit'. Janet was named 'Shantimayi'. Asked about his *sadhana*, Vaun would mostly say: " 'Coming and going, going and coming!' Now it appeared there was less 'coming' and more 'going' ". (p. 51) Shantimayi was tickled when the Ashram engineer Chandulal summed up her character: Shantimayi, he said, "is frivolous in the eyes but serious in the back." (p. 52)

At Darshan time, the McPheeters faced a dilemma: Whom to offer *Pranam* first, the Mother or Sri Aurobindo. They did not wish to offend or insult either of the two Gurus. Consequently, they decided to "put their heads, one after the other in the empty space between the two." They had the "unique privilege", Amal informs us, "of having blessings from both Gurus at once but they missed the feet of either!" (p. 52)

I found the chapter 'When Nehru Met Shaw' absolutely brilliant. Jawaharlal Nehru, the intellectual-statesman, meets one of the best playwrights of the 20th century, G. B. Shaw. Instead of the usual gifts, Nehru presented mangoes to Shaw. The occasion leads Amal to offer a sustained meditation on East-West cultural relations. The humble Indian mango becomes a metaphor for the best values of Indian civilisation.

Amal writes:

In the world of fruits the mango is as essentially Indian as olives are Greek, grapes French, figs Spanish, oranges Maltese and dates Arabian. Even more so — since it is a stauncher nationalist than any of them inasmuch as it has refused to thrive to any marked degree in a non-Indian soil . . .

It is also as old as Indian history: the specimens Nehru put into Shaw's hands are known by botanists to have had at least five thousand years of ancestors behind them, in the land of Arjuna and Tilak, Kapila and Jagadish Chunder Bose, Vyasa and Tagore, Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo. (p. 88)

Pursuing the chain of thoughts, Amal recalls Shaw's interest in the ideal of the Superman. It is not the neo-vitalism of modern Europe that we must seek, Amal surmises, but the Aurobindonian ideal which transcends the conceptions of Nietzsche, Shaw and the other evolutionists of the 20th century.

And this is how Amal writes about the significance of the incident:

The cry which Nietzsche raised of "surpassing man" and going beyond to a greater formula of embodied consciousness is ever on Shaw's lips, . . . Perhaps the extreme pleasure with which Shaw accepted Nehru's gift was due to the fact that the word "mango" sounds the first note of his world-message which, in a highly transfigured form unrecognised by him and even by Nehru, is also India's *weltanschauung* today and which, in brief, is:

'Man, go! Superman, come!'

In *The Sun and the Rainbow*, Amal Kiran offers memorable vignettes of life experience from an illumined perspective. The essays that originally appeared in the pages of *Mother India* have stood the test of time. The 'Clear Ray Trust' deserves our gratitude for ensuring that the volume continues to be available for the benefit of discerning readers.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

A peach should ripen on the tree; it is a fruit that is to be plucked when the sun is there upon it. At the time when the sun falls upon it, you come, pluck it and bite into it. Then it is absolutely heavenly!

There are two fruits like this: the peach and the golden greengage. It is the same for both: you must take them warm from the tree, bite them, and you are filled with an Edenic taste.

Each fruit should be eaten in a special way.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM, 2nd Edn., Vol. 15, p. 347)