# MOTHER INDIA

# MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

## Vol. LXIV

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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#### VED-JI

Vedaprakash Johar, who joined the Ashram in 1963 and served the Mother as Trustee and Dining Room in-charge, passed away on 4.9.2011. He was born on 23.1.1928.

## MAN THE MEDIATOR

A dumb Inconscient drew life's stumbling maze, A night of all things, packed and infinite: It made our consciousness a torch that plays Between the Abyss and a supernal Light.

Our mind was framed a lens of segment sight Piecing out inch by inch the world's huge mass, And reason a small hard theodolite Measuring unreally the measureless ways.

Yet is the dark Inconscient whence came all The self-same Power that shines on high unwon: Our Night shall be a sky purpureal, Our torch transmute to a vast godhead's sun.

Rooted in mire heavenward man's nature grows, — His soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 596)

## ISH AND JAGAT

THE Isha Upanishad in its very inception goes straight to the root of the problem the Seer has set out to resolve; he starts at once with the two supreme terms of which our existence seems to be composed and in a monumental phrase, cast into the bronze of eight brief but sufficient words, he confronts them and sets them in their right & eternal relation. Ishá vásyam idam sarvam yat kincha jagatyám jagat. Ish and Jagat, God and Nature, Spirit and World, are the two poles of being between which our consciousness revolves. This double or biune reality is existence, is life, is man. The Eternal seated sole in all His creations occupies the ever-shifting Universe and its innumerable whorls and knots of motion, each called by us an object, in all of which one Lord is multitudinously the Inhabitant. From the brilliant suns to the rose and the grain of dust, from the God and the Titan in their dark or their luminous worlds to man and the insect that he crushes thoughtlessly under his feet, everything is His temple and mansion. He is the veiled deity in the temple, the open householder in the mansion; for Him and His enjoyment of the multiplicity & the unity of His being, all were created and they have no other reason for their existence. For habitation by the Lord is all this, everything whatsoever that is moving thing in her that moves.

The problem of a perfect life upon earth, a life free from those ills of which humanity seems to be the eternal and irredeemable prisoner & victim, can only be solved, in the belief of the Vedantins, if we go back to the fundamental nature of existence; for there alone can we find the root of the evil and the hint of the remedy. They are here in the two words Ish & Jagat. The Inhabitant is the Lord; in this truth, in the knowledge of it by our minds, in the realisation of it by our whole nature and being is the key of escape for the victim of evil, the prisoner of limitation and death. On the other hand, Nature is a fleeting & inconstant motion preserved by the harmonious fixity of the laws which govern its particular motions. This subjection and inconstancy of Nature is the secret of our bondage, death, limitation and suffering. We who entangle ourselves in the modalities of Nature, must, if we would escape from her confounding illusions, realise the other pole of our existence, unqualified Spirit or God. By rising to the God within us, we become free, liberated from the bondage of the world and the snare of death. For God is freedom, God is immortality. Mrityum tírtwá amritam asnute. Crossing over death, we enjoy immortality.

This relation of Nature & Spirit, World & God, on which the Seer fixes, Nature the mansion, God the occupant, is their practical, not their essential relation. Conscious existence is Brahman, single & indivisible; Spirit & Nature, World and God are one; anejad ekam manaso javíyas, — they are One unmoving swifter than mind. But for life, whether bound or free, and for the movement from bondage to freedom, this One must always be conceived as a double or biune term in which God is the reverse side of Nature. Nature the obverse side of God. The distinction has been made by Spirit itself in its own being for the object which the Seer expresses in the single word vásyam. God has thrown out His own being in the spatial & temporal movement of the Universe, building up forms in His mobile extended selfconsciousness which He conceives as different from His still & eternal, regarding, occupying & enjoying self-consciousness, so that He as soul, the subject, may have an objective existence which it can regard, occupy & enjoy, the householder of its self-mansion, the god of its self-temple, the king of its self-empire. In this cosmic relation of Spirit to Nature the word Ishá expresses the perfect and absolute freedom, eternally uninfringed, with which the Spirit envisages its objects and occupies its kingdom. World is not a material shell in which Spirit is bound, nor is Spirit a roving breath of things ensnared to which the object it inspires is a prison-house. The indwelling God is the lord of His creations and not their servant or prisoner; as a householder is lord of his dwelling-places to enter them and go forth from them at his will and to pull down what he has built up whenever it ceases to please him or be serviceable to his needs, so the Spirit is free to enter or go forth from its bodies and has power to build, destroy and rebuild whatever it pleases in this universe. The very universe itself It is free at any moment to destroy and recreate. God is not bound; He is the free and unopposed master of His creations.

This word Ishá, the Lord, is placed designedly at the opening of this great strain of Vedantic thought to rule as with a master-tone all its rhythms. It is the key to everything that follows in the eighteen verses of the Upanishad. Not only does it contradict all mechanical theories of the Universe and assert the preexistence, omnipotence, majesty and freedom of the transcendent Soul of things within, but by identifying the Lord of the universe with the Spirit in all bodies it asserts the greatness, freedom and secret omnipotence of the soul of man that seems here to wander thus painfully entangled and bewildered. Behind all the veils of his nature, the soul in man also is master, not slave, not bound, but free. Grief, death and limitation are instruments of some activity it is here to fulfil for its own delight, and the user is not bound to his instruments; he can modify them, he can reject, he can change. If, then, we appear as though bound, by the fixed nature of our minds and bodies, by the nature of the visible universe, by the dualities of grief & joy, pleasure and pain, by the chain of cause and effect or by any other chain, shackle or tie whatsoever, the bondage is a semblance and can be nothing more. It is Maya, a willed illusion of bondage, or it is Lila, a self-chosen play at bondage. Like a child pretending to be this or that and identifying itself with its role the Purusha, this divine inhabitant within, may seem to forget his freedom, but even when he forgets, the freedom is still there, self-existent, therefore inalienable. Never lost except in appearance, it is recoverable even in appearance. The game of the world-existence is not a game of bondage alone, but equally of freedom & the liberation from bondage.

(Incomplete)

Sri Aurobindo

(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 303-05)

## THE SECRET OF THE ISHA

It is now several thousands of years since men ceased to study Veda and Upanishad for the sake of Veda or Upanishad. Ever since the human mind in India, more & more intellectualised, always increasingly addicted to the secondary process of knowledge by logic & intellectual ratiocination, increasingly drawn away from the true & primary processes of knowledge by experience and direct perception, began to dislocate & dismember the manysided harmony of ancient Vedic truth & parcel it out into schools of thought & systems of metaphysics, its preoccupation has been rather with the later opinions of Sutras & Bhashyas than with the early truth of Scripture. Veda & Vedanta ceased to be guides to knowledge & became merely mines & quarries from which convenient texts might be extracted, regardless of context, to serve as weapons in the polemic disputes of metaphysicians. The inconvenient texts were ignored or explained away by distortion of their sense or by depreciation of their value. Those that neither helped nor hindered the polemical purpose of the exegete were briefly paraphrased or often left in a twilit obscurity. For the language of the Vedantic writers ceased to be understood; their figures, symbols of thought, shades of expression became antique & unintelligible. Hence passages which, when once fathomed, reveal a depth of knowledge & delicacy of subtle thought almost miraculous in its wealth & quality, strike the casual reader today as a mass of childish, obscure & ignorant fancies characteristic of an unformed and immature thinking. Rubbish & babblings of humanity's nonage an eminent Western scholar has termed them not knowing that it was not the text but his understanding of it that was rubbish & the babblings of ignorance. Worst of all, the spiritual & psychological experiences of the Vedic seekers were largely lost to India as the obscurations of the Iron Age grew upon her, as her knowledge contracted, her virtue dwindled & her old spiritual valiancy lost its daring & its nerve. Not altogether lost indeed for its sides of knowledge & practice still lived in cave & hermitage, its sides of feeling & emotion, narrowed by a more exclusive & selfabandoned fervour, remained, quickened even in the throbbing intensity of the Bhakti Marga and the violent inner joys of countless devotees. But even here it remained dim & obscure, shorn of its fullness, dimmed in its ancient and radiant purity. Yet we think, however it may be with the Vedas we have understood & possess the Upanishads! We have understood a few principal texts & even those imperfectly; but of the mass of the Upanishads we understand less than we do of the Egyptian hieroglyphics and of the knowledge these great writings hold enshrined we possess less than we do of the wisdom of the ancient Egyptians. Dabhram evapi twam vettha Brahmano rupam!

I have said that the increasing intellectualisation of the Indian mind has been

responsible for this great national loss. Our forefathers who discovered or received Vedic truth, did not arrive at it either by intellectual speculation or by logical reasoning. They attained it by actual & tangible experience in the spirit, - by spiritual & psychological observation, as we may say, & what they thus experienced, they understood by the instrumentality of the intuitive reason. But a time came when men felt an imperative need to give an account to themselves & to others of this supreme & immemorial Vedic truth in the terms of logic, in the language of intellectual ratiocination. For the maintenance of the intuitive reason as the ordinary instrument of knowledge demands as its basis an iron moral & intellectual discipline, a colossal disinterestedness of thinking, — otherwise the imagination and the wishes pollute the purity of its action, replace, dethrone it and wear flamboyantly its name & mask; Vedic knowledge begins to be lost & the practice of life & symbol based upon it are soon replaced by formalised action & unintelligent rite & ceremony. Without tapasya there can be no Veda. This was the course that the stream of thought followed among us, according to the sense of our Indian tradition. The capacity for tapasya belongs to the Golden Age of man's fresh virility; it fades as humanity ages & the cycle takes its way towards the years that are of Iron, and with tapasya, the basis, divine knowledge, the superstructure, also collapses or dwindles. The place of truth is then taken by superstition, irrational error that takes its stand upon the place where truth lies buried builds its tawdry & fantastic palace of pleasure upon those concealed & consecrated foundations, & even uses the ruins of old truth as stones for its irregular building. But such an usurpation can never endure. For, since the need of man's being is truth & light, the divine law, whose chief article it is that no just demand of the soul shall remain always unsatisfied, raises up Reason to clear away Superstition. Reason arrives as the Angel of the Lord, armed with her sword of doubt & denial (for it is the nature of intellectual Reason that beyond truth of objective appearance she cannot confidently & powerfully affirm anything, but must always remain with regard to fundamental truth agnostic and doubtful, her highest word of affirmation "probably", her lowest "perhaps"), - comes & cuts away whatever she can, often losing herself in a fury of negation, denying superstition indeed, but doubting & denying also even Truth because it has been a foundation for superstition or formed with some of its stones part of the building. But at any rate she clears the field for sounder work; she makes tabula rasa for a more correct writing. The ancient Indian mind felt instinctively — I do not say it realised or argued consciously — the necessity, as the one way to avoid such a reign of negation, of stating to the intellectual reason so much of Vedic truth as could still be grasped and justifying it logically. The Six Darshanas were the result of this mighty labour. Buddhism, the inevitable rush of negation, came indeed but it was prevented from destroying spirituality as European negation destroyed it for a time in the eighteenth & nineteenth centuries by the immense & unshakeable hold the work of the philosophers had taken upon the Indian temperament. So firm was this grasp that

even the great Masters of negation — for Brihaspati who affirmed matter was a child & weakling in denial compared with the Buddhists, — could not wholly divest themselves of this characteristic Indian realisation that subjective experience is the basis of existence & the objective only an outward term of that existence.

But admirable & necessary as was this vast work of intellectual systemisation, subtle, self-grasped & successful beyond parallel, supreme glory as it is now held and highest attainment of Indian mentality, it had from the standpoint of Vedantic truth three capital disadvantages.

(*Incomplete*)

Sri Aurobindo

(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 307-10)



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## THE SECRET BELOW THE SURFACE

ALL life, all existence is an enigma to the human mind, because the mind is a light which sees only the surfaces of things or at most a little below the surface and is moreover limited by its own circumscribed area of vision. It cannot see what is beyond those limits and yet there are an infinity of things beyond its circle. It cannot see what is above, it cannot see what is within, it cannot see what is below. But what is on the surface is never the truth of things; the surface presents us only with facts not with truths, with phenomena not with realities, with imperfect indications, not with the realisation of things in themselves. The secret, the truth, the reality of things is above, within, below, it is not on their surface.

\* \* \*

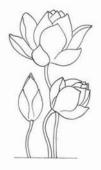
There is a meaning in the universe, an intention in cosmic existence; there is a significance of the individual, his life is a sign and has a purpose.

The true truth of things is not apparent on the surface, it is something hidden. Truth is not obvious, it comes always as a discovery, Life is the working out of a secret, the process and progress of a mystery; we too are not what we seem to be, we have to find and become ourself.

What we seem to be is a thinking human animal. What we are and have to become is God; the secret purpose of our existence here is to find the occult Reality of ourselves and the world, to become Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 286-87)



# **'HOW MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS THERE ARE IN CONSCIOUSNESS'**

#### March 13, 1914

How many different levels there are in consciousness! This word should be reserved for what is illumined in a being by Thy Presence, is identified with Thee and partakes of Thy absolute Consciousness, for that which has knowledge, that which is "perfectly awakened", as the Buddha says.

Outside this state there are infinite grades of consciousness, going right down to complete darkness, the veritable inconscience which may be a domain yet untouched by the light of Thy divine Love (but this seems improbable in physical substance), or which is, for some kind of reason of ignorance, outside our individual range of perception.

This is, however, only a way of speaking, and a very incomplete one; for when the being becomes aware of Thy presence and is identified with Thy consciousness, it is conscious in all things and everywhere. But the fleeting duration of this supreme consciousness can be explained only by the complexity of the elements of the being, by their unequal illumination and by the fact that they enter into activity successively. It is, moreover, because of this successive activity that they can gradually become aware of themselves as a result of their experiences, both objective and subjective (which are really one and the same), that is, discover Thee in their unfathomable essence.

The subconscient is the intermediate zone between precise perception and ignorance, total darkness; it is probable that most beings, even human beings, live constantly in this subconscient; few emerge from it. This is the conquest that is to be made; for to be conscious in the true sense of the word is to be Thyself integrally; and is not this the very definition of the work to be accomplished, the mission to be fulfilled upon earth?

Deliver us, O Lord, from darkness; grant that we may become perfectly awake. . . .

Sweet Master of Love, grant that all my consciousness may be concentrated in Thee so that I may live only by love and light and that love and light may radiate through me and awaken in all on our journey; may this physical journey be like a symbol of our action and may we leave everywhere a trace of Thee like a trail of light and love.

O divine Master, eternal Teacher, Thou livest in all things, in all beings, and

Thy love bursts upon the sight of even the most ignorant. Grant that all may become aware of it in the depths of their being and that hatred may disappear for ever from their hearts.

My ardent gratitude rises to Thee like a tireless chant.

The Mother

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 97-98)



## A VISION

(Continued from the issue of July 2011)

(6)

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

I SLEPT and now I am awake.

I awoke on the threshold of a long, vaulted path; this path is formed of great transparent emerald-green undulations, flowing like ripples upon the still surface of water into which a stone has been cast. The luminous sapphire-blue vault is supported by two rows of small slender pillars of some substance like lapis-lazuli; between the pillars a pale emerald light can be seen, as if all this were at the bottom of a tranquil green sea.

I am drawn towards this path, stretching as far as the eye can see, and I enter upon it. The ripples bear me along in a swift rhythmical motion, and so I continue for a long time. The motion accelerates as I move onwards — I must have travelled a very great distance. The journey seems interminable, for I am longing to see what is at the end of this path. Suddenly I distinguish a luminous white point. By an effort of will I increase my speed, and as I draw near I see that this point is a white square; when I reach its base it is immense. Then, a little weary from the journey, I lie down and fall asleep.

While I sleep, my intelligence awakens and I understand what I have just seen.

I understand that this path, vaulted with blue and paved with emerald undulations, is the way of intellectual evolution open in life to men of goodwill, the long but radiant path that leads all who wish to the fourfold equilibrium.

Having understood this, I awake refreshed and strengthened, for I have rested in the purple overshadow. I sense that I am about to see what at first was hidden to me by the white square.

Indeed, four eagles appear; they are dark blue, sitting back to back in a square and facing the four cardinal points. They bear upon their heads a small tablet, above which rises a white cloud. Beyond the cloud shines a very bright light. After contemplating the light I turn my gaze back to the eagles and see that they have become white and faintly radiant.

While looking at them I fall asleep, and again my intelligence awakens to the understanding of what I have just seen.

The eagles, who are at first in affinity with my mental vision — hence their blue colour — face the four cardinal points because they are turned towards life and

#### A VISION

light, light and power, power and utility, utility and light. In other words, they await the realisation of perfectioning in life so that life may become ready for the permanent individualisation of intelligence; and they await the perfection of individualised intelligence so that it may become fit for exercising power, the power that is to manifest in and through utility, that is to be used for the perfection of earth and man. And this will allow mankind to lift the veil represented by the cloud and attain a higher intelligence, a light of dazzling brightness; by this light man will see with a balanced vision — a vision at once full of love,<sup>1</sup> spiritual, intellectual and vital — the eagles which symbolise the intermediaries between the evolving supermen<sup>2</sup> and the higher radiances.

As soon as I have received this explanation my eyes open once more and I see, outlined against a dark-blue square, a sphere divided into two equal parts, one white and very luminous, the other a beautiful dark violet.

Having slept, I understand that I have passed from the vision of possibilities to the vision of the means of realisation. In mental equilibrium I contemplate earth, our heritage, our home by eternal right, balanced between light and power,<sup>3</sup> between intellectual radiance and the protective overshadow. Earth, not as it is now, but charged with spiritual light and power by the evolving supermen<sup>4</sup> arranged in hierarchical order.

My calm is deep and still, my hope immense, my aspiration intense, and for the fourth time I awake.

I see a square portal of deep amethyst, supported by two strong white pillars. In the middle of the doorway, on the ground, two violet eagles sit side by side, closely united. One faces east the other faces west.

Above their heads, at the centre of the portal, shines a splendid white sun all radiant with iridescent beams.

I gaze upon this wonderful scene with a profound delight. It feels as if one of the beautiful sunbeams has entered my head; all is illumined within me. This portal is the entrance opening upon victorious realisation, and this entrance is power in equilibrium, in duality, more rarefied and radiant.

In the middle of this entrance, not soaring in space but standing upon firm ground, the dual eagles in sovereign purple represent power in utility — terrestrial might. They are united by the indissoluble bond of affinity, and yet one faces in the direction of the setting sun, the other towards the rising sun, like a symbol of repose and awakening, of passivity and activity, which must be rightly balanced for one to rise from one level to another, to ascend from light to ever purer and more radiant light.

- 1. Pathétique: full of divinised love.
- 2. Psycho-intellectuels: men evolving into the divine supermen.
- 3. Auriser: to change with spiritual light and power.

<sup>4.</sup> Psycho-intellectuels: men evolving into the divine supermen.

Only by this equilibrium can the iridescent beams of the splendid white sun, centre of all forces, be fully utilised by the children of earth, who thirst for its magnificent illumination whose splendour is increasing and will go on increasing for ever!

The Mother

(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, February 1984)



## SOME ANSWERS FROM THE MOTHER

How can my effort to serve the Divine become more perfect?

By wanting Him more and more in every part of your being — integrally.

\*

The soul is the eternal essence at the centre of the psychic being. The soul is in fact like a divine spark which puts on many states of being of increasing density, down to the most material; it is inside the body, within the solar plexus, so to say. These states of being take form and develop, progress, become individualised and perfected in the course of many earthly lives and form the psychic being. When the psychic being is fully formed, it is aware of the consciousness of the soul and manifests it perfectly.

Unless one practises yoga in the physical being (outer being), it remains ignorant — even its aspiration is ignorant and so is its goodwill; all its movements are ignorant and so they distort and disfigure the Divine Presence.

\*

That is why the yoga of the body-cells is indispensable.

At the centre of each cell lies the Divine Consciousness. By aspiration and repeated self-giving, the cells must be made transparent.

\*

To become aware of the consciousness of the soul is the surest and easiest way of uniting with the Divine.

\*

We are made up of many different parts which have to be unified around the psychic being, if we are conscious of it or at least around the central aspiration. If this unification is not done, we carry this division within us.

To do this, each thought, each feeling, each sensation, each impulse, each reaction, as it manifests, must be presented in the consciousness to the central being or its aspiration. What is in accord is accepted; what is not in accord is refused,

rejected or transformed.

It is a long endeavour which may take many years — but once it is done, the unification is achieved and the path becomes easy and swift.

\*

Each time that you discover in yourself something that denies or resists, throw it into the flame of Agni, which is the fire of aspiration.

\*

To get rid of the past is something so difficult that it seems almost impossible.

But if you *give* yourself entirely and without reserve to the future, and if this giving is constantly renewed, the past will *fall away by itself* and no longer encumber you.

\*

To establish the reign of the Divine on earth, who is slower — man or the Divine Himself?

To man the Divine seems slow.

In the eyes of the Divine man is slow indeed! But perhaps in these two cases, the slowness is not the same.

\*

It is said that there are certain methods in the Tantras to open the chakras from below, whereas in the integral yoga the chakras open from above by the descent of the Mother's force.

What is the difference between the results of the opening of the chakras in these two systems?

In Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga, there are no such rigid rules and distinctions. Each one follows his own path and has his own experiences. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo has often said and written that his yoga begins where the others leave off.

This is to say that yoga ordinarily consists in awakening the physical consciousness and making it rise gradually towards the Divine. Whereas Sri Aurobindo has said that to do his yoga, one must already have found the Divine and united with Him — then the consciousness descends through all the states of being down to the

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most material, bringing the Divine Force with it so that the Force can transform the whole being and finally divinise the physical body.

\*

Transformation demands a total and integral consecration. But isn't that the aspiration of every sincere sadhak?

*Total* means vertically in all the states of being, from the most material to the most subtle.

*Integral* means horizontally in all the different and often contradictory parts which make up the outer being (physical, vital and mental).

\*

Flowers are very receptive and they are happy when they are loved.

\*

*How is it that ordinarily the richer one is (materially), the more dishonest one is?* 

It is because material wealth is controlled by the adverse forces — and because they have not yet been converted to the Divine Influence, though the work has begun.

That victory will form part of the triumph of Truth.

Wealth should not be a personal property and should be at the disposal of the Divine for the welfare of all.

\*

What is the difference between an emanation and a formation?

These words do not apply to the physical world as it is at present.

The explanation is only an approximation. Still, one can say that the emanation is made up of the very substance of the emanator, whereas the formation is made up of a substance external to the formator.

To make a comparison, one could say that the emanation is like a child made from the substance of its mother and that the formation is like a living statue made out of a material external to the sculptor.

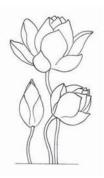
But naturally this is only a very approximate explanation.

The path is long, very long, almost interminable.

It is true that the path is very long, but for one who follows it with *sincerity*, it is *really very interesting*, and at every step one is rewarded for one's trouble.

[These are selections from the Mother's replies to Shyam Sundar.]

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 357-75)



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## TWO POEMS WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENTS

Here are two poems for your consideration — perhaps with some overhead breath in them. Please evaluate them critically. They seem to be somewhat antithetical in theme. Are there any lines in them you particularly like?

> Amal 27-10-1950

## **GOD'S WORLD**

- How shall the witness mind's tranquillity
- + Catch the extravagant happiness of God's world?
- To reach one goal He flings a million paths
- + Laughing with sheer love of the limitless, Wandering for centuries in secret glory,
  - Then striking home a single light of lights!
- Arvellous the pattern of His prodigal power, But vainly the philosopher will brood
- + This sable serpent flecked with sudden stars.
- + Coil after coil of unpredictable dream Will set his logic whirling till it drops. Only the poet with wide eyes that feel
- + Each form a shining gate to depths beyond Knows through the magic measures of his tune
- + Our world is the overflow of an infinite wine
- + Self-tasted in the mystery-drunken heart.

#### WORLD-POET

With song on radiant song I clasp the world,

- + Weaving its wonder and wideness into my heart ---
  - But ever the music misses some huge star
- Or else some flower too small for the minstrel hand.

No skill can turn all life my harmony.

Perchance a tablet of magic mood will make

The truth of the whole universe write itself —

But only when with mortal thoughts in-drawn I learn the secret time-transcending art:

+ Silence that, losing all, grows infinite Self . . .

Sri Aurobindo's Reply:

The + marking indicates lines which are of the first poetic order. The ordinary mark indicates those which are excellent. The other lines not marked are all of them good but not of a special quality. Both the poems are very successful, especially the first.

7-11-1950

[The above exchange is the last literary correspondence with Sri Aurobindo.]

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

(The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], 1993, pp. 198-99)

If the spirit could from the first dwell securely on the superior heights and deal with a blank and virgin stuff of mind and matter, a complete spiritual transformation might be rapid, even facile: but the actual process of Nature is more difficult, the logic of her movement more manifold, contorted, winding, comprehensive; she recognises all the data of the task she has set to herself and is not satisfied with a summary triumph over her own complexities. Every part of our being has to be taken in its own nature and character, with all the moulds and writings of the past still there in it: each minutest portion and movement must either be destroyed and replaced if it is unfit, or, if it is capable, transmuted into the truth of the higher being. If the psychic change is complete, this can be done by a painless process, though still the programme must be long and scrupulous and the progress deliberate; but otherwise one has to be satisfied with a partial result or, if one's own scrupulousness of perfection or hunger of the spirit is insatiable, consent to a difficult, often painful and seemingly interminable action.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 948)

# **EVENING TALKS**

#### (AS RECORDED BY PAVITRA)

(During his first year in Pondicherry, Pavitra took part in the informal talks that Sri Aurobindo had in the evenings with a small group of disciples. He kept a record of several talks dealing with science and occultism, two subjects of special interest to him.)

### 24 April 1926

(*The discussion is about spiritualistic phenomena: materialisations, movement of physical objects, etc. Sri Aurobindo comments:*)

Are these phenomena really physical phenomena — that is, do they make use of physical matter and are they subject to the laws of the physical plane? With vital force alone, it is quite possible to act upon physical matter, to move it and, by compacting this vital matter, to give the illusion of the physical one.

(Pavitra gives an account of recent mediumistic phenomena studied in Europe: the work of Guzik and Eva, paraffin gloves, the materialisation of flowers, etc. Then the story is told of the stone-throwing incident that occurred a few years back in the house on Rue François Martin. Other stories of similar manifestations are mentioned.)

These phenomena are achieved with the assistance of vital forces that are not of a very high order. That is why the morality of the mediums is often lowered when they fall under the control of such entities. It is possible, however, to manipulate these forces by oneself without such danger.

Whenever reference is made to the danger of Siddhis, it is on account of the contact with these lower vital forces. But these Siddhis are not necessarily dangerous. It depends on the nature of the Siddhis and the use that is made of them.

The Catholic Church is not quite wrong when it ascribes spiritualistic phenomena to devils; it is speaking ignorantly but it is not far from the truth. One must be very cautious in this matter.

(Pavitra speaks of the Metapsychic Institute of Paris and the work of Dr. Geley. Dr. Geley seems to have scientifically established that there is a real self in man above space and time. This gives a strong support to reincarnation.)

The real self of man is above the physical manifestations of space and time, but it is not above space and time; it is not in the Timeless.

\* \* \*

### 28 April 1926

(Continuation of the same subject)

The way in which Europe approaches the manifestations of the vital plane is wrong and does not lead to more light.

First, it is perfectly possible from the vital plane itself to imitate purely physical manifestations. The fact that an object is seen or touched does not prove that it is really physical. Most of these materialisations, like the materialised animals of Guzik, only succeed in red light. This suggests that the forces in action are vital forces, which cannot bear white light. If there were a complete materialisation, why should red light be so important?

When the connection between the physical and the vital is close, vital manifestations imitate physical ones. In such cases, a wound inflicted upon the vital body has its reaction on the physical. Of course, it is possible that the higher physical levels are reached and not the lower ones; that may account for the rapid dispersion of the materialisations.

Mediumship brings great dangers. To be a medium is to lend oneself without control to all kinds of beings of the vital plane, often of the lowest order. These vital beings try to contact the physical plane in order to find willing instruments there to project on them their influence. They are always in search of human beings to make use of them; this varies from a simple influence to a complete possession. The latter is a fearful danger.

Apart from possession, we must remember that the vital is the plane of desires, and that any work with the forces of that plane carries in itself the danger related to these desires: ambition, greed, lust, etc.

Though new facts are being placed before science, it does not seem to view them in the right manner or to derive more light from them; it cannot be obtained in the way now followed.

#### EVENING TALKS

Pavitra: Is science not bound to travel from the known to the unknown? And is it not possible thus to come slowly to recognise the existence of realities higher than the physical, and then proceed to the study of the laws of the higher planes?

The knowledge that science possesses is one thing — and not a large one — the scientific attitude is another. The capacity of observation, of study, of reserving one's judgment and building a conclusion only after all available data have been gathered, of keeping the mind open to any suggestion, any clue about a higher truth, this attitude is indispensable to the occultist also.

But the criteria of the physical plane are not valid on the vital plane. The vital plane is the world of spell and deceit and power. The methods of modern science are good so far as the physical plane is concerned; they are not acceptable for the higher ones. For these planes, the ancient method of developing the higher knowl-edge under the guidance of the Guru has its *raison d'être*. And even then there are dangers: first, the danger of falling into the power of vital entities, and second, the danger arising from the very nature of the vital world — the terrible power of desire. Whenever perfect conditions are not fulfilled, the possibility of a fall becomes very great.

*Pavitra: At present, is the mass of humanity able to accept knowledge which is not purely mental?* 

It may be that it would not accept such knowledge.

Barindra: The progress of science is mostly due to a few highly gifted men who were working by intuition, checking afterwards the truth of what they had perceived.

The dangers I was speaking of just now are not only met with in Yoga. In the case of spiritualism, the phenomena are due to vital entities taking possession of vital remnants of dead people and their floating thoughts. They assume various names which they take from the consciousness of the audience — not always the surface consciousness, very often the collective subconscious. They can even bring out facts unknown to those present, but it does not prove anything.

Why in India are Siddhis dreaded by those who aim at high spirituality? It is because of this double danger.

It is indeed possible to develop certain powers without being overcome by them. When one rises high enough in the Truth, Siddhis offer themselves without the same risk. But even then, care must be taken.

## 1 May 1926

(The subject of discussion is Mongolia and China. Characteristics of the Chinese: the Chinese are material and strongly intellectual.

Books of Ossendowski (Men, Beasts and Gods) and of St. Yves d'Alveydre (Mission of India) about Mongolia and the mysteries of Central Asia. Both authors speak of a great secret community of sages and adepts who are living in an underground city somewhere in Tibet. They are said to preserve all the wisdom and knowledge of the lost civilisations of Atlantis and others.)

These writers, like many other clairvoyants who give similar accounts, do not know how to distinguish between the physical and the vital worlds. They mistake for physical realities scenes, happenings and beings which exist only on a higher plane.

(Pavitra gives an instance of a Chinese traveller in Tibet who found a great monastery in a very isolated and lonely place in a high and remote valley. The adepts there had solved the problems of life and death and were powerful occultists. Many of them were Chinese and Tibetan, but there were also Indians and several Europeans.)

There is nothing very strange in the existence of a monastery in a high valley of the mountains, but the presence there of several Europeans is very improbable.

A similar case is that of a Christian Sadhu who asserts the existence in the Himalayas of a community of Christian masters who will come down very soon — naturally, to Christianise the world. And there are many other such cases.

(The talk then turns to what makes up the characteristics of a race. It is stated that physical heredity is not sufficient to account for the similarity of characters, ideals and tendencies.)

The main factor is that souls of a certain type are attracted to a definite race and take a body in it. This gives a first tendency towards the similarity you are speaking of.

\* \* \*

#### 5 May 1926

### (Continuation of the same subject)

The pages you have shown me, containing an account by a Chinese traveller of his discovery of the Temple of Life in a Tibetan valley, are far from convincing. No doubt, there are in such places monasteries and retreats inhabited by occultists, but the statement does not bear the stamp of truth. This international gathering is fanciful and highly improbable.

A few years ago, a Hindu who had travelled in these regions of China, Indo-China and Tibet brought to Europe a number of photos which he was showing with his lectures. His father was from Lahore and had married a Muslim woman in Mauritius. He had no spiritual value and his lectures were only a means to get some fame.

Mira<sup>1</sup> saw these photos and recognised two scenes she had seen often in visions. One was the entrance of a cave with two lying statues, leading to a small brook which the sun reached only once a day. Mira saw monks coming there to fetch water. But the Hindu traveller asserted that the place was totally deserted. What Mira saw then was either something of the past or a vital scene on a physical substratum. The other scene was a monastery in which monks were putting someone into a trance. The traveller confirmed the capacities of the monks for occultism.

*Pavitra: There is a strong desire for the marvellous in the European and still more in the American.* 

This has come as a reaction to a period of belief in nothing. But this liking for the marvellous is not at all spiritual. There is a complete want of knowledge of the spiritual. One cannot even speak of a search for Truth.

Pavitra: In spite of this ignorance and lack of discrimination, have we not here an indication of an aspiration towards a more spiritual state, of something hitherto hidden that is trying to come out?

Very likely. Such a thing has happened several times in history, but always ignorance has violently rejected the Truth that tried to come down. The last attempt was taken advantage of by a rising Christianity. A certain preparation had been made for a coming down of the Truth. Christianity failed not only because all religions are bound to fail, but because it was overwhelmed by ignorance, and what was coming down reascended and disappeared.

1. At that time the Mother was known by this name.

We are now in a similar condition and the same danger is near by. The Theosophists, spiritualists and others did not succeed in placing themselves in the true receptive attitude. If the leading spirits of Europe were in search of the spiritual Truth, there would be hope, but it is not so. That is why, in spite of all the adverse conditions, the East has accomplished more in spirituality than the West. In the East it is always the highly gifted minds that have turned towards spirituality, and a strong potentiality and spiritual reserve have thus been created.

(Conversations with Sri Aurobindo by Pavitra [Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire], Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2007)

We know that genes and chromosomes are the cause of hereditary transmissions, not only of physical but of psychological variations; but we do not discover how psychological characteristics can be contained and transmitted in this inconscient material vehicle. We do not see or know, but it is expounded to us as a cogent account of Nature-process, that a play of electrons, of atoms and their resultant molecules, of cells, glands, chemical secretions and physiological processes manages by their activity on the nerves and brain of a Shakespeare or a Plato to produce or could be perhaps the dynamic occasion for the production of a Hamlet or a Symposium or a Republic; but we fail to discover or appreciate how such material movements could have composed or necessitated the composition of these highest points of thought and literature: the divergence here of the determinants and the determination becomes so wide that we are no longer able to follow the process, much less understand or utilise.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 313)

## SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of September 2011)

#### **Chapter: VII**

#### "From this filthy sewer pure gold flows"

DR. K. D. GHOSE must have appreciated the reformist outlook of his staunch Brahmo father-in-law, Rajnarain Bose, that contrasted clearly with the superstitions and orthodoxy then currently dictating the social life of the Hindus. But that appreciation failed to ignite in him the spirit of nationalism by which Rajnarain swore. While the doctor loved to serve the people wherever he was posted and launched schemes to alleviate their suffering going beyond the scope of his prescribed duty, he had no love for the native social culture or even the native language — be it Bengali or Hindustani. He could not remain satisfied for long with the process of insulation he had ensured for his boys by leaving them under the care of Irish nuns at Darjeeling, the very best he could have done in India. He was keen to lead them to England, for him still the ideal ground, the model environment for the proper growth of his children.

Thus were the three boys led to Manchester, the second-most important city in England after London. It was 1879.

But this is what Manchester was in mid-nineteenth century:

The footsteps of a busy crowd, the crunching of wheels of machinery, the shriek of steam from boilers, the regular beat of the looms, the heavy rumble of carts, those are the noises from which you can never escape in the sombre half-light of these streets. Crowds are ever hurrying this way and that in the Manchester streets, but their footsteps are brisk, their looks preoccupied, and their appearances sombre and harsh. From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows. Here humanity attains its most complete development and its most brutish; here civilisation works its miracles, and civilised man is turned back almost into a savage.<sup>1</sup>

Manchester was also the first city to have a railway station. But it had no claim to any educational or cultural experiment or excellence. Dr. K. D. Ghose would have been happy to plant his boys in any notable place in England and if he decided on Manchester, it was because of suitable connections. As Civil Surgeon and head of the district medical service, and even more because of his pronounced admiration for persons and things English, he had developed a close friendship with the District Magistrate and Collector, Edward Glazier. He must have discussed with this gentleman the future of his sons. He sincerely believed that his sons were "children of a better breed"<sup>2</sup> and he had nurtured for them a dream of a brilliant future, although for him success in the Indian Civil Service examination would be the unerring proof of that brilliance. Writes Barindrakumar, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother,

Father's fond wish was that Aurobindo will brighten the face of the country by achieving a position in the I.C.S. Were he alive I do not know what would be his feeling at his renowned son's fame spread all over the world.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Glazier had a close relative at Manchester, William H. Drewett (circa 1857-1909), a minister in a non-conformist church. The Drewett couple had no children of their own. They agreed to take charge of the boys and arrange for their education. The paying-guest system was not so much in vogue and in any case to accommodate three boys from abroad at their most vulnerable age and to undertake educating them certainly required qualities of heart in which the Rev. Drewett seems to have been amply rich.

A voyage to England was not an easy task then and Dr. K. D. Ghose probably had other considerations for proceeding there at the earliest. Swarnalata Devi, once an efficient support to her husband in his social life and herself so charming as to be called the Rose of Rangpur, had started showing signs of mental imbalance as we have seen from a letter of Miss Akroyd. They were expecting their fifth child and the doctor obviously thought that the delivery would be safer under medical care in London and its after-effect on Swarnalata Devi's already unstable mind could be better managed there.

Recollects Barindrakumar,

Father proceeded to England for the second time with his three sons, one daughter and my mother, for educating his three sons. Carrying me in her womb this was my mother's first and last voyage across the blue ocean. On our arrival in England I was born in the suburbs of London, at Norwood, in front of the Marble Palace. Because I was born almost on the sea I was to be called Barindrakumar.<sup>4</sup> I have already stated earlier that since Dada's birth my mother was showing signs of insanity. The name of my mother's doctor was Mathew. And since I was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, soon after the birth of Christ, my crazy mother christened me with an absurd Biblical name, Emmanuel Mathew Ghose. My birth certificate carrying this name can still be obtained from the Birth Registration Office at Croydon.<sup>5</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> of January, the day after Barindrakumar was born, happened to be the festival of Epiphany — commemorating the three Wise Men of the East discovering and greeting the newborn Christ. In an atmosphere of gratitude Emmanuel (literally "God with us"), a name of Christ, could have occurred to Swarnalata Devi as a fitting prefix to Mathew. However, the name did not travel any distance beyond the Croydon Birth Registration Office.

To quote again a few more relevant words from Barindrakumar,

My eldest brother Benoy Bhushan Ghose was born at Bhagalpur, the second brother Manmohan Ghose too was born there. My sister Sarojini Ghose was born at Rangpur and I was born at Norwood in England. Father went to England with the family but returned alone in August 1879. Mother returned home three months after my birth, in March 1880, along with me and my sister. There is nobody alive now who could remember how long my parents lived together after we were back home and when exactly my mother went away to Rohini along with me and Didi. I and Didi continued growing up on the lap of our insane mother. The three elder brothers were left to grow up in the magical island of the whites.<sup>6</sup>

The island does not seem to have proved that magical for Sri Aurobindo.

There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but not to England as a country; he had no ties there and did not make England his adopted country, as Manmohan did for a time.<sup>7</sup>

While his two brothers were admitted to the Manchester Grammar School, Sri Aurobindo was taught privately by Mr. and Mrs. Drewett, the latter an accomplished Latin scholar. He was taught Latin, History, French, Geography and Arithmetic. The Drewetts of course taught him well, but they also diligently kept him untaught about anything Indian. That was Dr. Ghose's strict instruction to them.

These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.<sup>8</sup>

Surveying Sri Aurobindo's performance as a student in later years — despite his continuous encounter with odds — we can conclude that he received his lessons not only well but also with ease, saving for himself time enough to study English literature — he must have been recommended the best of it — including the King James version of the Bible, and begin writing poetry. In other words, the creative aspect of his life was vibrantly active.

Sri Aurobindo rarely spoke about the state of his inner experience at any stage

of his life unless it was either to correct some incorrect impression in circulation or in answering a question. We get just a hint of it at this stage of his life from a statement he made in one such context, that at the age of eleven, that is, a year before he left Manchester,

... Sri Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country. But the "firm decision" took full shape only towards the end of another four years. It had already been made when he went to Cambridge and as a member and for sometime secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches which, as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service; the failure in the riding test was only the occasion, for in some other cases an opportunity was given for remedying this defect in India itself.<sup>9</sup>

If he had such feelings at the age of eleven — feelings that must have begun to undo the effect of all that had been done to keep him and India uncompromisingly apart — his creative literary genius had begun to flourish even earlier. At ten he had published a poem in a local magazine. Answering a question in 1939 as to when he began writing poetry, Sri Aurobindo said,

When my two brothers and I were staying at Manchester, I wrote for the Fox Family Magazine. It was an awful imitation of somebody I don't remember.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo obviously meant *Fox's Weekly*,<sup>11</sup> a short-lived publication of Manchester, edited by W. G. Fox. If this first published poem of his has been supposed to bear the influence of Shelley's "The Cloud", one hardly sees the influence extending beyond the metre and the stanza-construction. "Awful imitation"? That only speaks of Sri Aurobindo's utter humility. Here is Shelley's first stanza:

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers, From the seas and the streams; I bear light shade for the leaves when laid In their noonday dreams. From my wings are shaken the dews that waken The sweet buds every one, When rocked to rest on their mother's breast, As she dances about the sun. I wield the flail of the lashing hail, And whiten the green plains under, And then again I dissolve it in rain, And laugh as I pass in thunder.<sup>12</sup>

And here is Sri Aurobindo's:

From the quickened womb of the primal gloom, The sun rolled, black and bare,
Till I wove him a vest for his Ethiop breast, Of the threads of my golden hair;
And when the broad tent of the firmament Arose on its airy spars,
I pencilled the hue of its matchless blue, And spangled it around with stars.<sup>13</sup>

The only other incident of his Manchester days that is known may appear a bit farcical. But surveying the situation objectively one cannot but appreciate the goodwill those concerned in the small episode had for their tender target. The orthodox Christian believed that Jesus alone saved a soul — just as anchors of some other faiths attribute that exclusive power of mercy to their gods. That a bright little boy like Sri Aurobindo would live in the custody of qualified Christian mentors and yet one day go back to his native land bereft of that invaluable insurance must have appeared absurd to Mr. Drewett's mother. (Obviously she did not care much for the souls of the other two boys as she might have observed them to be lagging far behind the point when one becomes eligible for the privilege.) So, she decided to act. In the context of clarifying a rumour that he had been converted to Christianity, Sri Aurobindo narrated the episode thus:

The only thing that happened was that there was once a meeting of nonconformist priests at Cumberland when we were in England. The old lady in whose house we dwelt, i.e. old Mrs. Drewett, took me there, after the prayers were over all dispersed and devout people remained a little longer afterwards and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. Then a priest approached me and put me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted, 'he is saved, he is saved' and began to pray for me and offer thanks to God. I did not know anything. Then the priest came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of praying. But somehow I did it in the manner children recite their prayers before going to sleep in order to keep up an appearance. That was the only thing that happened. I was not used to attend the Church. I was about ten at that time.<sup>14</sup> The Manchester phase of Sri Aurobindo's life ended in 1884.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

## **References and Notes**

1. Peter Hall: "The First Industrial City: Manchester" in *Cities in Civilisation*, Pantheon Books.

- 2. Dr. K. D. Ghose's letter to J. Bose, Dec. 2, 1890. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives.
- 3. Barindrakumar Ghose: Atmakatha. Papyrus, Kolkata.
- 4. Barindra means Lord of the Waters, the presiding deity of the Oceans, Varuna.
- 5. Barindrakumar Ghose: Atmakatha.

6. *Ibid*.

- 7. Sri Aurobindo: Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 35.
- 8. Ibid., p. 15.
- 9. Ibid., p. 32.

10. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 98. Conversation of 3 January 1939.

11. Sri Aurobindo's "The Light" was the only poem of literary quality published in *Fox's Weekly* during its brief existence, from January 1883 to November 1883. This was published in its very first issue. All other verses published were light or humorous. An example:

As my wife and I, at the window one day, Stood watching a man with a monkey, A cart came by, with the "broth of a boy", Who was driving a stout little donkey.

To my wife I then spoke, by way of a joke: "There's a relation of yours in that carriage." To which she replied, as the donkey she spied, "Ah yes, a relation – by marriage."

12. *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley*; The Signet Classics, The New American Library, 1966.

13. Sri Aurobindo: Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 5.

14. A. B. Purani: The Life of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

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## **ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY**

#### Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of September 2011)

### Chapter XIII (Continued)

A Time of Bereavements

#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY PONDICHERRY India May 12, 1951

My dear Father,

A few days back, I have posted two magazines for you. You may have already seen them, but it gives me pleasure to send them to you.

One of them, *Men and Worlds (Hommes et Mondes)*, contains a good article by Félicien Challaye, *Sri Aurobindo and His Yoga*. He is honest and clear, without being very deep, and covers almost the whole subject. Moreover, he does not say false things, which is rare.

The other is the first of the two issues of *France* — *Asie* which have been devoted to a great extent to Sri Aurobindo. The second issue will be sent to you a little later. In these two issues, you will find articles paying homage to Sri Aurobindo, and also an attempt to explain what we feel to be the deeper reasons for his withdrawal from his physical body.

I have told you that we feel his presence as concretely as when he was in his body, if not more. This is experienced by almost everybody, even the visitors. This confirms our conviction that our Master is always with us. Perhaps you will think: "They take, like the others, their wish for the reality." Evidently, this cannot be debated. I am simply telling you our perception, our inner feeling, at times as strong as the sight of a physical presence and all that it entails — but with a greater peace, joy, knowledge and force.

Recently we have held here a convention to determine the broad lines of the project of a University Centre which the Mother has decided to create in memory of

Sri Aurobindo. I would have sent you the report, but it is in English. I am sending a copy to Albert who will translate for you whatever interests you. This project has been warmly welcomed almost everywhere.

My health has not been too good these last months, may be a little too much work; in any case too much of nervous tension, with its effect on the digestion. Assimilation is difficult and I have grown thinner. I would not like to lose more weight, because then I lose my power of resistance. I assure you that it is not to look more "ethereal". I feel that the low point has been crossed and that I shall soon recover once the hot season is over.

I have written to Albert. I do not expect frequent letters from him; I know that he is busy and that at present our paths are quite different. He has a fine family.

My dear Father, I think of you often and always with respect and gratitude. I know that you bear valiantly the weight of the years and I am very glad of it.

I embrace you with all my faithful affection.

Your son who loves you,

Signed: Philippe

\* \* \*

#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY PONDICHERRY India June 9, 1951

My dear Father,

I was very happy to receive your letter and herewith I am sending you two photos of the Mother. In one of them, taken on April 24 last, you will see me too. You must not compare me, from the physical point of view, with the young man on the other side of the Mother. He is an athlete, extremely robust and muscular: it is he who is in charge of physical education in the Ashram.

The other photo is from last year; it was taken when the Mother was distributing flowers to the disciples.

I will be sending you one of these days the second issue of France - Asie containing a homage to Sri Aurobindo. I suppose by now you would have received the first one. If you want me to send it to somebody, please let me know. I have a few copies to spare.

I embrace all of you affectionately. Your son who loves you,

Signed: Philippe

\* \* \*

#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY PONDICHERRY India October 4, 1951

My dear Father,

Here the months pass quickly, and your letter of the month of June is still on my table, awaiting a reply. Actually, it did not ask any question and my reply has been the affectionate thoughts I often send to you.

It is your birthday today and I have come to send you my sincere wishes and spend a few moments with you.

I received news of you from Paul Repiton-Préneuf who, on his return from France, came to spend a few days at the Ashram towards the end of last month. He told me that he found you in great shape and Albert full of activity of a businessman; he also told me of the affectionate interest with which you enquired about me.

I had written to you that for long I have been suffering from problems of digestion. With constant vigilance and appropriate diet, I managed to maintain a more or less satisfactory control. All the same, I was getting thinner and weaker. Last June a crisis erupted and revealed an amoebic dysentery which I may have been living with for some fifteen years. Till now, the test for the amoeba has been negative, but it seems that it happens sometimes. An emetic has put things right; the body seemed to need only a little help to be rid of the cumbersome difficulty. All the functions of the body are excellent and it is on the way to recovery: I have already regained 8 kgs. It will take some more time for the disappearance of the after-effects of a disease which had almost become chronic.

The attached photo is not recent, but I do not think that I have sent it to you. It was taken in April 1950 by Cartier-Bresson, the French photographer.

I have sent the issues of *France*—*Asie* to the two addresses you had given me. There will probably be a commemorative meeting at the Sorbonne on December 5 to mark the occasion of the anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal. I shall ask them to send you the cards. If however it is not done, follow the newspapers a little before this date.

I hope you have had a pleasant summer and happy holidays.

I send to all of you my loving thoughts, and to you, my dear Father, my filial affection.

I embrace you,

Signed: Philippe

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#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY PONDICHERRY India December 18, 1951

My dear Father,

Here we are, very close to the New Year and, since tradition demands that at this moment we express our sentiments to our dear ones, I have just sent you my sincere wishes for this new stage on the eternal path.

If I look back on the closing year, I find that it has been heavy, no doubt because I do not yet know how to place my burden in Omnipotent hands. But at least I have the feeling that I am doing what I must — that is the only satisfaction I seek, even more than collaborating in the most noble and beautiful work that I know. This inner satisfaction is the only thing that has a value for me, next only to the Divine Presence.

To you, my dear Father, who knows the pleasures of doubting, I wish above all the joy of certitude.

Please embrace Albert and Denise for me and convey to them all my good wishes, to them and their children. May their soul awake and take charge of their life!

This letter ought to reach you, if the post is prompt, by Christmas Day, when you will surely bring the family together. Speak to them all for me.

I embrace you very affectionately.

Your devoted son,

Signed: Philippe

P.S.: I am sending you an article from the *Gazette de Lausanne* which I found interesting.

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#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

### Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY India May 3, 1952

My dear Father,

I have received a fine letter from Albert posted in Davos. It made me very glad; I was also very happy with the photos in which I found all of you. I shall write to him soon. Today, it is you I want to talk to.

You will surely have read in the *Bulletin* the beginning of *The Ideal of Human Unity*. The subject ought to interest you because it is a historical study, or rather a study of the philosophy of history. Together with *The Human Cycle* the book gives an entirely new over-view of the historical evolution of humanity. Sri Aurobindo takes the bull by the horns, in this instance, historical materialism, and gives a 'finalist' and spiritual explanation of history which runs counter to modern trends. Also, once known, his thought cannot but cause some waves.

Father Breuil, the prehistorian, on reading *The Human Cycle* (in English because it is not yet translated) spontaneously wrote to Sri Aurobindo to tell him about the strong impression it had made on him. Some say that this is the only philosophy of history capable of counter-balancing Marxism. The ideas are beginning to spread, slowly at first as always, then one fine day, the whole world will talk of them.

At the end of the last year, another member of the Institute, Jacques Rueff, came to visit the Ashram and he was deeply impressed. He is a Polytechnician, specialising in political economy and financial matters.

Perhaps you will soon have Repiton visiting you! He will come at the end of the year to settle down in the Ashram. We shall soon have a certain number of Polytechnicians taking an interest in Sri Aurobindo's teachings. That will not surprise you and you will surely make a connection with the Saint-Simonians.

Have you read Mother's articles on education in the *Bulletin*? Without being spectacular, they strike profound and new notes in this field. These are the ideas which guide our school and later will guide the University Centre.

All that represents a vast field of action. Many things now seem possible which a few years ago I would have thought unrealisable. That gives me much hope.

My health has improved. I am well, but I must be very careful. Neither can I do all that a young man does and I must limit myself.

I am interested in everything you tell me about yourself. You were very fond of reading, and I am sorry that your eyesight has weakened. I hope you will at least be able to continue playing bridge. Thank you for the good wishes from Aunt Brice and Lily. Tell everybody that I have not forgotten them, but much must have changed in the family in these thirty years.

Goodbye, my dear Father; I send you my thoughts of filial gratitude and I embrace you affectionately as also Albert, Denise and the children.

Your devoted son,

Signed: Philippe

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#### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr. AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY PONDICHERRY India August 25, 1952

My dear Father,

I was under the impression that I had written to you in May. On receiving your letter, I verified it. I found a rough draft dated May 3, the register of the post does not show any indication that a letter had been sent to you around that date. That would mean that my letter had remained in the state of a rough draft. I beg you to excuse me. Had I been conscious of it, I would not have remained so long without writing to you.<sup>1</sup>

The work is certainly demanding and often it makes me neglect my correspondence. But it does not prevent me from sending my thoughts to you and I would have somehow found the time to write to you if I did not have this false notion which made me wait for a letter from you.

I am interested in everything that you tell me about yourself. I am very glad that you can continue with your bridge and a little reading. From my own experience I realise what the decrease of the physical capacities is. From the point of view of sports, the fall is rapid after fifty. For the runs, the jump, I am nearly at the level of thirteen-year-old children.

In my case, to age has just been added the bad intestinal condition which dates back to several years and had become chronic. Now I am much better. The intestinal functions are nearly restored, and since a few months, the general condition has

1. A letter dated May 3 had actually been sent by Philippe to his father: it is the preceding letter! All the ideas which it contained have been taken up again in the letter dated August 25; I have therefore left out some repetitions in the present one.

improved considerably. In the sporting activities it has meant an improvement which has brought me to my 1949 standard. I am convinced that but for this amoebic dysentery, I would be completely well.

Here is a recent photo in which I am beside the Mother. You can see I am still not well fleshed out: I weigh only 63 kg.

You will surely have read the beginning of *The Ideal of Human Unity* in the *Bulletin of Physical Education*. The subject ought to interest you, because it is a historical study. Along with *The Human Cycle*, it gives an entirely new overall view of the historical evolution of humanity. Such an attempt, which would have been doomed to failure fifty years ago, is no longer surprising now. Modern scientific thinking has considerably modified its attitude; it is ready to consider points of view which it dismissed and even refused to examine formerly.

Albert Schweitzer has just written to us from Lambaréné to say how admirable he finds this book and that he hopes that the new generation will take Sri Aurobindo as guide. The ideas are starting to percolate slowly in the beginning, as always; then one fine day the whole world will talk of them and they will seem most natural.

I embrace you affectionately, as also Albert, Denise and the children.

Your devoted son,

Signed: Philippe

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

### Addendum I

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### Addendum II

# A LETTER FROM ABBÉ BREUIL TO SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated from the French)

Archaeological Survey, University of Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg, December 1, 1950

Sri Aurobindo,

As it seems you know French as well as English, I shall use my own language to write to you. My friend van Riet Leuwe lent me your book, The Human Cycle, which I have just finished reading with profound interest; it is, together with Lecomte du Noüy's great book, Human Destiny, the one which has interested me most deeply and stimulated the most thought. My life of "tireless" researcher in matters of my science (prehistory) throughout the world, my independent discipline as a naturalist have never impeded my "free thinking" either in the course of my frequent solitary rounds or in my life as a University man and "academic". During my already long life (74 years) I have known how to live in harmony with the diverse human elements of Western society, with the Church which more than any other earthly element opened my mind to the inner and suprarational problems during the years of my theological-philosophical clerical formation, and with the scholarly world where I acquired an honourable place because of my objective work. Without ambition and without good luck, I have yet never lacked anything and most things that men esteem highly, academic titles, university position, etc., came to me in abundance. The Roman authorities whom I have always avoided uselessly "provoking", have always "left me in peace"; it is all that I have wanted from them. But I have always had excellent and friendly relations with the best elements of other Churches and even circles outside them, in the "free-thinking" element which seeks. Your book is my first contact with Indian thought, of which I had no idea. I am unaware whether what one gathers from your book is an individual "fact" or the expression of an important trend. It appeared to me as penetrating and comprehensive as Chinese thought such as I have been able to perceive through the commentators or disciples of the great Confucius, very admirable, of course, but keeping itself separate from the "suprarational" and never leaving the social problem and the life of practical relations. Your form of thought is nearer ours - I am speaking of those among us who do not close themselves in an exclusive positivism or materialism.

I think it would be interesting to have your book read by some open minds amongst us who find themselves in completely different *milieux*.

The foremost of them, a very great mind, less "left in peace" than I by the Roman authorities, and having a large influence in France, England and the United States, is the great palaeontologist and philosopher, Father (Jesuit!!!) Teilhard de Chardin of the Academy of Sciences.

Our ideas certainly coincide on more points than one. I have often said in my life that this life (individual or social) is not resolved by logic, and reason is, in face of reality, like a little compass for measuring the parameter of the horizon. While reciting (which I do quite often) the "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus*",<sup>1</sup> I stop always and stress the ending: "Emitte Spiritum tuum et *creabuntur* et *renovabis faciem terrae*."<sup>2</sup> I believe, as you do, that creation continues through humanity and arrives, I know not how, at its transformation. It is an act of faith and hope, but very necessary. . .

You make vague allusions to cycles of successive lives in which that experience would be accumulated; I know these ideas, at least as they circulate in the West. They please me, among other things, because they make it possible to better understand, by the different degrees of evolution in man on a scale starting from near-animal to Saint and to him who has discovered the suprarational life in God, the inequality of our contemporaries. I do not reject this perspective *a priori* though unprovable.\*

Yet I do not know how your Ideal of another state of things not only individual but also collective can be realised without ecclesiastic educational structures. The individual radiation is not enough.

All told, your reign of God on earth resembles incredibly St. Paul's Parousia: "*Nunc per enigmata, tunc facie ad faciem*"<sup>3</sup> (free quotation), which religious symbolism places at the "end of the world".

But one is always at the end of the world and at the beginning of another!

The orientation you explain is not less justifiable or true, but the mystery of its realisation remains intact and a suprarational "act of faith". Providence carries us along and we must have faith in it or lose hope in life.

With my compliments for your very suggestive book,

Yours sincerely, H. Breuil Member of the French Institute and Honorary Professor of Prehistory at the College of France

\* Perhaps still more veiled is the allusion to secret forces in the human being, that one ordinarily designates by the name "metaphysical". I know these forces exist, but I doubt whether they are moral.

<sup>1.</sup> Come, Holy Spirit.

<sup>2.</sup> Send out your Spirit and they shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.

<sup>3.</sup> *Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*: (We see) now (through a glass) darkly; (but) then face to face.

## THE ODYSSEY OF THE LIFE DIVINE

SRI AUROBINDO, a yogi, poet, philosopher, social and political thinker and critic was also a translator. Along with his creative activities, he involved himself with translation to an extent that a complete theory of translation may be culled from his writings. A bulk of the works translated by Sri Aurobindo are from texts in Sanskrit and Bengali languages into the English language. From Sanskrit he translated Kalidasa's works, Ramayana, Mahabharata, the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, the Gita and some other Sanskrit texts of different poets. His involvement with translation was a part of his study of Indian culture and India's spiritual legacy. His acquaintance with the Indian culture led to his journalistic writings in *Bande Mataram*, *Arya* and some other journals which he brought out at different periods. These writings had a wide impact and helped to awaken the spirit of Nationalism in India.

Translation not only served to awaken the country but it also helped in the understanding of the polity of other nations engaging with India. Sri Aurobindo wrote prodigiously on polity and international relations as well. His translations in the English language served an important role in Nation-building, Nationalism and Supra-nationalism.

Sri Aurobindo addressed all the essential problems faced by translators. The basic test that a translated text has to undergo is the question of fidelity. How close is the translation to the original? In order to keep close to the original Sri Aurobindo adopted various methods of translation like — literal, conversion of image or metaphor, insertion of an image to convey the essential idea, paraphrasing and interpretation.

In all his efforts the focus of his translations was on preserving the spirit of the original text. Sri Aurobindo emphasised that the spirit needs to be retained and as far as the spirit is preserved all the above-mentioned methods may be justly employed. In translating the Rig Veda Sri Aurobindo endeavoured to retain the spirit and gave a prose translation of the hymns and used philological and psychological methods for their interpretation.

Sri Aurobindo translated various texts, even while engaged in his creative original literary work. Translation for him was not only a literary activity but he took to translation while acquainting himself with Indian culture. In 1893, Sri Aurobindo came to India and learnt several Indian languages, both ancient and modern. As an exercise in mastering the language and also to know the culture of India, he experimented with various methods of translation. This rigorous literary activity later resulted in a voluminous collection of the works translated by him, and his acquaintance with Indian culture formed the basis of his askesis and his metaphysical philosophy. His works like *The Life Divine, Savitri, The Synthesis of* 

*Yoga, The Secret of the Veda*, his commentaries on some Upanishads, his writings on Indian culture collected as the *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *Renaissance in India* bear testimony to his study of Indian and Western literature and scriptural writings.

It is noteworthy that Sri Aurobindo had the Gita and the Upanishads with him while he was in Alipore jail in solitary confinement. However, a few of his translations of the Isha Upanishad were done when he was in Baroda. Sri Aurobindo emphatically says that he always wrote from his own experience; only when he had a particular experience he wrote about it. He wrote about the Gita, the Upanishads or the Veda only when he himself had the experience of these scriptural texts. Sri Aurobindo translated and commented extensively on Sanskrit texts; the Rig Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the works of Kalidasa and Bhartrihari, — these form the main corpus of his translated works. Translation, commentary and experience went hand in hand for him.

The translation and exegesis of the Rig Veda has a special significance in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. While he read the Upanishads and the Gita, he could not correlate a few experiences and he found some links missing in them. When he read the Vedas after coming to Pondicherry, he says, he found all the missing links. Sri Aurobindo experienced the Vedas even before he read them; the readings only confirmed his experiences. In one of his letters he writes:

... I found, first, that the mantras of the Veda illuminated with a clear and exact light psychological experiences of my own for which I had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teachings of Yoga or of the Vedanta, ... and, secondly, that they shed light on obscure passages and ideas of the Upanishads to which, previously, I could attach no exact meaning and gave at the same time a new sense to much in the Puranas. (*CWSA* Vol. 15: 39)

He was now able to link the experiences and meanings of the three Sanskrit scriptures and their spiritual purport. His essays on the Rig Veda which came out as a volume known as *The Secret of the Veda* and his translations of the Vedic hymns, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, are a detailed study of the Vedic texts. Sri Aurobindo had gone through the earlier explanations of the Veda. When he read the Vedas he found a deeper meaning and also a deeper symbolism of the objects and gods and goddesses described in the text. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience corroborated that of the Veda, but he undertook a rigorous study of the text and analysed and unveiled the symbolism through philological and psychological methods. His essays clarify the meaning of various symbols and explain their psychological significance. An important point that Sri Aurobindo makes is that the modern definition and understanding of a language as arbitrary is a new one. In ancient times the contextual meaning, the deeper meaning was of importance. Therefore, a word would have different meanings in different contexts. Sri Aurobindo cites the example of *Agni*, which is will, action, power, aspiration, vital force and is used variously as required in the context. He makes it clear that it will take many pages and much time to describe each Veda and the meaning of every single image of *Agni* in the text, therefore he selected a few hymns for his elaboration which forms the volume *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* with his translations and commentaries. However, he did not restrict himself to the translation of the hymns on *Agni* but also translated hymns on *Usha, Vayu, Mitra, Indra* and other Vedic deities.

One of the leading principles of the mystics was the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge and the true knowledge of the Gods. This wisdom was, they thought, unfit, perhaps even dangerous to the ordinary human mind or in any case liable to perversion and misuse and loss of virtue if revealed to vulgar and unpurified spirits. Hence they favoured the existence of an outer worship, effective but imperfect, for the profane, an inner discipline for the initiate, and clothed their language in words and images which had, equally, a spiritual sense for the elect, a concrete sense for the mass of ordinary worshippers.

(CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 8)

Pertaining to these three levels are the three layers of meanings which the Rig Veda may embody — the religious, the psychological and the spiritual. Sri Aurobindo has delved into the psychological and spiritual meanings of the text and has given appropriate explanations for the same. For example, the symbol cow, "gau" is not the cow, the animal, but it is the symbol of light. Therefore, when the propitiator asks for cows during the sacrifice he is asking for Divine Light; the religious person would ask for the animal wealth, but the spiritual seeker has in his mind the symbol of the spiritual light that he aspires for when he performs the sacrifice. The sacrifice itself as mentioned in the Veda, is not the mechanical process of sacrifice, it is the inner sacrifice that the seeker of truth has to make continuously, throughout his life in order to gain spiritual height. Sri Aurobindo not only wrote about this sacrifice, he himself experienced it and expressed his experience in his writings. His translation and exegesis of the Rig Veda has enhanced the wealth of spiritual writings and given new insights into the ancient texts.

Regarding the nature and importance of the translation of the Veda, Sanskrit scholar Sampadananda Mishra writes:

The translations of the Vedic mantras into English by Sri Aurobindo are not strictly literal but literary. In most places they are rather interpretations than translations. But everywhere he has preserved "a fidelity to the meaning, the sense of the words and the structure of the thought". He has greatly brought out the poetic force of the hymns, their magnificent colouring and images, the noble and beautiful rhythm and the perfect diction as far as possible in English, so foreign a language, to express all these. In these translations one at once almost feels the spirit and presence of the ancient Vedic seers.

(Mishra: pp. 21-22)

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga has its seed-foundation in the Veda. His essays on the exegesis of the Veda — *The Secret of the Veda* — and his metaphysical treatise — *The Life Divine* — began in the first issue of the *Arya* brought out by Sri Aurobindo from Pondicherry on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914. Iyengar remarks:

*The Secret of the Veda* had . . . a different purpose altogether; it was meant to explore and locate the remotest origins of his Yoga, the roots of the aswathalike magnificence of the spiritual philosophy of *The Life Divine*, the ancient corroborations (or, rather, seminal anticipations) of this Supramental Manifesto. (Iyengar: p. 430)

The study of the Veda made an important contribution to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy as many of the ideas developed by him are embedded in seed form in this ancient text. Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of essays in the journal Arya, from August 1914 to January 1921 in which were serialised fifty chapters of the volume which were later brought out as The Life Divine. Before publishing it as a volume Sri Aurobindo edited each chapter and added six more chapters to the series. It was then that the epigraphs from various ancient Sanskrit texts too were added which give the seed idea of the chapter. These epigraphs are culled from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas and Vivekachudamani. Iyengar has counted the number of epigraphs taken from each of these texts. Eighty-five have been taken from the Upanishads, sixty from the Vedas, twenty from the Gita, one each from Vishnu Purana and Shankaracharya's Vivekachudamani (Iyengar: p. 430). Iyengar also points out that it is a tradition among the saints and yogis to take a seed idea and develop it further. Sri Aurobindo has also taken the seed idea and has developed it further through his experience in his writings on metaphysics, psychology, sociology and yoga. Among all his writings it is only in The Life Divine that he has incorporated the epigraphs that corroborated the central idea of the chapter.

The journey of the 'life divine' is both internal and external and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experiences along with his studies of the ancient texts have shaped it. In order to delimit the scope of the analysis only the first and the last chapter of *The Life Divine* are taken up. The hymns chosen in this chapter form a continuum and will give a summary idea of the whole of *The Life Divine*. The first chapter of the first part of Book I is 'The Human Aspiration'. The hymn chosen by Sri Aurobindo is from the Rig Veda, the translation of the same may be quoted here:

She follows to the goal of those that are passing on beyond, she is the first in the eternal succession of the dawns that are coming, — Usha widens bringing out that which lives, awakening someone who was dead. . . . What is her scope when she harmonises with the dawns that shone out before and those that now must shine? She desires the ancient mornings and fulfils their light; projecting forwards her illumination she enters into communion with the rest that are to come. (*CWSA*, Vol. 21, p. 3)

The translation of another hymn reads:

Threefold are those supreme births of this divine force that is in the world, they are true, they are desirable; he moves there wide-overt within the Infinite and shines pure, luminous and fulfilling.... That which is immortal in mortals and possessed of the truth, is a god and established inwardly as an energy working out in our divine powers... Become high-uplifted, O Strength, pierce all veils, manifest in us the things of the Godhead. (*Ibid.*)

As the title of the chapter conveys it is about the human aspiration, the aspiration which longs for God. The aspiration of humanity is the core of this chapter. The two hymns describe the beginning of aspiration and its purpose. M. P. Pandit explains these hymns in his book *Legends in The Life Divine*.

Usha here is the symbol of the dawn, the first stirrings of the light which leads towards God. Usha in the Vedic context is the "break of divine illumination". This illumination of the divine increases by the day and the spiritual realisations are attained. Usha, the dawn is the time when light just breaks in for the day. Similarly, the first ray of illumination touches the aspirant and it grows during the day. 'Day' here is not only the day which comes after the dawn, but it is the period of many births which the human being goes through and eventually evolves into the divine consciousness. Dawn, the spiritual rising of the sun every morning is the symbol of spiritual awakening of man with the illumination of consciousness in spiritual experience.

The second hymn directly addresses *Agni*, the fire within, the divine spark within each individual which carries him through the dark hours and develops into a strong aspiration that yearns for the Divine alone. Sri Aurobindo points out that this is the aspiration which humanity has had since the beginning of time and it is conscious of itself. It is this aspiration that has been present in animate and inanimate things and has evolved upto Mind till now. The evolution from matter to life to mind has taken place because of this *Agni*, this divine spark, and it is still continuing. This spark is present at all stages of evolution and is never extinguished. If its presence is not felt, it is because it is hidden under layers of ignorance, ego and resistance of the nature. Once these layers are cleared up, *Agni* takes up the evolution, but even from behind

the veil it keeps on coaxing the matter, life and mind to yearn for perfection and truth. *Agni* further reveals itself on higher levels of consciousness which is the next step of evolution. The key to immortality is this immortal flame which not only kindles the heart of the humanity but carries the evolution further and guides and saves the aspirant from falling back into ignorance. The soul's journey from darkness to light is seen through only by this ever growing divine flame.

The first chapter forms the first step in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Through the succeeding chapters he develops this idea and paves the way for the divine life upon earth, finally summarising it in the last chapter. The last chapter forms the summary of the entire fifty-five chapters of both the books of *The Life Divine*, especially of the last six chapters.

The five hymns that Sri Aurobindo chose in the last chapter summarise his entire philosophy of the 'life divine'. The first hymn as translated by him reads:

O seeing Flame, thou carriest man of the crooked ways into the abiding truth and the knowledge. (*CWSA*, Vol. 22, p. 1051)

Sri Aurobindo refers to this flame again in the last chapter. He refers to *Agni* as the seeing flame, that which sees the truth and takes the aspirant forward. *Agni* is used in a similar context to that of the first chapter i.e. as aspiration. The second hymn speaks of *Indra*, the Divine Mind:

I purify earth and heaven by the Truth. (Ibid.)

*Indra* is the Divine Mind, the elevated mind which is capable of guiding the aspirant and leads him to the path of illumination. To pursue the spiritual path, aspiration and purification are equally important. The Divine Mind guides the individual to purify himself and rise to the higher levels of consciousness. It helps in evolution as it is above the intellectual mind and receives light from the "Truth-Mind". On the spiritual path, purification is indispensible. However, without joy there is no meaning of the spiritual pursuit. The true spiritual pursuit and process brings joy with itself.

The third hymn reads:

His ecstasy, in one who holds it, sets into motion the two births, the human self-expression and the divine, and moves between them. (*Ibid*.)

The third hymn of the chapter describes this joy of pursuing the spiritual path and the joy of creation. Sri Aurobindo says in *The Life Divine* that the reason behind all creation is delight. Delight is the *ananda* of existence manifested by the consciousness-force. It is this Soma, the God of delight about which the hymn has been quoted.

May the invincible rays of his intuition be there seeking immortality, pervading both the births; for by them he sets flowing in one movement human strengths and things divine. (*Ibid*.)

The joy, the *ananda* comes when there is the psychic awakening. The psychic is the divine spark in every human being which takes part in evolution and evolves with every life. It is the psychic being which grows and takes over the mind, life and body of the individual, fills it with delight, guides it against all choices of good and evil. Being divine in essence, it never falters. It not only governs the mind, life and body, but also helps to elevate them to a higher consciousness and prepares them for transformation. This stage of the psychic taking over the entire being is termed as psychicisation in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. The dual process of spiritual and psychic transformation taken up by the Divine Mind, *Indra* and the psychic being is the two-fold step of transformation before the final Supramental transformation in Integral Yoga.

The last hymn is dedicated to *Agni*, will. When the aspiration grows, the entire being is spiritualised and psychicised; then the *Agni*, the divine flame, becomes capable of having its own Will.

Let all accept thy will when thou art born a living god from the dry tree, that they may attain to divinity and reach by the speed of thy movements to possession of the Truth and the Immortality. (*Ibid.*)

It is by this conquering will that the individual is led to the last transformation that is the Supramental transformation when the evolution becomes irrevocable and attain immortality.

These five hymns sum up the entire philosophy and hold the keys to immortality on earth. The Vedic search, the ambrosia of immortality is hidden in this journey of the flame from life to life. The flame which evolves in every birth and expresses the divine consciousness more and more perfectly, has to undergo all the three transformations explained by Sri Aurobindo and attains those heights of consciousness where death does not exist and life takes its shape and form as and when desired. Sri Aurobindo has envisaged such a process and has foreseen a Gnostic society of such divine beings. Thus the seed-thought of immortality given out by the Veda, the secret of the Veda as revealed in Sri Aurobindo's writings, is the divine life upon earth.

KALPANA BIDWAIKAR

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#### Bhavani

(From a Sanskrit Hymn of Shankaracharya)

Father nor mother, daughter nor son are mine, I obey no master, served am I by none, Learning or means I have not, wife nor kin; My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Charity I have not learned, Yoga nor trance, Mantra nor hymn nor Tantra have I known, Worship nor dedication's covenants: My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Virtue is not mine nor holy pilgrimage, Salvation or world's joy I have never won, Devotion I have not, Mother, no vows I pledge: My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Sri Aurobindo

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 383)

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# THE HOUR OF GOD IS UPON US

A SADHAK was recently asked by a visiting professor of philosophy, "I hear the Supramental Force has descended upon the earth. Have you felt or seen any change?"

The spontaneous response was, "Can't you see it?"

That response set me thinking.

I began to review all that has happened, in particular during the last two decades. The unexpected turn of events took the world by surprise and even perhaps by shock. The sudden and abrupt change is overwhelming.

It would seem, so far the hostile forces have enjoyed authority over the world movement. The Supramental Force descended upon earth on February 29<sup>th</sup> 1956 and has been active ever since. It was building the path brick by brick. It was only at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the Force began a deeper and more intense process of cleansing.

I will examine these events in four key domains: physical, economic, political and religious.

There have been massive upheavals at the physical level across the world: Tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, activated volcanoes, forest fires. The most recent mindblowing calamity that hit Japan cannot be described in words. The scientists cannot explain any of these happenings in any coherent manner and have failed to see it coming. The dimensions of these acts of god have been unprecedented in modern times. Man's failure to live in harmony with nature is partly responsible. But, fundamentally it is the result of man's greed, callousness, selfishness and short-sightedness.

My recent visits to various countries and my observations have given me the impression that people are beginning to realise the urgent need to live in harmony with Nature. A week-long shut-down of some large European airports due to unprecedented snowfall last Christmas almost crippled the economy. Recent floods in various cities of the world have washed away homes and left hundreds of families without food or shelter.

Man's reluctance to embrace change and mend his ways may lead to far more serious consequences.

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It seems to be Nature's final call for change.

Perhaps, the world has been hit the hardest in the financial sector. The sudden financial crash across the world has been unprecedented in the world's history. Compared to the financial debacle we are facing today, the impact of the first two World Wars put together does not seem significant anymore. This crisis has not spared any country or individual in the world. It seemed like a collective punishment being delivered for the shocking greed and frightful wrong-doings of people around the world. It calls for a great deal of humility, deep introspection, and the will to take decisive corrective action.

There are signs that it is beginning to happen. I believe the initial response to the current situation is caused by fear. The shock has been deafening. I have seen people in some developed countries spending nights in large cardboard boxes because they have run out of money. Millions of people across the world are jobless. Millions of dollars have been swindled away by bankers from small investors. In India too, we are living in the midst of gigantic levels of corruption which is retarding our progress. The massive protest of people from all walks of life is a final warning.

It is obvious the world henceforth cannot be dominated by the ruthless, the greedy, the selfish, the power-hungry and dishonest people. It is a stern and stunning call for man to bring a change in every aspect of his life.

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The political scene in the majority of countries is precarious and scary. There is a major upheaval and crisis in the Middle East. It was the most unexpected revolt the world has seen. It came in like a political tsunami which no leader in any of those countries had anticipated.

The peoples across the world are clamouring for change. They have tolerated the evil of the current systems for a long time. They are no longer willing to live in turmoil, they desire to see substantial changes that will make the world a better place.

However, their understanding of change is superficial and stops at the fulfilment of their physical needs. This is only short-term relief. What is called for is a radical change. A much deeper understanding is warranted that will pave the way to a very harmonious life based on true spiritual values which will change the attitudes and behaviour.

This is the final wake-up call for the politicians of the world.

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A few decades ago people respected each other's religious beliefs and sentiments. Today, the level of religious intolerance is becoming a bloody battle of deeds as well of words.

In fact, there is serious conflict within many sects belonging to the same religion. Shias and Sunnis kill each other in a Muslim country. They will not enter each other's mosques. Other sects in Islam betray the same levels of hatred. Christianity has One Christ and One Bible. There are over six different sects who will not pray in each other's churches. Even Buddhism has different sects based on the same teaching. What this simply demonstrates is the miserable state of the human mind. And this state of mind now rules the world.

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However, the outcome of this intolerance is that it has awakened many people in various countries. Many of them have moved away from their religions to seek a spiritual path. The word 'Yoga' just a decade ago meant Indian methods of physical exercises. Today, yoga is beginning to be understood in its truer sense. I saw a large hoarding in the heart of Moscow city which declared, "The only way we can change ourselves and the world is through yoga and meditation."

Sri Aurobindo had foreseen this moment many years ago. The Supramental Force is facing violent resistance to change. The Mother has used three precious words many years ago which should echo in our hearts: "WILL YOU HELP?"

It is imperative for all those who are their devotees to remain vigilant and on guard against any hostile attack. As Sri Aurobindo has written in one of his letters:

As far as I can see, once the supramental is established in Matter, the transformation will be possible under much less troublesome conditions than now are there. These bad conditions are due to the fact that the Ignorance is in possession and the hostile Powers an established authority, as it were, who do not care to give up their hold and there is no full force of Light established in the earth-consciousness which would not only meet but outweigh their full force of darkness. (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 34)

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At the moment the world is in turmoil and in great pain.

Our ardent prayers, our sincere dedication and our deep faith must remain absolutely unshakeable. We need to participate in Their battle.

For the Hour of God is upon us.

RAMRAJ SEHGAL

### THE LUMINOUS PAST

#### (Continued from the issue of September 2011)

WHEN Rabindranath Tagore went to Paris, he took along with him a troupe of actors. On that trip to France Bharati-di was the poet's secretary. His first public appearance was at the Town Hall. A very big meeting was organised there. Bharati-di received from the Mayor a list of the invitees who were supposed to be present. The famous poetess N was the first person the *kaviguru* was going to meet. She was as beautiful as she was accomplished. That is why she was also very arrogant. Bharati-di had already met her to discuss her meeting with Rabindranath. The poetess did not show much enthusiasm. Bharati-di gave Rabindranath a hint of this and asked him to be careful.

On the appointed day, the poet along with his troupe and Bharati-di arrived at the Town Hall. The Mayor introduced the poetess N to the poet right away. The two poets shook hands heartily. When N saw Rabindranath and his manners, she was somewhat flustered and in a clearly audible voice asked if one could speak to him in French. Bharati-di said, "You can do it without hesitation." The poetess said to Rabindranath, "You are such a great poet." Rabindranath said in a mock dramatic way, "But in front of you I am just a crow." The French poetess without understanding anything, blurted out, "You are right." The secretary of the poet, with a horrified look on her face, whispered into N's ears what the poet had actually said. N hurriedly turned around, a bit shaken and rushed out of the Town Hall. Nobody understood what had happened. The next day there was a big photograph of Rabindranath in the newspapers. Praise was showered on him on the front page.

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After he had gone through all his other engagements, the poet got down to his theatre work. The performances raised him to great heights of honour. A large number of tickets were sold. It was a grand success. When everything was over, the most famous restaurant in France invited him and his entourage for dinner. The very spacious restaurant was packed with people. As soon as the poet was seated at the special place reserved for him, a young Frenchman wearing dhoti and kurta kneeled at his feet to show his respect. The poet was astonished. No one from all those who were with him could recognise this man. The young man took a few steps back and with his eyes fixed on the poet, with folded hands, recited a poem from the book *Shishu* with the right Bengali pronunciation. As soon as he finished his recitation, the poet stood up and going straight to the young man, embraced him

warmly. He then made him sit next to him. The young man had been a student at Shantiniketan. Now the poet could recognise him. He informed the owner of the restaurant that his young friend would eat with him. The young man said that he had paid in advance for the meal. The poet had the payment cancelled. The restaurant owner did not give them a bill. Instead he handed the poet a cheque for a large amount which represented one-fourth of that evening's collection. He placed this cheque in the poet's hands. It was beyond all expectations. In answer to this gesture the poet said that the memory of that evening's reception would always remain bright in his mind.

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Not only did Bharati-di recount stories, but she also made others tell stories. Once, just before the class ended she told me, "I have told you many stories of the poet. Now you tell us one." Even though I felt shy, I said that I knew by heart Rabindranath's poem 'Namaskar' ("Aurobindo, accept Rabindra's obeisance"). But as it was a long poem, and it would have taken a long time to finish, so I decied to tell a story. I said that once, on 25th Baishak, which was Rabindranath's birthday, many poets, scholars, writers and artists had gathered. They were all waiting in a large hall for the poet to come. Each one held something or the other in his hands as a present for Rabindranath. When they were talking about who had brought what, one of them said in a sad tone that he was very embarrassed as he was going to give a very cheap pen to Gurudev. He confessed that he was going through hard times and he could not do any better. The poet overheard this conversation as he was passing by the window. About five minutes later the poet suddenly came into the room. Everyone stood up. The poet said, "In fifteen minutes you will be called to the next room." Once he left the room, all of them started to prepare themselves, picked up their presents and straightened their clothes. Fifteen minutes later, that cheap pen could not be found. Someone gave a bunch of roses to the man who had brought the pen and insisted that he should go to the poet with these flowers. One by one they all went up to Rabindranath and gave him their presents. Rabindranath was blessing them. Looking at the man who had lost the pen he made a sign asking him to wait. Pulling out a pen from his pocket, the poet wrote on a small piece of paper:

> Don't birds steal fish, one and all, Why poor kingfisher blame we then? Writers, all, steal pens to write Why should I then buy a pen?

The gentleman saw that the poet had written this with the very same cheap pen which he had brought. He would surely remember for ever the words which came from the poet's sympathetic heart.

When Bharati-di heard this story she praised me and asked me to write another story and bring it to her. When I brought to her my French assignment, she read out that story in the class. This is how it went.

During the summer holidays Shantiniketan wore a quite deserted look. The poet liked the hot weather more than the cold. However, since that summer was exceptionally hot, he too went away to Kolkata. He was supposed to return two or three days before the end of the holidays. There were only three people who were left to look after everything. They happily made good use of this freedom. They passed their time with singing, music, stories and chit-chat. Two out of the three people had a habit of taking a nap in the middle of the day. The other person used to be busy with his clothes and sprucing himself up. Ten days later, the poet came back, much before the planned date of return. It was one o'clock in the afternoon. The first two caretakers were fast asleep, and the third one was sitting on the floor, in the middle of the round room, looking at himself in the mirror and checking if he had rubbed his chin well with soap. He was holding a sharp razor in his hand and was shaving. He was merrily singing full-throatedly, out of tune and out of rhythm. When he heard the song which was out of tune, the poet stopped in his stride as he was about to climb the stairs. Still covered in soap, the face of the man suddenly went completely blank. The poet took large strides and went into his own room. The man who was shaving, abruptly stopped what he was doing. He quickly washed his face and woke up the other two by shaking them. He informed them that the poet had come back. The next day in the morning the poet sent in an envelope two lines from Nishikanto's poem to the man who had been shaving.

> Rotund sir in rotund room, shaving I have seen, Shantiniketan's all new to me for never here I had been.

> > Pramila Devi

(Translated by Sunayana Panda from the original Bengali Ujjwal Ateet.)

### THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of September 2011)

#### 5. A Babe and a Giantess

KRISHNA was born in a prison, brought up in Gokula. While everything remains a divine mystery and he has the last laugh watching our many surmises, his years of growing-up in the cowherd settlement present the deepest mystery of all. How old was he when he dared the Kaliya serpent? Certainly the most controversial problem has been his age when he was hailed as the *Gopijanapriya*. How old was he when he played the flute on full moon nights when the cowherdesses left their homes and hearths to be with him and play games in the groves of Brindavan?

One thing is sure. Krishna was hardly a few months old when the Putana episode happened. There was this beautiful cowherdess from nowhere who had joined the ladies of Gokula in admiring the baby in the cradle. The ladies had been invited to come and see Krishna who is now born to Yashoda in the palace of Nandagopa, and watch the loveliness of his limbs from his toes to his crown. The Tamil hymnologist, Perialwar reports their words:

> Devaki is like the nectar that has risen From the cool ocean. She has sent This innocent babe to Yashoda. Come and see the beauty of the feet Which the babe has put in his mouth For tasting. Girls with coral-red lips! Come and see!

Yashoda has shoulders like tender bamboos. Her milk-rich breast is pressed by this child Who has had a full feed and is now lying asleep. Look at the beauty of his shin with his two feet That have shining, gleaming silver anklets! O girls, come and see!<sup>1</sup>

Yashoda and baby Krishna! It is an eternally fascinating vision. She was only a foster mother. I do not think she knew he was the son of Devaki till Krishna went away to Dwaraka for good. Did she ever see him again? A legend has grown out of

<sup>1.</sup> Perialwar Tirumozhi, I-3-2,3.

this sadness of the mother who had brought up a son till he was ten (or was it twelve?) years old. She had nurtured a boy with so much love but did not have the joy of watching him get married and bringing home a daughter-in-law!

According to the legend of the Tirupati temple, Yashoda was born again as Vakula in the Kali Yuga and the Lord had come to her as a young man, Srinivasa. As he had no parents, she adopted him and when he fell in love with the local princess, Vakula went to the king Akasha Raja and requested his daughter Padmavati's hand in marriage. The king readily obliged and the Padmavati-Srinivasa wedding was a grand affair. Padmavati came to Vakula's home as a bride and there was ananda everywhere for a long time.

This is certainly posterity's recognition of a mother's heartache at having been separated from her son forever. It also reveals how legends have a natural growth in the light of human experience. Yashoda's love for her son was so total! While the straightforward story-telling of *Bhagavata* gives no attention to the details of bringing up a baby, the Tamil hymnologist describes each phase of Krishna's growth. One of his decads on this subject shows Yashoda pointing out the moon to the baby and inviting the lovely disc in the skies above to come and play with the little one:

Young full moon! My little child Is like sweet nectar to me. My Lord is pointing out to you repeatedly And calling out to you to come. If you wish To play with this jewel-sheened boy, Do not hide yourself in the clouds. Come running happily.<sup>2</sup>

This scene has been etched magnificently by Raja Ravi Varma in one of his paintings. The mother-baby concept has gone deep into our psyche. Yashoda is the archetypal mother. For her Krishna is everything. Artistes have given lovely portraits of this duo. There are no favourites here, but Raja Ravi Varma takes precedence since I have myself never been satiated when gazing at this portrait.

Yashoda for Ravi Varma is a beautiful and benign person. Not particularly a Keralite face, the lady might be a Maharashtrian or Konkani. Her tresses are combed back neatly, the central parting a graceful streak, shining in the moonlight glow. Her forehead has *sindur* and a *kumkum* dot that add to the brightness of the face. The nose-screw circlet (*nath*) and pearl nose droplets (*bullakku*) take us back by centuries. The right ear is visible. It is heavily ornamented with *thodu*, *kundalam* and  $v\bar{a}li$ , all encrusted with gems. A gem-studded necklace and a cord of black beads apart, two long strings of pearl with a pendant are also shining on the sari.

2. Perialwar Tirumozhi, I-5-2.

Her left hand points out something directed by her eyes, and has a gem-studded bracelet. Obviously she is pointing at the moon. She is holding the baby Krishna and is surely standing on the balcony. Oh, the charming little Krishna bathed in moonlight!

Krishna is all gem-studded ornaments. Ear-studs, *kundalams*, hair pulled up with a silk bunch, the parting marked by a gem-studded ornament. The peacock feather is very much there, strings of pearls, golden necklace, a golden string with a tiger-claw pendant, the bejewelled right hand bound with amulets holding a tasselled horn. The left hand is trying to imitate his mother's gesture that points to the moon. A flower garland, anklets on his feet, the right raised a little as if he is petulant at the moon's tardiness, and a hip string too. But I could never reconcile myself to the pearl 'drop' hanging from his nose. This is worn only by women! Till one day I realised that Ravi Varma had carefully studied and meditated upon the popular Sanskrit verse of Lila Sukha (13<sup>th</sup> century) beginning *Kasturi tilakam*...

Sri Krishna, the crest-jewel of cowherds Stands full of glory in the midst Of young cowherdesses, with a sacred mark Of musk on His broad forehead, The kausthubha gem hanging on his chest, A new pearl suspended from his nose, A flute held in his palm And a pair of bracelets about his wrists, All his limbs painted with sandal paste And strings of pearls adorning his neck.<sup>3</sup>

Somewhere here the legend takes precedence. This idyllic existence was threatened. Kamsa had learnt that his killer was born and was safe. This must not be! Kamsa's first attempt to destroy Krishna was the sending to Gokula of the demoness Putana. She came in as the festivities were going on, but dressed as a lovely cowherdess. She had taken up the little baby to fondle him, and when it cried began to feed it at her breast. The baby not only drank the milk which had poison but the adventure ended with the giantess on the floor in her original, repulsive form, quite, quite dead! This is the *Bhagavata* version in which Putana comes as a beautiful girl with her tresses richly decorated with jasmines. She finds Krishna in the cradle by chance (*yadhruchchayā*) and immediately lifted him:

The mothers Yashoda and Rohini, on noticing the handsome lady within the house, stood there merely looking on stunned and immobilised by the hypnotic

3. Translated by D. Rangachari.

power of that fair-looking lady who was like a sword in a sheath — hardhearted and evil-minded within, though glamorous and well-dressed outside. Sitting there, that cruel woman put the infant on her lap and applied him to her breast, which had been treated with a highly toxic poison (*durjaravīrya-mulbanam*). With considerable annoyance, the infant gripped and pressed her breast, and began to suck, drawing out her very life energy in the process.<sup>4</sup>

As her life was snuffed out, Putana fell down dead in her original form. The noises from her throat as she lashed about in death-throes had been terrible and the entire cowherd clan was shocked. Two important points are insinuated here by the author of the Purana. Firstly, it is never safe to let your defences down, giving in to worldly attractions. This was the mistake of Yashoda and Rohini. A stranger comes in and lifts their darling, and they simply stare on at the lovely ornaments and silks of this beautiful 'cowherdess'! Secondly, never allow Evil to make merry with its devil's dance. A gesture of firmness is what is called for. If we are prepared to fight evil, help will come from outside. Even if it is tardy in coming (like Yashoda and Rohini being stopped in their tracks by the external loveliness of Putana), our own inner powers will spring forth as an answer to the challenge. If the mothers were first entrapped by the charming looks of Putana and later petrified by the scene unfolding before them, the baby's strengths within were unfurled with speed. The baby Krishna destroying Putana is a symbol of what each one of us is capable of, if only we become aware of these powers and bring a yogic strength to sustain and perfect them. "Be Conscious!" was a mahavakya of the Mother. We have to be conscious as Krishna was (vibhudhya) when Putana bent over his cradle. Our elders have known well the art of instilling ethical values and lessons on the art of living quietly through such stories.

The narrator of the *Bhagavata* describes how the cowherds got together and burnt the huge carcass of the horrible demoness. Immediately scented smoke spread all over as if sandalwood was being burnt. The implication according to the narrator is that even by imitating a mother's love and giving 'poisoned' milk Putana had remained close to Krishna and so had such a glorious end. "What shall we then say of those mothers and the cows who fed him with milk with great love and attention?"

The scene itself is etched in our racial memory as though it happened but yesterday. This is part of the universal lore which is told to children so that they will gradually give up fear of the 'big' and the unknown. Jack the Giant Killer fascinated me no end as a child because I had a book with pictures of the characters, something rare in a village home seventy years ago. The Biblical story of David and Goliath is well known. In the legend from the Bible we recognise the importance of spiritual strength that is needed to bring down temporal might. Spiritual strength is not seen

<sup>4.</sup> Skandha X, chapter 6, verses 9-10. Translated by Swami Tapasyananda.

by the physical eye. As David challenges Goliath, he says: "God saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is God's."

The idea of a person small in size overcoming a huge person is fine copy for unfurling one's imagination. It is a difficult proposition, though. A painter can show David flashing his sling and sending the stones accurately at Goliath. But how will a painter manage with this tiny baby, this charming Krishna and show him as a killer? Such is the magnetism of the Krishna world that not a millimetre of its spaces has been neglected by our writers, sculptors, painters and musicians. There is terror in the tale; there is also glory in its presentation. Raja Ravi Varma has given us several insightful moments of the Krishna story and among them is his portrayal of Putana.

In this painting Krishna is unadorned except for a solitary gold chain. No ear or nose drops, no bangles, no anklets. He looks so natural, this could be my grandson in the cradle! He is sitting on the demoness Putana with his small legs outstretched, and turns towards the onlookers with a smile of contentment. Do not worry, I have finished her off! That is the message of his gentle eyes and smile through lips that are still closed. Both his tiny hands are pressing the huge left breast of the demoness. She is dead and her big round eyes are bulging out, open with the death-stare. A green garment with a border is tied to her hips but otherwise she is stretched out with her chest bare. She is black, while Krishna is golden sheened. The contrast is needed for the scenario is laid among clumps of bushes.

Is it childish to be ecstatic over this scene and so reject the entire thing as a cock-and-bull tale from an idle mind? If it were so, how could it have survived millennia? The rationalist portion of my brain tries its best to place hurdles in my path. Fie upon this last of the godheads of the little mind, Reason!

In her high works of pure intelligence, In her withdrawal from the senses' trap, There comes no breaking of the walls of mind, There leaps no rending flash of absolute power, There dawns no light of heavenly certitude. A million faces wears her knowledge here And every face is turbaned with a doubt. All now is questioned, all reduced to nought. Once monumental in their massive craft Her old great mythic writings disappear And into their place start strict ephemeral signs; This constant change spells progress to her eyes: Her thought is an endless march without a goal.<sup>5</sup>

5. Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 251-52.

This power of 'doubt' is more like the *kutti pisāsu* (tiny devil) in the esoteric ritualism of Kerala. It can irritate us no end, and come in the way of open-hearted enjoyment, receiving an electrical ananda even in the awesome spectacle of Putana's death. Yes, the terrifying rakshasi figure is there, but who cares? My heart sings as I see this little baby as the real destroyer of the evil demoness. Isn't she in me too, in images of rage, jealousy, hatred and greed? But I look at Krishna's picture as he sits on the lap of Yashoda, close my eyes and begin, *kasturi tilakam*... the voices of great singers like Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao and M. K. Tyagaraja Bhagavathar reverberate in my ears, and everywhere it is Krishna, his left hand trying to reach out to the full moon directed by Yashoda's gaze. All other emotions drain away and this Ananda alone is true. When it is with us, what need we be worried about? How can any evil thought dare enter us?

And so many visions of Krishna killing Putana. The ISKCON painting has its own revelatory feel. A fair-complexioned Putana dressed in a pinkish garment is lying on her back flailing her arms with long claws, while a wee little blue-coloured baby sucks at her left breast. For that small figure, the painter has drawn a pretty crown with a big peacock feather, a waist chain and anklets. It tunes in with Srila Prabhupada's details drawn from a devotee's heart. The Chaitanya parampara to which he belongs considers Krishna as the Supreme and that he is "situated in everyone's heart." He is not just an 'avatar'. So what does it matter what size the Supreme comes into this world to guard the good people and destroy the evil? Srila Prabhupada feels that even Putana realised the power of Krishna the moment she sighted him. "This child is so powerful that He can destroy the whole universe immediately." He has also several explanations to Krishna's closing his eyes (*nimeelithekshanah*) when he saw Putana bending over him.

According to Vedic rules, the killing of a woman, a brahmana, cows or of a child is forbidden. Krishna was obliged to kill the demon Putana, and because the killing of a woman is forbidden according to Vedic Sastra, He could not help but close his eyes.<sup>6</sup>

There are several versions of the *Bhagavata* in half a dozen languages in my library. Each one is enjoyable and new in its own way. Here is the *Vasudevan Kathai*, also known as *Purana Bhagavatham* by the Tamil poet, Arulaladasar who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He has allowed his imagination to roam free when retelling the *Bhagavata* story. Putana is introduced as a lovely damsel walking towards the palace of Nanda:

<sup>6.</sup> *Krishna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Volume One, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Philippines, 1982), p. 45.

The golden anklets tinkled at her feet; Her bangles kept a musical rhythm. A gold-bright garment covered her. Even tapasvins would fall in love With this beauty; a garland nestled Among her tresses; her moon-like face Had beads of sweat. Her milk-rich breasts Moved as she walked slowly And reached the steps of the palace.<sup>7</sup>

She took her own time, fondling the baby with a great show of love. Then she said: this child looks like a blue lily and is verily an image of nectar. If everyone sees him, the evil eye may fall upon him, she continued and kissed the babe. All this made Yashoda, Rohini and other cowherdesses feel at ease. They did not know she was a killer for Putana means "destroyer of babies". But when she sat down with him on her lap to feed him, he sucked her life away. Immediately there was a big change. She was no more a lovely girl but a terrifying demoness. It was like Indra defeating Vritra and destroying him. Arulaladasar paints in sheer red the scene as her intestines caught fire and fell out. Her pleas to Krishna to let go her breast were not heeded. The Lord who was used to devouring the worlds and then recreating them did this as a matter of course.

If Putana was such a terrible demoness, how come she was blessed with the vision of the Supreme and transformed into purity that even her carcass gave out sandalwood smell when it was burnt? Among innumerable legends spoken in connection with the *Bhagavata* incidents, there is one that connects Putana to Mahabali. I heard the following in a lecture on *Bhagavata* by Srivillipputtur Kannan Swami.

The Lord had come to the sacrificial hall of Mahabali to beg for three spans of earth. Mahabali's daughter Ratnavali was charmed by the glowing figure of the little boy. She prayed to him to give her the chance of being his mother. The Lord assented. Then he proceeded to the King and made his request. Despite the royal priest Shukracharya's advice, Mahabali made the gift. The moment the waters were poured on Vamana's hands, the small figure became the macrocosmic figure of Trivikrama.

Ratnavali was incensed. How dare the sweet fellow resort to this transformative trick? Her father was so innocent! Ratnavali rushed towards Trivikrama to kill him. The Lord smiled and said: "Lady! What was the boon you asked for when I entered the sacrificial hall? And now you are rushing at me with a murderous intent. So in the next birth you will be a mother who wants to feed me at her breast. But your

<sup>7.</sup> Canto 25, verse 31. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

desire will be to kill me. Yet, because I had agreed, I shall drink milk at your breast." This Ratnavali was born as Putana in the Dwapara Yuga.

The secret of the popularity enjoyed by the Krishna cycle of stories can never be gauged in full. I have seen animation pictures in Marathi which show Putana reduced to a skeleton when the baby drinks her milk. There is a terrible aptness in this transformation too. With so much colour and ananda in the Krishna world, why would I turn away from it? As for Krishna's reign in our fashion world, here is a recent news item from New Delhi with the dateline 19<sup>th</sup> June:

Delhi-based designer Sunil Mehra's latest collection is inspired from Lord Krishna's life and mythology and features contemporary ethnic chic embellished with motifs of Krishna, the peacock feather and flute, associated with the popular god.<sup>8</sup>

I am just wondering whether someone should print T-shirts with the Putana Samhara picture and distribute them to Indian citizens who want to make a stand against the Demoness of Corruption. It might have a better effect, with its touch of kshatra tej, on the gangs of corrupt citizens who are trying to destroy the foundations of this nation.

### (To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

8. http://www.gdayindia.com.au/a-collection-inspired-by-lord-krishna.

The religionist speaks a truth, though too violently, when he tells us that even our greatest and purest virtue is as vileness before the divine nature of God.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 500)

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