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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIV

No. 6

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## TRANSFORMATION

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;  
    It fills my members with a might divine:  
    I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.  
Time is my drama or my pageant dream.  
Now are my illumined cells joy's flaming scheme  
    And changed my thrilled and branching nerves to fine  
    Channels of rapture opal and hyaline  
For the influx of the Unknown and the Supreme.

I am no more a vassal of the flesh,  
    A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;  
    I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.  
My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,  
    My body is God's happy living tool,  
    My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 561)*

# THE KARMA YOGIN

## A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

*(Continued from the issue of May 2011)*

### Part II

## Karmayoga; the Ideal

### Chapter IV

#### XII.

It moves, It moveth not; It is far, the same It is near; It is within all this, the same It is outside all.

This second verse only brings out more emphatically what is implied in the first or presents the same truth from a slightly different standpoint. Brahman moves or vibrates, and Brahman does not move or vibrate. As the One Immutable and Immobile, He does not move, but He moves as mobile and multiple Prakriti. When it is said that Brahman is One and Unmoving, it is not meant that the mobile and multiple element in the Universe is other than Brahman; the Gods who cannot reach Brahman, whom He precedes and outstrips, are yet appearances of Himself; Matari-swam and the Waters, whom He contains, are also of His substance. Purusha alone is not Brahman, Prakriti also is Brahman; for He is not only the efficient cause of His Cosmos, but its material Cause as well. It is true that the motion and multiplicity of Prakriti are phenomenal and superficial, the stability and immutability of Purusha fundamental and real; but the phenomenal has a truth and existence of its own and is not utterly unreal. To take the suggestive human parallel, Shakespeare in himself is one and immutable, in his creations he is mutable and many; the personages of his dramas and their words and actions are not Shakespeare in the ultimate truth of himself, yet they are not other than Shakespeare; for they live in him, by him and are of his substance. It is easy to say they are unreal, but they have a reality of their own; they are true psychical images and live as phenomena in the consciousness of Shakespeare though not as separate and independent entities. So also the multiple Cosmos has a true phenomenal existence and reality in the Brahman, though no separate existence as independent entities. The tree and the river are not real as tree and river, but they are real as images, eidolons of the Brahman. In Himself He is calm, quiescent and unmoved, in them He moves and energises.

It is far and It is at the same time near. Physically near and far; the Sun and the distant constellations and Orion and Aldebaran and Lyra and whatever utmost star glitters on the outermost mesh of this network of suns and systems, all that is Brahman; and equally this earth which is our dwelling-place, and this country which is our mother and nurse, and this village or city in which we live and do business, and this house which shelters us, and these trees and tanks which were part of our childhood, and the faces we familiarly know and the voices we daily hear, all in which we habitually live and move, all this is Brahman. Emotionally & mentally near and far; for our love and our hatred, and what we love and hate, things forgotten and things remembered, things we cherish until death and things we put from us with loathing, friend and enemy, injurer and injured, our work and the daily web of our fears and hopes and longings, this is Brahman; and that which is so far from us that it cannot stir a single emotion or create a ripple of sensation in the mind, whether because it is remote in the distance of Time or hidden in the distance of Space or lost to the blindness of indifference, that too is Brahman. Intellectually near and far; for the unknown and the little known, that which is too vast or too small for us to perceive, or which our most powerful instruments cannot bring near to us or our keenest reasonings analyse or our widest comprehension embrace, that is Brahman; all we daily perceive and note, the myriad forms that Science analyses, the delight of the eye and ear and taste and smell and touch, this is Brahman; and the subjective world in ourselves which is nearest to us of all, thought and memory and sensation and feeling, volitions and aspirations and desires, these too are Brahman. Spiritually near and far; for the Omniscient and Omnipotent Cause and Ruler who creates universes with the indrawing of its breath and destroys universes with its out-throwing, beside whom we feel ourselves to be too vile and weak and feeble to partake even infinitesimally of His divine nature, that is Brahman; the ineffable and unimaginable Spirit whom our senses cannot perceive, nor our minds comprehend, nor our reason touch, that is Brahman; and our own Self who eternally enthroned in the cavern-heart of our being, smiles at our pleasures and pains, mighty in our strength, as mighty in our weakness, pure in our virtues, unstained by our sins, no less omniscient and omnipotent than Isha, no less calm, immutable and ineffable than the Supreme Being, — this our Self too is Brahman. The Karmayogin who has realised it, must hold all existence divine, all life a sacrament, all thought and action a self-dedication to the Eternal.

It is within all this, It too is without all. Brahman is within the whole Universe; every object however inanimate, every form of life however vile, is brim-full with the presence of God. The heathen who worships stocks and stones has come nearer to the truth of things, than the enlightened professor of “rational” religion, who declares God to be omnipresent and yet in the next breath pronounces the objects in which He is present to be void of anything that can command religious reverence. There is no error in “idolatry”; the error is in the mind of the idolater who worships

the stone as stone and the stock as stock, thinking that is God, and forgets or does not realise that it is the Divine Presence in them which is alone worship-worthy. The stock or the stone is not God, for it is only an idolon, a symbol of His presence; but the worship of it as a symbol is not superstitious or degrading; it is true and ennobling. Every ceremony which reminds us of the presence of the Eternal in the transient, is, if performed with a religious mind, a spiritual help and assists in the purification of consciousness from the obscuration of the senses. To the ordinary intelligence, however, the idea of Brahman's omnipresence, if pushed home, becomes a stumbling-block. How can that which is inert, senseless and helpless be full of that which is divine and almighty? Is it not a sacrilege to see Him in what is vile and repulsive? Is it not a blasphemy to envisage Him in the vicious and the criminal? Hence the popular Manicheism which pervades every religion; hence the persistent idea of a twofold creative power, God and devil, Ormuzd and Ahriman, Allah and Iblis, the one responsible for all that is good, the other for all that is evil. This kind of spiritual and intellectual weakness loves to see God in everything good and pleasant and beautiful, but ignores Him in what is evil, ugly or displeasing. But it is an imperfect religion which thus yields to the domination of the mind and senses and allows them to determine what is or is not God. Good is a mask and evil is a mask; both are eidola, valid for the purposes of life in phenomena, but when we seek that which is beyond phenomena, we must resolutely remove the mask and see only the face of God behind it. To the Karmayogin there should be nothing common or unclean. There is nothing from which he has the right to shrink; there is none whom he can dare to loathe. For God is within us all; as the Self pure, calm and eternal, and as the Antaryamin or Watcher within, the Knower with all thought, action and existence for His field of observation, the Will behind every movement, every emotion, every deed, the Enjoyer whose presence makes the pain and pleasure of the world. Mind, Life and all our subjective consciousness and the elements of our personal existence and activity, depend on His presence for the motive-force of their existence. And He is not only within us, but within all that is. What we value within ourselves, we must not belittle in others; what we cherish within ourselves, we must not hurt in others; what we love in ourselves, we must not hate in others. For that which is within us, is the Divine Presence, and that which is in others, is the same Divine Presence. To remember this is worth all the moral teachings and ethical doctrines in the world. Vedanta has been declared by those who have not chosen to understand it, a non-moral or even immoral philosophy. But the central truth of Vedanta enfolds in a single phrase all the highest ethics of the world. Courage, magnanimity, purity, justice, charity, mercy, beneficence, loving kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, all the highest demands that the most exalted ethical teacher can make on humanity are contained in that single doctrine; and find in it their one adequate philosophical justification and sole natural basis.

That is not only within all this, It is also outside all. We have already seen that

Brahman is outside all in the sense of containing the Universe and not only pervading but surrounding every object with His presence. He is also outside in the sense that He is apart from it and other than it. He is not confined in Time, Space and Condition, but is quite above and outside Time, Space and Condition: Cosmos is within Him only as the shadow of a cloud is in the water; He is in Cosmos only as the water is in the shadow and causes and contains the shadow; but He is not the Cosmos in His nature or in His substance any more than the water is in nature or substance the shadow. The Cosmos exists in Him phenomenally and as a transient appearance, just as the shadow exists phenomenally in the water and after a time passes away. But there is this difference that the appearance in the water is the shadow of something else cast from outside, but the Cosmos is a shadow or eidolon of Himself created by Brahman in His own being. The materialistic Pantheism so natural to the sense-dominated intelligence of the West, is not Vedanta. God is not in nature or substance His Universe; but the Universe is He phenomenally and as a manifestation. Spirit-Matter is Brahman, but Brahman is not Spirit-Matter. This distinction must be carefully kept in mind or the doctrine of entire identity between Brahman and the Self of Things, may lead to disastrously false conclusions. The truth that Brahman is in all this, must be carefully balanced by the truth that Brahman is outside it all.

Yet to the Karmayogin the negative side of this dual truth is only necessary as a safeguard against error and confusion; it is the positive side which must be his inspiration. In its light the whole world becomes a holy place and all cause of fear or grief or hatred disappear, all reason for selfishness, grasping, greed and lust are eliminated, all excuses for ignoble desire or ignoble action are taken away. In their stead he receives the mightiest stimulus to self-purification and self-knowledge, which will lead him to the liberation of the divine in himself, to that subdual of the bodily and vital impulses which disciplines the body into the triune strength of purity, abstemiousness and quietude; to courage, magnanimity, justice, truth, the four elements of strength; and mercy, charity, love, beneficence, the four elements of sweetness, making that harmony of perfect sweetness & strength which is perfect character, to a mind, pure of passion and disturbance and prepared against the delusions of sense and the limitations of intellect, such a mind as is alone capable of self-knowledge. In this disciplined body, a perfect heart and a pure mind he will have erected a fitting temple for the Eternal within him in which he can offer the worship of works to the Lord and of selflessness to the Self. For by that worship he will become himself the Lord and find release from phenomenal life into the undisturbed tranquillity of the Spirit. The dictum, *Theos ouk estin alla gignetai*, God is not but is becoming, has been used to express the imperfect evolution of the cosmos but is better applied to the present spiritual progress of humanity. In the race the progress is still rudimentary, but each man has that within him which is empowered to fulfil his evolution and even in this life become no longer an animal, or a mind, a heart, an intellect, but the supreme and highest of all things — Himself.

### Book III.

#### Chapter I.

“But he who sees all creatures in his very Self and the Self in all creatures, thereafter shrinketh not away in loathing. He who discerneth, in whom all creatures have become Himself, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have sorrow in whose eyes all are one?”

In these two stanzas the Upanishad formulates the ethical ideal of the Karma-yogin. It has set forth as its interpretation of life the universality of the Brahman as the sole reality and true self of things; all things exist only in Him and He abides in all as the Self. Every creature is His eidolon or manifestation and every body His temple and dwelling-place. From Him all things began, in Him they develop and mature themselves, to Him they must in their nature strive to return. The mutual relations of all beings to each other may be summed up in the single phrase, “One Self in all creatures, all creatures in one Self”; for He is both within all and contains all. But this Self exists in each creature not partially or fragmentarily but in Its indivisible completeness. Therefore the Self in one creature is precisely the same as the Self in another, not merely kin by origin as in the Christian theology, not merely of the same kind and nature as in the Sankhya teaching, but absolutely identical. The sense of personal separation in space and substance and difference in nature has been illusorily brought about by the play of Prakriti, the noumenon of false self, on the one eternal Reality, creating an illusion of multiplicity and mutability. Self identifies itself with the phenomena of the evolved universe; habitually feeling the play of the three gunas, the principles of material reception, reaction and retention, on the body, the vital impulses, the mind, the intellect, the supra-intelligence it mistakes the continuity of conscious impressions for the real self, forgetting that these are merely aspects of consciousness in relation to matter and not the true and eternal reality of consciousness. But the end of evolution is to liberate the permanent from the impermanent, the spiritual from the material, the Self from its bondage to the three gunas and the false conceptions which that bondage creates. This liberation or release must therefore be the final aim of religion and ethics, otherwise religion and ethics will be out of harmony with the truth of things and therefore false or imperfect. Religion and ethics must train the individual self in a man to discover its universality, to see himself in all creatures and all creatures in himself, and the ideal or ethically perfect man is the one who has attained to this vision and observes it habitually in his thoughts and actions as the one law of his life.

In order to realize this vision, it has been found by experience that a man must attain freedom from the lower impulses which identify the body and the vital impulses with self; he must practise cleanliness and purity in mind, body and speech, — abstinence from gross gratifications and freedom from the domination of passions



and desires; indifference to cold, heat, hunger, thirst, fatigue and other affections from external influences. In other words he must be completely master of his own body. The Christian virtue of purity, the Pagan virtue of endurance, lie therefore at the very root of Vedantic morality.

To see oneself in others is impossible without completely identifying oneself with others; a perfect sympathy is essential and perfect sympathy brings with it perfect love, perfect charity and forgiveness, perfect pity for sin and suffering, perfect tolerance, a universal benevolence with its counterpart in action universal beneficence. The Jivanmukta, the Rishi, the sage must be, by their very nature, sarva-bhuta-hitarata; men who make it their business and pleasure to do good to all creatures, not only all men, but all creatures, — the widest possible ideal of universal charity and beneficence. To do as one would be done by, to love your enemies and those who hate you, to return good for evil are the first ethical inferences from the Vedantic teaching; they were fully expressed in their highest and noblest form by Buddhism five hundred years before they received a passionately emotional and lyrical phrasing in Judaea and were put widely into practice in India more than two thousand years before Christian Europe took even slightly to heart what it had so long been professing with its lips. And not only perfect love and beneficence, but perfect justice with its necessary counterpart in action, honest dealing and faithful discharge of duty are the natural outcome of the Vedantic teaching. For if we see ourself in others, we shall not only be willing but delighted to yield them all that is due to them and must shrink from wronging or doing hurt to them as naturally as we would shrink from doing hurt to ourselves. The debts we owe to parents, family, friends, the caste, the community, the nation we shall discharge not as an irksome obligation, but as a personal pleasure. The Christian virtue of charity, the Pagan virtue of justice are the very sap and life of Vedantic morality.

Seeing the Self in all creatures, implies seeing the Lord everywhere. The ideal man of Vedanta will accept pain as readily as pleasure, hatred, wrong, insult and injustice as composedly as love, honour and kindness, death as courageously as life. For in all things he will see the mighty Will which governs the Universe and which wills not only his own good and pleasure and success, but the good and pleasure and success of others equally with his own; which decrees that his own good and the good of others shall be worked out not only by his victories and joys, but by his defeats and sufferings. He will not be terrified by the menace of misfortune or the blows dealt him by man or nature, nor even by his own sins and failures, but walk straight forward in the implicit faith that the Supreme Will is guiding his steps aright and that even his stumblings are necessary in order to reach the goal. If his Yoga is perfect, his faith and resignation will also be perfectly calm and strong; for he will then fully realize that the Supreme Will is his own Will. Whatever happens to me, it is I that am its cause and true doer and not my friend or enemy who is merely the agent of my own Karma. But the faith and resignation of the Karmayogin will

not be a passive and weak submission. If he sees God in his sufferings and overthrow, he will also see God in his resistance to injustice and evil, a resistance dictated not by selfishness and passion, but undertaken for the sake of right and truth and the maintenance of that moral order on which the stability of life and the happiness of the peoples depend. And his resistance like all his actions will be marked by a perfect fearlessness, a godlike courage. For when a man sees God in all things and himself in all beings, it is impossible for him to fear. What is it that can cause him terror? Not danger or defeat, not death or torture, not hatred or ingratitude, not the worse death of humiliation and the fiercer torture of shame and disgrace. Not the apparent wrath of God Himself; for what is God but his own self in the Cosmos? There is nothing that he can fear. The Christian virtue of faith and resignation, the Pagan virtue of courage are the strong stem and support of Vedic morality.

The ignorant censure of Vedanta as an immoral doctrine because it confuses the limits between good and evil or rejects the one necessary motive to action and virtue, proceeds from unwillingness or inability to understand the fine truth and harmony of its teachings. Vedanta does indeed teach that virtue and vice, good and evil are relative terms, things phenomenal and not real; it does ask the seeker to recognize the Supreme Will in what is evil no less than in what is good; but it also shows how the progression of the soul rises out of the evil into the good and out of the good into that which is higher than good and evil. Vedanta does reject the lower self of desire as a motive to action and virtue, but it replaces it by the far more powerful stimulus of selflessness which is only the rising to our higher and truer Self. It does declare phenomenal life to be an illusion and a bondage, but it lays down the practice of courage, strength, purity, truth and beneficence as the first step towards liberation from that bondage, and it demands a far higher standard of perfection in these qualities than any other creed or system of ethics. What to many moralists is the highest effort of feeble human nature is to Vedanta only the first imperfect manifestation of the divine self in humanity. Vedanta embraces, harmonizes and yet overtops and exceeds all other moralities; as Vedic religion is the eternal and universal religion, so is Vedic ethics the eternal and universal morality. Esha dharmah sanâtanah.

## II. Ethics in primitive society.

Every system of ethics must have a sanction to validate its scheme of morals and an aim which will provide man the stimulus he needs, if he is to surmount his anti-ethical instincts and either subdue them or eradicate. Man is not a purely ethical being; he has immoral and nonmoral impulses which are primarily stronger than his ethical tendencies. To check the former, to liberate, strengthen and train the latter is the first object of all practical ethics religious or non-religious. The first requisite to

this end is a true knowledge of human nature and its psychology; for if an ethical system is psychologically untrue, if it is seriously mistaken in its view of human nature or fails to discern and reach his highest and noblest instincts, it will either be ineffective or possibly even do as much harm as good to the moral growth of humanity. But even a psychologically sound morality will not command general assent in practice unless there is a sanction behind it which the reason or the prejudices of mankind will accept as sufficiently strong to make a necessity of obedience. Armed with such a sanction it will influence the thoughts and the thoughts the actions of the race, but even then it will be only a repressive and disciplinary influence; to be an active stimulus or powerful moral lever it must be able to set in our front an aim which will enlist strong natural forces on the side of virtue or an ideal which will appeal to instincts deepseated and persistent in universal humanity.

In its origin it is more than probable that morality was a social growth and limited to communal habits and communal necessities. The aim set before the individual was the continued privilege of abiding in the community and enjoying all-important advantages of security, assistance and social life which membership of the community could alone provide. The sanction was again a communal sanction; the custom-code of the tribe or community commanded assent and obedience precisely because it was the tribe and community that commanded and could enforce them with severe social punishments, death, ostracism, excommunication. This origin of ethics from the customs of the tribe, themselves originating from the fundamental necessities of self-preservation, is warranted by the facts of sociology as rendered by modern investigation. It agrees also with the view of nature and evolution held by the Vedic inquirers. For if we consider the history of communities and nations so far as we know them, we shall find that it consists so far in a progression from the society to the individual in society, from a basis of *tamas* to an outgrowth of *rajas* in the *tamasic* basis; while *sattwa* perfected in a few individuals, is, as a social force, not yet emancipated.

We have seen that *Prakriti* or nature in all its operations works through three inherent *gunas* or qualities which repeat themselves in all stages and forms of her multifold activity; they are present as much in psychic and spiritual evolution as in the physical; and so all-important are they that all activity of any kind whatsoever, all life mental, vital, physical are said to be merely the natural operation of the three *gunas* interacting upon each other. These three *gunas* are called in the Sankhya terminology *sattwa*, *rajas*, *tamas*; comprehension, activity, passivity, or as they manifest in physical substance, retention, active reaction and passive reception. None of these *gunas* can exist or act by themselves; the activity of each involves the activity of the other two; but according as one or the other predominates, an action, a state of things, a substance, a character, is called *tamasic*, *rajasic*, or *sattwic*. In the early stages of upward evolution *tamas* predominates, in the medial *rajas*, in the final *sattwa*. In the early evolution of man it is inevitable, therefore, that the

obscuration of *tamas* should be very heavy and that the characteristic of passive receptivity to outside surroundings should be markedly predominant. Early man is active only under the pressure of hunger, or when moved by the primitive impulses of sense and vitality and the needs of self-preservation. His senses are keen and his power of activity great because keen senses and a strong, hardy, agile body are necessary to self-preservation; but in the absence of necessity or stimulus he is profoundly indolent, even inert. His sensibility, physical or mental, is small, for sensibility depends on and increases with *rajas*, the power of reaction and this power is in the savage comparatively undeveloped. His emotional reactions are also weak and primitive; in their predominantly physical character and in the helpless spontaneity of their response to impressions they reveal the domination of *tamas* passivity. The centres of individuality, a characteristically *sattwo-rajas* function, are too weak as yet to control, regulate and rationalize the response. Hence the emotional nature shows itself on one side in a childish unruly gratification of the pleasure of pleasant impressions, — the savage is easily mastered by gluttony and drunkenness but also capable of childlike worship and doglike fidelity when brought into close contact with a higher nature; on the other it is manifested in a brutally violent response to unpleasant impressions. Anger is the primitive reaction to an unpleasant impact which is not unfamiliar, fear the primitive reaction to an unpleasant impact which is new and surprising. The savage is therefore prone to childish terror in presence of the unknown, to ferocious anger and vindictive cruelty when his hatred is aroused by injury or the presence of what, though not unfamiliar in form, is alien and therefore hateful in its features. The habit of self-indulgence in anger by an organization of great passivity and low physical and mental sensibility creates the characteristic of a quiet unimpassioned cruelty, — the savage is, as a rule, calmly cruel. The Red-Indian's stoicism, impassivity, immobility, quiet endurance of pain are merely the inertia of the *tamas* mind and body systematized and become part of his tribal morality. But the height of passivity is reached in his intellectual organization of which the only strong reaction is the primitive mental response to outside impressions, curiosity. This curiosity is different from the desire to know, for it consists in a childish amused wonder and a desire merely to repeat the experience, not to learn from it. Such curiosity is at the root of the practice of torture; for the primitive mind finds a never-failing delight in the physical response evoked by intense and violent pain. This pleasure in crude physical, moral, aesthetic or intellectual reactions because of their raw intensity and violence is a sure sign of the undeveloped *tamas* mind and is still common enough in the most civilized communities. Originality and independence of mind and character spring from a strong *rajas* development and are therefore unknown to the savage who is the creature and slave of his environments. By far the most powerful and insistent of these environments is the community in which he lives and which is necessary to him at every turn for his security and his self-gratification. His passive mentality

therefore not only accepts but welcomes rigid control by the community; it receives the hereditary custom-law of the tribe as an inviolable natural law, and has too weak an individuality to react against it or to desire change and progress. The primitive community is therefore stationary; the individual exists in it not as an individual, but as an undetachable fragment of the whole. The social organization, even at its best, is in type and level on a par with that of the beehive and the ant-hill.

The tamasic state of society reaches its highest development when the community, entirely outgrowing the attractions of the nomadic instinct, settles down to a fixed habitation for centuries and adds to its original reason for existence, — communal self-preservation, — the more fruitful impulse towards communal accumulation. It has then the necessary condition for progress from the tamasic stage to the sub-tamasic in which the individual first begins to emerge although he is still subordinated to the community and lives chiefly for the general advantage, not for his own. The settled state of society and the expansion of the community which a more prosperous and stable life brings with it, involve an increasing complexity of the social organization. Specialization of function becomes pronounced, for the larger needs of the community demand an increasing division of labour. Rank and private property begin to emerge; inequality has begun. The more various activities, the more varied experience, the less primitive range of desires and the need of a wider knowledge of things and men create a greater mental alertness and increased mental differentiation. This in its turn means the growth of individuality. Personality, we have seen, has memory for its basis and is determined by memory; individuality or difference of personality is originally created by difference in the nature and range of the impressions experienced and retained by the mind, which naturally results in different habits of emotional and mental reaction. The fundamental self in all men is the same, the action of external Prakriti in its broad masses is the same all over the world; therefore human personality is necessarily the same in its general nature wherever we meet it. Difference in personality arises purely from difference in the range of mental and emotional experience; from the different distribution of various kinds of experience, and from differently developed habits or ways of reaction to impressions received. For character is nothing but habit; and habit is nothing but an operation of memory. The mind remembers that it received this particular impact before and reacted on it in this particular way and it repeats the familiar experience. The repetition becomes a habit of the mind ingrained in the personality and so a permanent characteristic. Difference of experience thus creates difference of personality, and difference of experience depends on difference in life, pursuits, occupations. So long as life is bounded by the desires of alimentation, self-preservation and self-reproduction, there can be no real individuality within the species, for the processes required and the experiences involved in these functions are practically the same for each member of the species. Even the gratification of primitive sensuous desires does not involve anything more than minute and

unnoticeable differences. Hence one savage very much resembles any other savage just as one animal of a species very much resembles another of the same species, and one savage community differs from another only as one animal sub-species differs from a kindred sub-species. It is only when desires and needs multiply, that difference of life and occupation can bring difference of experience and develop individuality. The increasing complexity of the community means the growth of individuality and the liberation of rajas in the human psychology.

Rajas is the principle of activity and increases with the intensity and rapidity of the reactions of Will upon external things; it is not content like tamas with passively receiving impressions and obeying its environments, but seizes on the impressions and strives ever to turn them to the service of individual personality, to master its environments and use them for its own enjoyment. Everything which it experiences, it utilizes for the pleasure and pain of the individuality. The rajasic man is the creator, the worker, the man of industry, enterprise, invention, originality, the lover of novelty, progress and reform. The growth of rajas therefore necessarily meant the inception of a great problem for society. In the tamasic and sub-tamasic states man develops the all-important faculty of conservatism, reverence for the past, fidelity to the communal inheritance, subordination of the interests and passions of the particular, be it class or individual, to the stability and safety of the whole. But here was a new element likely to disturb and upset the old state of things. The rajasic individuality was not likely to accept the traditional sanction, the communal aim as a satisfying aim and a binding sanction. The more and more he developed, the more and more strongly it would crave for the satisfaction of its expanding individual desires, ideas, activities with less and less regard to the paramount importance of social stability. How should society deal with this element? From that single difficulty arose the whole sociological problem involving difficulties of ethics, legislation and politics which after so many thousands of years mankind has not solved to its permanent satisfaction.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 275-90)*

## ‘THOSE WHO LIVE FOR THEE AND IN THEE . . .’

**March 9, 1914**

THOSE who live for Thee and in Thee may change their physical surroundings, their habits, climate, “milieu”, but everywhere they find the same atmosphere; they carry that atmosphere in themselves, in their thought constantly fixed on Thee. Everywhere they feel at home, for everywhere they are in Thy house. No longer do they marvel at the novelty, unexpectedness, picturesqueness of things and countries; for them, it is Thy Presence that is manifest in all and Thy unchangeable splendour, which never leaves them, is apparent in the least grain of sand. The whole earth chants Thy praises; in spite of the obscurity, misery, ignorance, through it all, it is still the glory of Thy love which we perceive and with which we can commune ceaselessly everywhere.

O Lord, my sweet Master, all this I constantly experience on this boat which seems to me a marvellous abode of peace, a temple sailing in Thy honour over the waves of the subconscious passivity which we have to conquer and awaken to the consciousness of Thy divine Presence.

Blessed was the day when I came to know Thee, O Ineffable Eternity.

Blessed among all days be that day when the earth at last awakened shall know Thee and shall live only for Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol.1, p. 93)*

## A VISION

*(Continued from the issue of May 2011)*

(4)

*In this issue we are publishing the fourth of the seven visions.*

I SLEPT and now I am awake.

I awoke in the middle of a populous city, in a great, cheerfully-lit hall where a feast is being held. Around a long, richly-laden table, a dozen people are sitting and talking merrily. At the centre I see an old man with a fine noble head enframed by a great beard and long silky white hair; his expression is at once very grave and very gentle, and even his gaiety has a touch of solemnity. Beside him sits a young, fair-haired woman dressed in flowing white veils. The ten others are men, disciples gathered around their master.

While the feast goes on joyfully, I feel and see gathering slowly above the town a heavy cloud charged with hostility.

The young woman too has sensed<sup>1</sup> the impending danger; she suddenly rises and speaks in an inspired voice: "A great calamity broods over us, a dreadful cataclysm is in the making. I sense it although I cannot say exactly what it is; we must at all costs leave the town immediately, together with all who trust us and are willing to follow us." None of those present doubts the grave words that have disturbed the harmonious gathering; all rise unhesitatingly and prepare to leave the hall.

At that moment the scene fades from my sight and for a while I can discern nothing more. As soon as my consciousness returns, I find the little group again, but how the scene has changed!

The twelve have left the town, which is now only ruins and destruction. How violent the upheaval must have been! For nothing remains of this huge city but heaps of rubble, so consumed by fire and eroded by water that they seem even now to have lain there for centuries. Earthquake, eruption, flood, all three must have contributed to change the product of so much science and art so abruptly and totally into grey or red rock-like mounds and hillocks all blackened by smoke. Not a blade of grass remains to be seen, and in the midst of this vast wasteland runs a wild torrential flood sweeping away all kinds of wreckage in its rapid course. Above this agonising scene stretches a beautiful expanse of cloudless, limpid blue sky, which seems to mock this wretched earth.

1. *Sentientier*: to be aware with all the senses (physical and subtle) together.



Along the arid banks, beside the turbulent waters, are encamped thousands of people driven from the town by the fury of the elements. They are plunged in listless despair, sitting with idle arms and empty looks, or pacing jerkily back and forth; the shock has been too great for them and seems to have jolted them out of their senses.

By contrast, the little group has remained calm and courageous; the master is walking beside the torrent, his protective arm around the young woman, surrounded by his trusting disciples. They feel for the lot of this bewildered crowd and grieve at their inability to help them. The old man knows that they must leave the place with all possible speed, for the danger still threatens; fresh upheavals are bound to occur and perhaps all will be flooded. So he advances towards the crowd and explains in a loud clear voice how to use the driftwood littering the ground to build rafts which will enable them to flee the imminent disaster. Then, after a last sad farewell to the collectivity, the little group makes its way to a sort of floating house waiting for them moored to a rock. The twelve board this makeshift boat; one of them shoves off with a pole and they launch forth upon the torrent which bears them away at a tremendous speed amid the rocks and the flotsam of all kinds strewn in its course.

They hasten on and on at a dizzy speed. The young woman in white raiment stands near to an opening in the broadside, gazing upon the scene outside and keeping watch. A young man says, "If we can only reach the sea, all will be well."

Another replies, "That will be difficult, for near to the sea there is a reef and we might be dashed to pieces on the rocks." Then the voice of the master rises deep and majestic, "You know full well that our dwelling can never sink: is it not the symbol of eternal truth?" Several men reply in unison, pointing to the young woman who is still standing, "Besides, so long as she is here in our midst, no harm can befall us." And she watches ever more intently.

Suddenly, after covering a great distance, the floating house comes in view of what must once have been a very large and beautiful city. Only huge pieces of wall, and the ruins of steeples and spires and palaces, are visible, eaten away by air and wind, water and fire, their weird white shapes pointing to the sky. The ground is hidden by running water, and at the centre of the town, which must once have been the site of a river or a vanished harbour, lie great sailing ships of which only bare hulks remain.

The scene is so impressive and brings to mind so vividly the idea of a great civilisation destroyed, that all gaze in silence, in grave and sorrowful contemplation.

At that moment all fades once more from my sight, and when I become conscious again, I find myself above the sea, a wild tumultuous sea swollen with huge billows ready to swallow up all that would be so rash as to draw near them. Amid these waves I see beings of disorder, ferocious and grimacing, who with their own power are increasing the power of the raging waters. Looking more closely, I realise that their frenzy is aimed at some crimson figures whom they wish to seize,

but who oppose them by their very calm; yet soon, perhaps, their strength will be exhausted.

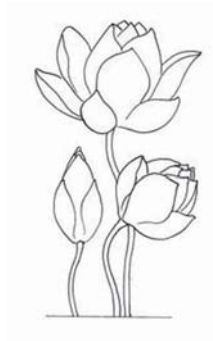
Then in the distance the floating house appears, profiled in violet against the foamy sea. It glides upon the waters on a straight, even course, as upon a perfectly smooth surface; and indeed, fore and aft of the boat, amid the waves that grow suddenly calm at its approach, a long silver path, luminous and smooth, unfolds. On either side of the path the waves rise sheer like walls, but a powerful force prevents them from bearing down upon the refuge of the little group. And now, one by one, the crimson figures emerge from the water in defiance of the violent efforts of their enemies, and take shelter in the floating house. As soon as all are safe, the huge waves fall back upon themselves, rolling, crushing, swallowing up the hostile beings who oppose them in vain.

Gradually all becomes peaceful again; the water, with scarcely a ripple upon its surface, turns sapphire blue; the sky is ablaze with sunlight, and the boat goes on its way haloed in white light.

Within, all rejoice. The little group has given a loving<sup>1</sup> welcome to those they have saved, and the master says in his deep gentle voice, "Thus it is that sooner or later, light shall triumph over darkness, order over disorder, love over hate, and harmony reign over a Universe at peace!"

THE MOTHER

*(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, August 1983)*



1. *Pathétique*: full of divinised love.

## A CONVERSATION OF 11 JANUARY 1967

[A disciple complained that people took Mother's time with questions often useless, while less and less time was left for her to attend to apparently more important work. Mother commented:]

It *has* to be like that, since it is like that.

It is perhaps a lesson (it is an indication), but it has a purpose. The lesson that I have to understand, I am trying to understand. I am learning to be patient, oh! such a patience. . . . Always there are revolts, insults, all that. For me it is absolutely zero and sometimes it is even amusing. When I am in my own condition, the true condition of compassion, it changes nothing, it does not raise even a small ripple on the surface, nothing.

The question was put to me yesterday; I was asked if insult, the feeling of being insulted, and what is called in English "self-respect" (something corresponding a little to *amour-propre* in French) had any place in the sadhana. Of course, there is no place for it, it is well understood! But I have seen the movement, it was very clear, I have seen that without ego, when the ego is not there, there *cannot be* this sort of ruffle in the being. Because I went back far into the past to a time when I still used to feel it (many years ago), but now, it is no longer something foreign even, it is something impossible. The whole being, and even (it is strange), even the physical constitution does not understand what that means. It is the same thing when there is materially a shock (*Mother shows a scratch on her elbow*), like that for example; it is no longer felt as one feels an injury, it is no longer felt like that. Most often there is nothing at all, it passes absolutely unperceived in the whole; but when something is felt, it is only the impression — a very, very gentle, very intimate impression of a help seeking to make itself felt, a lesson that is to be learnt. But not as one does in the mental way in which there is always a stiffening; it is not that, it is immediately a sort of offering of the being, which gives itself in order to learn. I am speaking of the cells. It is very interesting. Evidently if you mentalise, you must say that it is the feeling or consciousness of the divine Presence in all things and that the mode — the mode of contact — derives from the state in which you are.

Yes, that is the experience of the body.

And in individuals, when there is any knock or shock, always the only perception is a clear vision of the ego — the ego manifesting itself. They say, "It is the other." I would not say, "Oh! That one was angry" or "Oh! This one . . .", no, it is his ego; not even his ego: *the ego*, the ego principle — the ego principle which still intervenes. It is very interesting, because the ego has become for me a kind of impersonal entity, while for everybody else it is the acute sense of his personality! Instead of

that, it is a kind of way of being (terrestrial or human, one can say), which is in greater or lesser quantity here or there or there, giving each one the illusion of personality. It is very interesting.

*Yes, but the trouble is that others do not learn their lesson, so . . .*

Oh! If they learnt their lesson everything would change very quickly.

*So the result is that you are invaded, engulfed.*

Cannot!

*All your time is taken, all your . . .*

They cannot engulf me! (*Mother laughs*) I am too big!

*Materially, all the same, you are overwhelmed.*

I have noticed that if I resist, it becomes bad. If I have the feeling of fluidity, there are no more knocks. It is the same thing as for this scratch (*Mother shows her elbow*). If you stiffen and things resist, you get a knock. It is like men who know how to fall: they fall, they break nothing; whereas men who do not know how to fall, just a little fall and they break something. It is the same thing. One must learn how to be . . . the perfect unity. To correct, to straighten, is still resistance. So what will happen if the invasion, as you say, continues? It will be amusing, let us see! (*Mother laughs.*) As others are not in the same state, perhaps they will be vexed, but I am helpless! (*Mother laughs.*)

One must always laugh, always. The Lord laughs, and He laughs, and His laugh is so nice, so nice, so full of love. It is a laugh that envelops you with an extraordinary sweetness.

This too men have deformed — they have deformed everything (*Mother laughs*).

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 54-56)

## WHEN THE MOTHER SMILES

EACH time we see the Mother smile, we cannot but remember some lines of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. There is the passage which is part of his description of Savitri herself:

Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense  
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight  
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.

There is also that single line which seems to say everything:

They who have looked on me shall grieve no more.

Naturally, it means a great deal to us when the Mother smiles and it is equally natural that her non-smiling creates a big gap in our life. But neither the one nor the other means always the same thing, and an attempt at some understanding of them would be useful. We may hazard a few statements based on experience.

When the Mother does not smile at us, it need not indicate that she is displeased. She may be absorbed in doing some work on our inner being. When she smiles, it also need not signify that she is particularly pleased. The smile may be a means of doing something to the outer being. But one point is certain: whenever the true soul in us comes to the front, she invariably gives it a smile.

This smile really signals her pleasure. But it is otherwise difficult to ascertain what her smiling or not smiling stands for. Hence, even if she does not shed her smile on us, we must never feel depressed. We, on our side, should always keep smiling. Not, of course, out of complacence or out of indifference to her displeasure, but out of a firm faith that, howsoever she deals with us, it is always as our spiritual Mother, one whose love is eternal and perfect. For, as Sri Aurobindo has said: "Whatever is done by the Mother is for the good of the sadhaka and the sadhana."

If a smile remains long on our faces, there is bound to be a smile on hers as well. Through that smile of ours — trusting, hopeful, filled with gratitude for her very presence amongst us — our true soul will look out at its spiritual Mother and then her pleasure in her own child will shine forth.

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

The Mother's comment when this was read out to her: "I am smiling."

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, August 1972, p. 527)

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of May 2011)

**Sunday, 17 October 1926**

*(Conversation with the Mother)*

*I think I have understood what you meant. Since yesterday I have changed everything in my meditation. Instead of doing things myself as though I were directing the Force, I simply open myself and remain passive. Almost the whole day, I was able to keep contact with the Force and open myself to its action.*

I FELT you very close the whole day.

*But this puts me to sleep.*

There is nothing wrong with that. During sleep, in you as in many others, there is no resistance left. Everything opens and the working is perfect. If you feel inclined to sleep, don't resist it.

*About the meditation, what have you decided?*

It is decided, if you yourself are ready within.

*I consider this meditation as infinitely valuable and accept it gratefully.*

I must ask you not to be surprised in your outer consciousness if you see certain things that could make you wonder. The others consider this room a temple and behave as they would in a temple, but they replace the idol by a human figure. That gives them the plenitude they need. You are brought up differently.

*Don't worry. First of all, this won't surprise me — I understand their feeling very well. I don't act quite like them, probably because, as you say, I have been brought up in other conditions and have less need of outer manifestations; still, I obey what I feel within. As for being surprised, why?*

\* \* \*

**Tuesday, 19 October 1926**

*(Conversation with the Mother after meditation with her at 12.15 p.m.)*

*Something profound must have happened. I followed the movement on the whole. It seems to me there were two different forces — the first force was calm and luminous; the second, a stronger one, was fixed here (pointing to the solar plexus).*

A force of strength?

*Yes, a force of strength. My mind was more calm today.*

When you came, you were well prepared. Your psychic being had prepared and adorned, under a symbolic form, a sort of bed of roses and gold leaves to receive what was going to come down. It was very pretty.

The Force that descended is a force of transformation. It will act from the centre now, fully conscious of the movements.

*(Here, several pages of the notebook have been torn out.)*

... for lack of a better word, I would say several examinations, or tests, if you like. You have passed them all successively and regularly, which shows that you were quite sincere. Now everything will go well till the end; everything will be easy. I am sure of it.

Tomorrow Sri Aurobindo will see you after your meditation.

*In that way, I won't miss the meditation!*

\* \* \*

**Saturday, 23 October 1926**

*First, I will speak of my meditation when I'm alone. There I feel, as I said, two workings of the Force. One is behind the heart; the impression it gives me is of living fire, but obscure. On the contrary, the Force coming from above into the mind has a light behind; though I don't see it, I know it is there.*

*Taking my meditation with the Mother today, I will say what happens when meditating with her. I feel at first a preparatory period when the Force comes down to the head and remains there for a certain time. Then it goes*

*down and takes possession of the central being. There it remains. My consciousness is then drawn backwards, but, as it is a new movement for my body, there is some difficulty arising from it in the chest and throat — for instance, a choking sensation.*

*With the Mother my mind is quiet; its activity is greatly diminished and does not disturb me. But when I am alone, as I don't act upon the mind now, it is sometimes very chaotic and disturbs me very much.*

What kind of movements take place?

*Always the same old movement. A noise awakens some association and the mind spins around it and goes on and on. Then I find myself carried away and have to come back again and again.*

Do you see what kind of movements they are? Are they true mental movements or do they arise from below?

*They arise from below and I don't think there is anything new in them. But there is also another kind of mental movement. Very often now I find myself thinking of you or of the Mother, thinking that I will see you tomorrow, for instance, and what I will say to you, or seeing myself offering flowers to the Mother.*

Seeing?

*Not seeing, imagining rather. The process is the ordinary mental one, it seems. But as I am awaking to the reality of something of which I had only an intuition formerly and as I am coming in touch with the Light here above, my mind is directed towards you. It may be there is something genuine, but then the mind immediately starts working in the old way. What should I do?*

You have nothing to do. The two movements you are conscious of are movements of the same Force. When it comes to the centre in the chest, it awakens the being to the Truth and turns it upwards. It is the human way of establishing the communication with what is above, a straight line with the supramental Truth. When the Force is established there and the central being comes out and seizes upon the outer being, it will effect the transformation. It will direct the Force downwards, everywhere, and effect the change.

*I am so tired of my mind.*



But these movements are not so important. They are the remnants of the old way of working and they will fade away.

*I am waiting for a more radical change. Up to the present, though something very luminous is dawning in me, there is no radical change of consciousness. I am still the old self.*

What are you expecting?

*Well, many things! For instance, I will see my lower self as I see others' selves. I will no more be bound by the body.*

Of course the time will come when you will see the movements of nature in yourself as in others. But what you are waiting for, is it not a mental demand? It is better not to make such demands, for they always misrepresent the Truth. What you are asking for is the Truth and you must not state in advance that the Truth must be so and so. The mental representations, even the best ones, are imperfect and they become obstacles. What is needed is to realise the experiences as part of yourself.

*Then is it too much to wait for such a change? I am waiting for a change. Perhaps it is wrong to wait for something?*

No, but it is wrong to state in advance what the change will be.

*Now in meditation I only open myself to the Force and allow it to work. I am not acting upon my mind any longer; that is why it is so restless at times. This change in my meditation occurred last Saturday. I was then very conscious of the Presence in me and I kept in touch with it the whole day. But since that day, though it is still working, I am not very conscious of it. Sometimes the Force acts in the mind, sometimes in the central being. What shall I do? I have left the idea of directing the Force. (Sri Aurobindo smiles) But shall I follow all its movements?*

Remain open and passive and follow; that is what you have to do. The Force will transform you by itself and by its own means and ways. The way of doing it with the mind is slow and imperfect, though the mind sometimes thinks it to be the best way because it feels itself acting. That is wrong. The mind does not know the conditions and the means. The Force acts with a directness of which the mind is incapable, and you are receptive enough to allow it to work. Obstacles may arise, obstacles in the physical, vital or mental, as they arise always, but that does not matter. They will be worked out and rejected. Do not try to do anything by yourself.

*I feel an increasing need for peace, tranquillity. And even the little work I do outside disturbs me for the present. I would like to minimise it or even to give it up. But I suppose I have to keep it.*

Yes, it is better to keep it — and you will arrive at a state where you will do that work only with the outer part of yourself. It will then no longer disturb you.

*Yes. But for the present, it is a little difficult and painful. It seems to be a period of transition.*

Yes. It is a period of transition.

*(Here, several pages of the notebook have been torn out.)*

\* \* \*

### **Saturday, 30 October 1926**

*Nothing remarkable is to be said. Meditation is becoming deeper and more luminous. I feel my consciousness as if bathed in light. Also it happened that I felt separated, to some extent, from my outer consciousness. Yesterday evening, in meditation, my consciousness was very much withdrawn inside and I nearly lost consciousness of the body. Thinking it to be a help, I called the Mother, but instead of helping me to go beyond, it seemed that she brought me back to the physical consciousness. It is only an impression; I have not spoken to her since.*

*It is not always equally easy. Some days are better than others. But apart from these slight variations and from the recurring thoughts of the mind, there are no special difficulties now. The Force is working mainly in front of the face, where it purifies and pacifies, and on the vital. I feel the Force as luminous, white. It pervades the mind but not yet the whole being.*

*My physical body feels a little strain resulting from the different movements. Today I woke up with a pain in the back. I don't know if it has any relation to Yoga or is simply due to cold. Perhaps it has a connection with the psychic centre.*

*But why is the vital not opening?*

It is opening. Much more work is being done than is felt by your ordinary consciousness. The Mother tells me sometimes what is happening during the meditation. It is all very good. The task of connecting the two consciousnesses is going on. When this will be done, it will go quickly.

*In meditation I don't remain completely passive, but I follow what the Force does. I talked with the Mother about the matter and she said that passivity was required in the beginning of the meditation, but that when the Force has begun to work cooperation is to be practised.*

Of course, following the movement was understood — to follow the movement and see what it is doing there. Complete passivity would be inconscience.

*Completely passive, I would go to sleep.*

*I became conscious of a centre in the middle of the head, a centre connected with both ears. I don't know more about it yet, only its existence.*

\* \* \*

## **Sunday, 31 October 1926**

*(Conversation with the Mother)*

*My meditation was calm and deep — a great Force descended. But the last two days were not very luminous. Yesterday in particular, it was a little cloudy.*

*The evening of the day before, during meditation, I almost lost consciousness of my body. I called you to help me, but instead of helping me to realise myself you put me back into my physical consciousness.*

Yes. To leave one's consciousness in order to enter into another state is not what one should seek. That may be interesting as an experience, but the present movement is different. It is a question of connecting the two consciousnesses, but this means bringing down the higher consciousness into the physical body. Everything must be present there in the natural consciousness. You will be brought back like this each time you try to escape.

Something is being prepared for you — that was said yesterday. It is as though the Divine Will had traced the goal and the path; it is as though it had told you, "You will be like this." It was very clear. The goal is known to us, but it is reserved for the two of us. To you it is rather the path that this indicated, and this path is very different from what you are expecting in your outer consciousness. I wouldn't know how to express it; you wouldn't understand me in your outer consciousness. Your inner being knows; it almost told me a while ago something very similar. This has to become conscious. You are on the verge of something. Don't be surprised if it is very different from what you expect or if it is very intense. It is so willed.

... ? ...

Today I saw that a shadow had tried to cloud things, but nothing is left of it now. When something like this descends, the first effect is to raise up all the opposition. All that is unsundered in the being rebels. Then there is a waiting in the darkness, for one sees nothing yet. That must be the cause of your difficulties yesterday.

Remain calm and concentrated.

*(Here several pages of the notebook have been torn out.)*

*(To be continued)*

PAVITRA

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

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

*Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half-fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1107)*

# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of May 2011)

### CHAPTER XII (Continued)

#### Spirituality and Political Turbulences

Pondicherry, December 15, 1947

My dear Parents,

I have received at the beginning of November your sweet letters of October 22. Since then time has passed very quickly, and here we are nearing the end of the year. So I am here to chat a little with you.

One of Father's letters is lost, because I never received his remarks on *The Message of Sri Aurobindo . . .* and *Essays on the Gita*. I would have been happy to see them, even in their abridged form.

The most important books of Sri Aurobindo have not yet been translated into French. The reason for that is that we are all very busy with the day to day life of the Ashram and that it is a work which cannot be entrusted to an outsider. The massive metaphysical work *The Life Divine* is being translated by Jean Herbert and will shortly be published by Albin Michel. But, although Herbert is an eminent translator because he is the chief interpreter at the United Nations, his version is not free from errors of comprehension. And then, a translation is never completely faithful; it is always an interpretation, because the spirit of two languages is not the same. In English, Sri Aurobindo's books are luminous; in French, I have the impression that much of this luminosity is lost.

Recently we have had the celebration of the Ashram School — its 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The children invite the parents and the elder members. Among others there was *L'anglais tel qu'on le parle* (English, As It Is Spoken), by Tristan Bernard; it was well acted and everybody enjoyed it. The Physical Education portion is always very successful because we give it a lot of importance and our instructors are very good.

Pondicherry is calm after the fever of the month of August. The political problem is not resolved and will not be except by negotiations between Paris and Delhi. But we have an attempt at local government, which is only in its first stages.

The news from France has been quite bad. It seems that the communists have blown it and lost ground. The spell under which they labour is strange; it is a carbon

copy of Hitlerism. Recently I have read two books which you probably know and which have interested me very much: *I Have Chosen Freedom* by Kravchenko, and *The Yogi and the Commissar* by Koestler. There would be much to say if one wished to comment on them. The one by Koestler is remarkable because of the confirmations that he gives, unwittingly, to Sri Aurobindo's views. If Papa has read it, he would certainly have thought of the beginning of *The Life Divine* ('The Two Negations'), written in 1916.

It seems to me that they will arrive at regulating the right to strike in the way that Papa suggests: secret vote for the majority, ban or at least severe limitation, in the case of public services. The misuse and the disastrous consequences are much too evident.<sup>1</sup>

But are we moving towards a real stability or on the contrary towards a new disequilibrium? I wonder if the experiment of the dictatorship of the proletariat can be avoided and if one can go beyond — towards a political and social organisation based on new values — or whether the entire journey of the ancients must be terminated and the abyss be measured to the very bottom. Is the Russian experience enough or must it be widespread until humanity is disgusted with it?

A friend, Dr. Tony Grangier, has given me the address of one of his friends, Dr. Pierre Winter, and I notice that he is your neighbour in Paris: 132, Victor-Hugo Avenue. I do not know him, but I am told that he is a serious and deeply idealistic man.

If I had known that Albert and Denise were going to America, I would have given them the Raymonds' address, very good friends from New York. Antonin Raymond is an architect of great merit. He had visited you on his return from India.

Yes, as for me, the weak point is the intestine. The diet is of little importance, provided that the food is healthy and regular. But the digestion is very sensitive to the psychological factor. Extra work, external disturbance or inner difficulty, irregularity of meal timings, all that has a visible and often distressing repercussion. I was not careful about it at first and that led to quite painful consequences: intestinal problems, colitis with probably some ulcerations of the right colon. My digestion was poor and I had been obliged to reduce my food intake; so I lost weight. Now I am recovering; but it compels me to be more careful and take certain precautions. For me, as for all of us here, the body becomes more sensitive to the movements of the consciousness. It is a progress not without certain drawbacks, in the transitional period. The problems of health are signs of inner difficulties. I know mine and I know very well, from experience, that all depends on the spiritual progress and on the opening to the divine forces.

My dear Parents, I am sending you my sincere wishes for Christmas and for

1. This paragraph alludes to the violent after-war politico-trade union battles.

the New Year. I shall specially be with you on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Please convey my best wishes to Albert and Denise and their children.

With all my filial affection.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

*Drafts of Paul's letter*

(I)

December 1947?

. . . It is certain that I admire Aurobindo for the synthesis he attempts between the manifested world and the spiritual world; but to give the same weightage to the scientific knowledge acquired by the senses and the intelligence on the one hand, and on the other, to the knowledge of the spiritual world acquired by vision in a state of trance or ecstasy — which may seem natural to an eastern mind which has always lived in an atmosphere of mysticism — does not seem to be acceptable to a western mind. That is the sensitive point, the disagreement. It is there that convincing . . .

(II)

At first sight and with due reservations, it is possible that . . .

(III)

To give the same degree of credibility to the scientific knowledge of the manifested world and to the knowledge of the spiritual world through the vision in a state of ecstasy or of trance may appear natural to an Easterner who has always lived in an environment of a general mysticism, but requires more than a mere affirmation. That is the sensitive point for a Westerner, it is there that he comes across a difficulty, it is there that he must be convinced . . .

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## SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
May 1, 1948

My dear Parents,

I am quite late in writing to you. I have in front of me your letters of January, February and March to which I have not yet replied. Today I have a little time and I have come to chat with you. Actually I often talk to you inaudibly because quite frequently I have the impression of a contact between us and of a current that is present. One can communicate many things in this manner.

But that does not remove the need to reassess the situation from time to time. To begin with me. After a lot of research and fruitless attempts, I have finally found that most of my physical difficulties were due to . . . acid drops! These sweets, of which I sucked three or four after meals (to ease the digestion!), contain yellow or red colouring matter, to which I had become allergic for some unknown reason. There are quite frequent cases of this kind of allergy (anaphylaxis): hay fever, particularly asthma. For me, this kind of poisoning showed itself in a skin rash with itchiness, persistent boils, general fatigue, stomach upsets, violent cramps, abnormal sensitivity to cold. When I did not take these sweets, things improved without my knowing the reason. As I was trying out different diets and treatments during all this time, the conclusions were always distorted, often contradictory. A deliberate and complete discontinuation of these sweets was enough for everything to return to normal or almost, because one boil in the hairy skin still remains, rather troublesome during sleep.

Reflecting on the action of the colour red, its traditional relation (in India as in Europe) with the planet Mars, its homeopathic relation with the boils, I suddenly thought that tomatoes, papayas, mangoes and other red and orange fruits could also play a role in this matter. Avoiding them these last four days has brought about an immediate relief. The boils are drying up; no new ones are forming. I hope to be rid of them in some ten days from now.

What is instructive is the complete failure of all the other treatments and diets. The doctors had diagnosed a liver problem. I did not believe them, but I tried their treatment. Nothing worked.

On the other hand, I did not believe in this kind of connection, like the fact that the colour red is said to be under the influence of Mars, that the mango and the papaya are regarded as **hot** in South India, but the fact is that all these influences combined seem to have had a real action on **my** body — I do not generalise.

My inner discipline and the occult help, enormous, which I received from Sri



Aurobindo and the Mother, have succeeded in holding in check, first, a harmful psychological state (this gave me very beautiful experiences of detachment from the body), then a spreading of the infection and the effect on the other organs, without succeeding in overcoming the effect of these poisons taken in repeated doses.

There is a general weakness still. I weigh only 59 kg and do not have much resistance. But I have the feeling that I can recuperate quickly. The digestion has again become normal and I do not doubt that I can easily put on a few more kilos and rebuild the muscles. I have never given up my exercises, following Papa's example in that, and my body is agile and healthy.

As for the knee, the improvement is also steady. Everyday I play a few games of table tennis (ping pong). We play this game seriously because it is marvellous for developing suppleness and quick reflexes. That is why it is the sport of the Air Force. I am quite good at it.

Very soon I am going to take up a little tennis. From time to time I do some exercises on the apparatus (parallel bars, rope climbing). Only jumps are forbidden for the time being, because I cannot bend my knees fully.

I am sending you some photos showing me in my various activities.

Today, the first of May, we have had a very successful sports meet, with the finals of all the events of our sports section. Many official invitees attended it. People are happy to come because the organisation and the spirit which reign in the Ashram are admired by everybody, even those who do not at all believe in the spiritual life.

Maman asks me what I do about money. It is very simple. The things which I need — toilet articles, clothes, for my personal use — I ask the Mother for them, and they are given to me from one of the departments of the Ashram, against a voucher signed by her. It is the same with the articles necessary for my work (office, workshop . . .). As the work I do brings me in contact with the outside world (visits, trips by car, post), I have a certain amount at my disposal for which I am accountable. This money does not belong to me; I am responsible to the Mother for its use.

Actually, I lack absolutely nothing and my life is hygienic and sufficiently comfortable. I also have books and magazines, as many as I can read. I must abstain from whims and from the idea that I possess whatever it may be, because it is very pleasant to make use of things without possessing them. One can really enjoy them without feeling bound to them, without them possessing you. Man is generally perverted in that he finds his pleasure in personal possession. And yet can one not appreciate a work of art in a museum as well if not better than that which one has in one's drawing room?

Concerning whims, here is an example. I loved the cinema very much. In Japan I went there almost once a week. Here, for the last 22 years, I have never gone to one, except once when the Mother was invited to inaugurate a cinema hall. We were there for 10 minutes! For some time now, we have begun to organise

educational and recreational film projections for the children. I enjoy the films with them. I think that the rule should be: if the occasion for something arises (in the job and for general work), so much the better; but if it does not, so much the better too. Desire is not the salt of existence; on the contrary, it is that which defiles everything and hinders the perception of *ananda* in things and in beings, a joy of being real and positive.

I do not say that the correct attitude is easy to maintain. It is, on the contrary, difficult, especially for Europeans. To depend on the Divine for everything is not easy. Not to be able to act as one pleases and to treat oneself to one's little fantasies, sometimes to be obliged to say that one possesses nothing and consequently to lack the appearance of power which the possession of money gives, not to be able to distribute gifts to win the approval of the humble people, etc., are small vexations but at times very much felt.

Before the war, we would receive from the Mother a small amount as pocket money. It has since then been stopped. Some people have friends who send them a little money. That must not be done without the Mother's knowledge and her permission, otherwise it would be unfaithfulness in the yoga, but there is no absolute general rule except for the offering of all one has just as of all one is.

Your last letter said that both of you had been unwell. I hope that with the fine weather, you have recovered your health. Did you suffer from the cold? Winter in Paris must have become quite difficult: no heating, restrictions on gas and electricity. Friends who receive detailed news from France, are quite pessimistic about her economical and social situation. France is the centre of a conflict, which is, for the present, mostly ideological, but which can take, at any time, a social and even a military aspect. One has the impression of being caught up in an inexorable machinery, like the one which carried away Hitler's Germany.

In Pondicherry, the political situation is not yet clear. One waits from one day to the next for a joint declaration by the French and the Indian governments. The ideal solution would be that French India regains her complete independence, enters into the heart of the Indian Union with an autonomy as large as possible and maintains with France important cultural links which could be useful both for India and for France. That ought to be the result of a development which has been going on since a year with various ups and down. France has made quite a few mistakes and hardly much is left to be made to lose everything. The Delhi government is very centrist and the State of Madras would like to absorb the Pondicherry territory. The Ashram has become rather unpopular because we have not recommended this immediate fusion which is against the interests of the local population. We have been accused of being the agents of French imperialism (France, it must be said, is not well thought of in Asia). But all that is only temporary and I still have confidence that one day the logical and honest solution will be realised.

I leave you for today, embracing you affectionately.  
Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. When will you go to La Minelle?  
Embrace Albert and Denise.

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### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
August 31, 1948

My dear Parents,

I have received your letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> August and am a little surprised because it seems that you have not received the long letter that I wrote to you in May. I had kept a copy of it which I am sending you. I had registered it because it contained some photos. I will lodge a complaint, but it is not of much use.

Since the month of May, time has passed quickly and for some time, I have been telling myself that I must find the time to write to you. Perhaps it is your anxiety that I felt. I have already noticed that when I feel very strongly the urge to write to you, you too think of me at that moment, and often I receive a letter from you soon after.

No, my dear Father, do not be anxious; you have not written anything which may hurt me in any way. Your letters always give me great pleasure and most often I feel myself in inner communion with you. Even when you do not share my point of view — far from me to insist that it should always be so — I recognise a great affinity in us. Perhaps it is quite natural between father and son. All the same, I think that it represents more than a mere heredity. In any case, I feel that you have made a great effort towards the truth, and no doubt, it is this common aspiration which has brought us closer. It seems that in life, the effort is more important than the result attained.

I think often of Maman also. I know all that she suffers, and nervous ailments are among the most painful ones. They say, “It is of the nerves, it will pass”, and they think they have said it all. But the pains and the functional troubles of nervous origin are nonetheless there. Modern medicine has only just begun to understand

them and to treat them suitably.

I understand that La Minelle cannot be much fun for you two, alone, at your age. But what is it that can be amusing at this moment? Everywhere one sees nothing but conflict, chaos and insecurity. I understand that those who remember the pre-war days, I mean, before 1914, are nostalgic about it. And yet! Do we not live, as Churchill has said, in a privileged era, and will not future generations envy us? Yes, if we are conscious of what is going on; no, if we are carried away by the current, without understanding.

If you do not go to La Minelle any more, where will you go? Because I suppose that it would be possible to create a pleasant abode for yourselves for a few months: books, walks, fishing, radio with music. And in another place, would it be better?<sup>2</sup>

On my side, I have nothing to add to my letter of May. I am much better and participating in quite a few sports. I have resumed tennis and play one or two sets every day. Summer is ending and the hottest season too.

Please excuse the spelling mistakes. I have only a little time if I want this letter to go today, and I insist on it. Even if I am not regular with my letters, never think that I forget you or even that I neglect you. It is lack of time which hinders me the most and I am always looking for the lost time!

I embrace both of you very affectionately.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

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### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
November 16, 1948

My dear Parents,

Have you received my letter of August 31? I am a little anxious and I hope that the loss of a letter does not cause a quite useless anxiety or misunderstanding. Looking again at our correspondence of these last months I note that since my letter

2. La Minelle was linked up with the public telephone network, but it had never, in Paul's lifetime, been connected to the electricity distribution network. A turbine had been installed by Albert at the place of the old mill wheel; fed by the water of the stream flowing into the pond, it turned a dynamo; this energy was neither steady nor permanent and could not run a valve radio, the transistor having yet to be invented!

of May 1 (I still do not know if you have received it), I have received only one letter from Maman of April 30 and Papa's letter of August 18, in which he said that he was without news for a long time. Is one of yours lost?

We have had quite an eventful summer, politically speaking. No, things are not going as we would wish. The French administration has almost ruined a wonderful opportunity. It may seem to be successful for a while but, by her refusal to understand that the epoch of the colonies is past and that a new solution is the only chance of conserving the French culture and prestige here (it is rather low since this last war, and goes down a little more with each stupidity), I am afraid that it may end up as in Syria or Lebanon, where similar mistakes have ruined France's predominant influence.

The daily work is always absorbing. It is far from being monotonous, because much is to be done in many directions, and the scale of values has changed much for us. All the same I would like to have a little time to take up certain questions of mathematics which interest me.

My health is good now. I have put on a few kilos and participate in some sports and varied and regular physical exercises. The example of the youngsters is contagious.

Here is a photo taken in May in which I am between Baron and Monod-Herzen.

A friend has sent me Lecomte du Nouÿ's recent book: *L'Homme et sa destinée* (*Man and His Destiny*). Has Papa read it? It has interested me much because in his effort he goes as far towards the light as a western scientific mind can go and because he also shows the formidable obstacle which is the West's natural incomprehension of true spirituality.

In the text I found a certain number of ideas expressed by Sri Aurobindo several years earlier (the principal works of Sri Aurobindo had appeared in the journal *Arya*, published in Pondicherry between 1914 and 1922):

- man, temporary culmination, but not the final word of the evolution;
- evolution must continue in the spiritual direction and not in the intellectual direction (which would reject Nietzsche's conception of the *superman*);
- man's necessary cooperation in the new plunge to be taken;
- an aid to the evolutionary progress subsequently becoming an obstacle, etc.

This book confirms my opinion that the synthesis at which Sri Aurobindo has arrived, is not in contradiction with modern science on any point — in the present instance biology and palaeontology. Rather, it receives from them a clear-cut support in several respects.

The chapters devoted to the biological evolution are extremely instructive, but those on religion, the idea of God, education, are much weaker, doubtless because these are not subjects very familiar to the author, doubtless also because it is not possible to speak of them in depth and with amplitude by ignoring the major contribution made by India to these questions. It is the same criticism that I level at Bergson. To the Hindu readers, the chapters in question leave the impression of a

superficial and narrow thinking. One finds there the confusion, current in the West, between religion, morality and spirituality. This last term must be applied only to the life in the Spirit, that is to say to the realisation of the inner divine Presence and to the resulting orientation towards an intimacy, then an increasing union with the Divine.

In spite of these imperfections, this book is important due to the clear stand of official science (one can consider the author to be one of its legitimate representatives) against the materialism which has reigned supreme for fifty years.

This is to tell you that if in Europe or in America one seeks, sometimes desperately, a remedy for the present chaos which exists in every field, it does not seem that the minds are yet ready to accept the synthesis presented by Sri Aurobindo due to a lack of discernment in spiritual matters. This lack of proper discernment also explains why the pseudo-mystics or religious charlatans so easily captivate the attention and the credulity of the public (this is true above all in the United States).

Give me your news. Where are you? I am writing to you in Paris, thinking that you must have returned there. What with the miners' and others' strikes, you will have a great deal of trouble to keep yourselves warm this winter in Paris. If only I could send you a little of the Indian sun! (Not today, it is raining, because we are at the turn of the monsoon season.)

I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

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### SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.  
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY  
India  
December 21, 1948

My dear Parents,

Here is the end of the year. This is the time when all of us draw up more or less the balance sheet of the past year and the projects for the one that is beginning. My thoughts will be especially with you these days, above all on the first of January, the day of family reunion. Please convey my best wishes to Albert, Denise, their children and all the others.

For you, my very dear Parents, my sincere and loving wishes, for the inner life

as well as for the outer life. The ones which I formulate specially are for the peace, the light and the joy which result from the contact with the soul and the inner Presence. Nothing can replace them. Without them, all the rest is empty and lifeless; with them, life takes on its real meaning.

Here, for French India, the report is bad. A total political chaos reigns. In fact, for France in India, 1948 will have been the year of lost opportunities. Perhaps they will never be found!

As for me, I continue to put my health back in order. The rest is very fine.  
I embrace you lovingly and filially, your

*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.)

*You forget that men differ in nature and therefore each will approach the sadhana in his own way — one through work, one through bhakti, one through meditation and knowledge — and those who are capable of it, through all together. You are perfectly justified in following your own way, whatever may be the theories of others — but let them follow theirs. In the end all can converge together towards the same goal.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 532-33)*

# **SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI**

*(Continued from the issue of May 2011)*

## **CHAPTER III**

*Introduction — 3*

### **The Saga Irresistible**

When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth . . .<sup>1</sup>

wrote Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

It is amazing that legends should grow around a person who was most reluctant for publicity. Though he was like the priest who invoked the aspiration for freedom dormant in the nation and who, in the words of the renowned historian R. C. Majumdar, “infused by his precept and example, courage and strength into everyone that came in touch with him,” he, it seems was by nature too self-effacing even to be conscious of his accomplishments. The fact, however, is, to quote Majumdar again,

The dazzling light he shed on Indian politics did not vanish with him; the torch which he lighted continued to illumine Indian politics till it passed into the hands of worthy successors who led it to its destined goal.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Majumdar many authors who use history for their theses are not necessarily serious or true historians. Their vision does not penetrate the froth and foam on the streams of time. ‘How important a role could a leader with his presence of less than five years on the political arena play?’— is a question that naturally dominates their sense of assessment. They focus on the register of eye-catching deeds on the surface, not on the impact of the ideas and quiet actions underneath them that go on working slowly over a long span of time. To cite once again a statement from that epoch-making fighter Subhas Chandra Bose about his inspiration — though his method of action at its later phase would not have been approved by Sri Aurobindo:



The illustrious example of Aurobindo Ghose looms large before my vision. I feel that I am ready to make the sacrifice which that example demands of me.<sup>3</sup>

Other factors apart, the single biggest cause that made the shy Sri Aurobindo a legend is the fact that his was the first voice to demand unqualified freedom for the country, an idiom unheard till then — a fact that is often passed over if not deliberately ignored. He did so without the slightest inhibition at a time when many leading national figures of the day would have shuddered to proclaim anything resembling such an idea. Sri Aurobindo rarely spoke of the interviews and interactions he had with several important persons of his time, even if one among them were to be no less a person than J. Ramsay Macdonald, the future Prime Minister of Great Britain. To a question from this visiting celebrated Labour leader as to the end which was being worked out by the Indian administration, Sri Aurobindo's unexpected answer was, "A free and independent India"!

Sri Aurobindo shone for years as the brightest star on the Indian firmament. . . His genius shot up like a meteor. He was on the high skies only for a time. He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light<sup>4</sup>

wrote an early historian of the Indian National Congress. His political voice fell silent, but before long the ideal of freedom began echoing all over the country through a dozen other robust voices and that was what the pioneer himself must have desired. But it also accounts for the pioneer's role being overlooked.

This brings to mind an anecdote from the mystic lore. Once a childless woman met a sage who was camping in a nearby village and prayed for the boon of a son. Reminisced the sage, "My mother too had remained childless for long. She met a sage — who became my guru years later — and prayed for the same boon. The guru asked him to fetch the costliest item she had treasured at home. My mother had a piece of silver as an heirloom. Carrying that she went to meet the sage but by then he had left the village for a town that was miles away. My mother walked the distance all alone but by the time she reached the town the sage had moved away to the mountains. My poor mother resumed her travel by foot weathering heat and storms and at last found the sage many days later. The sage accepted her gift and gave it back to her and blessed her. Thus was I born."

"O great soul, I too would go home and fetch the most precious item we have and come back and if by then you have left this place I will go forward in search of you until I find you. I will do exactly what your mother did," said the woman.

"My child, you cannot do exactly what my mother did, for you have an example before you; she had none," said the sage and he added, "that makes all the difference."

Indeed, great are those who demanded the freedom of the country and they

deserve their place in history, but somehow the one who set the example has not been given the importance he deserves. It does not matter to Sri Aurobindo the Mahayogi, but it matters to the history of the subcontinent.

Once again we find Sri Aurobindo in the unique role of the pathfinder and the herald of the evolutionary destiny of man. If his vision and realisation of the Supramental and his Yoga for its descent were experiences restricted to him and his spiritual associate the Mother, his works explaining the present human predicament and his analysis of the evolutionary progression and his conclusions about its future are a gift nonpareil for any seeker, be one's quest spiritual, intellectual, ethical or socio-psychological. He presents a prospect that stands eminently out from all the distinguished theories, theses and philosophies of our time. It is important to remember here that even though he is counted among the philosophers by academics, he clearly excused himself from that honorific. In fact, he wrote in a communication to a disciple,

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether.<sup>5</sup>

If a certain circumstance obliged him to write what is viewed as philosophy, what he put down in the terms of the intellect were his experiences and observations in the course of his practice of Yoga.

It is but natural that the world has only begun to wake up to his vision and has not yet realised the mightily beneficent role the awareness of the vision could play in the life of humanity, preoccupied as it is with the hitherto unimaginable problems of war, conflict and tensions of numerous kinds on one hand and the mighty leaps in science, technology and communications on the other hand. The latter set of developments of course are the outcome of a natural evolutionary law of progress with which man must either keep pace in terms of his consciousness or suffer the consequences of a devastating disharmony.

The crisis we face today cannot be defined in terms of politics, economics, ethics, religion or even psychology. It is all-comprehending and still deeper. This is how Sri Aurobindo diagnoses the situation:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administra-

tive, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it.<sup>6</sup>

Dichotomies galore stare us in the face. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, as all will agree, was the most eventful period in the recorded history of time. Great wars and great revolutions, liquidation of empires, end of paramount monarchy and its ally, feudalism, widespread practice of democracy and socialism, recognition of human rights in its various aspects, growth of feminism — all point at the growth of social and political freedom of the individual. But the freedom has also been put to gross misuse, at the individual as well as collective planes. If the individual ego manifests in crude attachment to and greed for power and wealth, the collective ego manifests through varieties of fanaticism, mostly religious, racist and caste-based. Drug-addiction, violence and anarchy are certainly not outcomes of freedom, but the air of freedom has added to their growth. We have achieved great speed in our communication and movement, but time seems to slip through our fingers; we have at our disposal numerous gadgets and amenities to facilitate our activities and ease our life-style, but our angst and anxiety have multiplied; man, on the whole, feels alienated on several fronts.

The list of paradoxes can be long. But the essential conclusion that can be drawn is simple. It is not that we lack fine ideals, will and even goodwill, but something inexplicable happens somewhere, turning a one-time patriot into a power-hungry tyrant, a genuine idealist into an egotist, a man once prepared to sacrifice his life for a cause into a self-centred coward cringing in an illusory shell of security through more power or more wealth. Needless to say, there is something concealed in our consciousness that introduces an element of corrosion into the process of our applying the ideal in our action and in living it. Unless this element is transformed, any qualitative change in human conduct is improbable.

Can this element be ever transformed? That is the question of supreme importance. Once we recognise the fact that there is a gradual ascent and expansion of consciousness upon this earth — and that human life is its most conspicuous evidence — we cannot in principle dismiss the possibility of a further development along the line or even an exceeding of the line. Then arises the question: What could or should be the *modus operandi* of that legitimately visualised development? Great moral, ethical or religious lights have failed to achieve much with humanity as a whole even though individuals have benefited by them:

A fire has come and touched men's hearts and gone;  
A few have caught flame and risen to greater height.<sup>7</sup>

By no means is it easy for our intellect to visualise the future of man as Sri Aurobindo envisages it. Probably the most candid articulation of scepticism in this regard is to be found in Bertrand Russell's observation:

Apart from the minuteness and brevity of human species, I cannot feel that it is a worthy climax to such an enormous prelude. There is a rather repulsive smugness and self-complacency in the argument that man is so splendid as to be evidence of infinite wisdom and infinite power in his creator. Those who use this kind of reasoning always try to concentrate our attention on the few saints and sages; they try to make us forget the Neros and Attilas and Hitlers and the millions of mean poltroons to whom such men owed their power. And even what is best in us is apt to lead to disaster. Religions that teach brotherly love have been used as an excuse for persecution, and our profoundest scientific insight is made into a means of mass destruction.<sup>8</sup>

The cruelty and injustice of man towards Nature and the creatures of the earth cannot be undone, but our awareness of these wrongs is a sign of our anxiety that they should not and must not be perpetrated. It is obvious that Russell's own effort to free the world from nuclear and other destructive actions are among the forces opposing the evil at work. Despite all appearances to the contrary, humanity in general stands by these positive forces.

These are precisely some of the issues on which Sri Aurobindo dwells in his prose magnum opus, *The Life Divine*. Alas, the problem of evil cannot be wished away nor can the concept of goody-goody God stand up to the cynic's age-old challenge. The problem of evil cannot be tackled nor its role understood without all-comprehensive knowledge of the Creation and the process of man's journey forward through inconscience and ignorance.

. . . grief, pain, suffering, error, falsehood, ignorance, weakness, wickedness, incapacity, non-doing of what should be done and wrong-doing, deviation of will and denial of will, egoism, limitation, division from other beings with whom we should be one, all that makes up the effective figure of what we call evil, are facts of the world-consciousness, not fictions and unrealities, *although they are facts whose complete sense or true value is not that which we assign to them in our ignorance. . .*<sup>9</sup> (Italics added)

says Sri Aurobindo.

He further states,

. . . a limited consciousness growing out of nescience is the source of error, a personal attachment to the limitation and the error born of it the source of falsity, a wrong consciousness governed by the life-ego the source of evil. But it is evident that their relative existence is only a phenomenon thrown up by the cosmic Force in its drive towards evolutionary self-expression . . .<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo elaborates his vision of the process of transformation as he visualised it not as a thinker or philosopher but as the Seer who saw it and as the Yogi who participated in it and who passed on the task of its continuous pursuit at the physical plane to the Mother. A study of his works and the words of the Mother will surely go a long way in revealing to us their vision and the inevitability of its realisation. A common sense cerebration should also whisper to us that all that man had aspired for since the dawn of his consciousness — ‘God, light, freedom, bliss and immortality’ under various names — and which have continued to elude him — will one day be realised.

. . . an eternal Perfection is moulding us into its own image.<sup>11</sup>

says Sri Aurobindo. Through the accumulating experience of all our endeavours, their success as well as failure, we are striving to come closer to that perfection and it has one day to be attained.

The role faith can play is different. Once, a professor while concluding his talk on evolution said that the most satisfying supplement to that process could be found not in science but in the theory of involution put forth by Sri Aurobindo and that with the unfoldment of what still remains involved in mind, namely the Supermind, our present life had the prospect of changing into a divine life. Some learned members in the audience murmured sceptically about the possibility of man as he is today, so filthy in his mind, becoming divine in nature. An old retired primary teacher who was sitting nearby overheard them. Later, drawing the speaker’s attention to a pond he observed, “When I see a lotus emerging out of the mud and mire there with the Grace of sunlight, I do not understand why anybody should doubt the possibility of a divine consciousness emerging out of the mud and mire that the present human mind is, as a result of the intervention of the Grace of the Divine.”

Once we accept the proposition of man’s evolving potentiality, many a theory of psychology and philosophy must undergo revision and our overall attitude to the *raison d’être* of our existence has to change radically.

But our appreciation of this vision sublime does not depend on a chronological presentation of Sri Aurobindo’s life. That is to be studied for the sake of our most cherished quest. One of the inspirations behind taking up this biographical exercise is to see how vastly a life could be lived. Simultaneously while venturing into the hitherto uncharted expanses of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo could produce volumes

of prose and poetry, including a great epic, to satisfy the human intelligence on the mysteries, riddles, and paradoxes of our existence (probably harnessing the largest vocabulary in English, for he covered a range of subjects that no other author had dared — philosophy, sociology, political science, Indology, drama, poetry, criticism and, to top them all, Yoga and spirituality), could write, exercising a super-human patience, thousands of letters answering questions on innumerable queries on different topics and condescend to discuss with his attendant-disciples, at their level of comprehension, issues profound and trivial with an inimitable zest. He would discourage outstanding personalities from trying to secure for him a Nobel Prize, but accept an award offered by a university . . .

Indeed, his life is a great saga by itself, at once lovely and amazing and irresistible.

*(To be continued)*

MANOJ DAS

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## DETERMINATION AND WILL

*(Continued from the issue of May 2011)*

THE individual being, and particularly the mind in it, have an instinctive repulsion to admitting that it's another force than their own small personal one which does things. There is a kind of instinct which makes you feel absolutely convinced that the effort of aspiration, the will to progress are things belonging to you by your own right and, therefore, that you have all the merit. (*CWM*, Vol. 7, p. 358)

\*

You can put your will at the service of your desire, but desire is not will. Desire is an impulse. There are people who are full of desires and who have no will.

*(CWM, Vol. 6, p. 410)*

\*

It is difficult to get rid of all habits. They must be faced with a steady determination.

*(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 160)*

\*

. . . in general it is good to have a strong will. When you have a strong will you have only to direct it properly; when you do not have a will you first have to develop one, which always takes time and is sometimes difficult. (*CWM*, Vol. 17, p. 29)

\*

One must have an unvarying will to acquire what one does not have in one's nature, to know what one does not yet know, to be able to do what one cannot yet do. . . .

If one has a strong will, he has only to orient it properly; if he has no will, he has first of all to build one for himself, which always takes long and is sometimes difficult. (*CWM*, Vol. 14, p. 158)

\*

. . . by will and practice one can learn to concentrate on somebody or something and to get consciously identified with this person or this thing, and through this identification you know the nature of the person or the thing. (*Ibid.*, pp. 50-51)

\*

You know, the only way of knowing the Divine is by identifying oneself with Him. There is no other, there is only one, one single way. . . .

. . . what hinders the experience is the absence of the practice of concentration, and also the absence of one-pointedness, singleness of purpose, of will. One “wants” it for a minute, two minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, an hour, and afterwards, one wants many other things. . . . One “thinks” about it for a few seconds, and after that thinks of a thousand other things. So naturally in this way you could take an eternity. (*CWM*, Vol. 5, pp. 223-24)

\*

But the will is something altogether different. It is the capacity to concentrate on everything one does, do it as best one can and not stop doing it unless one receives a very precise intimation that it is finished. (*Ibid.*, p. 46)

\*

Concentration does not mean meditation; on the contrary, concentration is a state one must be in continuously, whatever the outer activity. By concentration I mean that all the energy, all the will, all the aspiration must be turned only towards the Divine and His integral realisation in our consciousness.

(*CWM*, Vol. 16, pp. 177-78)

\*

It is by the concentration of our will and the intensity of our aspiration that we can hasten the day of victory. (*Ibid.*, p. 23)

\*

Essentially, from the general point of view, particularly from the intellectual viewpoint, the most important thing is the capacity of attention and concentration, it is that which one must work at and develop. From the point of view of action (physical action), it is the will: you must work and build up an unshakable will. From the intellectual point of view, you must work and build up a power of concentration which nothing can shake. And if you have both, concentration and will, you will be a genius and nothing will resist you. (*CWM*, Vol. 5, p. 128)

\*



Moreover, whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of *everything*, the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, *nothing* can resist it — whatever it may be, from the most material physical development to the highest spiritual one.

(CWM, Vol. 9, p. 360)

\*

What should be done? . . . Be sincere.

That's it; always, always, the little worm in the fruit. One tells oneself, "Oh! I can't." It is not true, if one wanted, one could.

And there are people who tell me, "I don't have the will-power." That means you are not sincere. For sincerity is an infinitely more powerful force than all the wills in the world. It can change anything whatever in the twinkling of an eye . . .

(CWM, Vol. 8, p. 19)

\*

You have the immense privilege of having come quite young to the Ashram, that is to say, still plastic and capable of being moulded according to this new ideal and thus become the representatives of the new race. Here, in the Ashram, you are in the most favourable conditions with regard to the environment, the influence, the teaching and the example, to awaken in you this supramental consciousness and to grow according to its law.

Now, all depends on your will and your sincerity. If you have the will no more to belong to ordinary humanity, no more to be merely evolved animals; if your will is to become men of the new race realising Sri Aurobindo's supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth, you will find here all the necessary help to achieve your purpose; you will profit fully by your stay in the Ashram and eventually become living examples for the world. (CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 116-17)

\*

Because a thing is difficult it does not mean that one should give it up; on the contrary, the more difficult a thing is, the greater must be the will to carry it out successfully.

Of all things the most difficult is to bring the divine consciousness into the material world. Must the endeavour then be given up because of this?

(CWM, Vol. 16, p. 181)

\*

After all, what is freedom? To go about doing whatever you like? But do you know what is “you”? Do you know what is your own will? Do you know what comes from you and what comes from elsewhere? Well, if you had a strong will I could have allowed you to work. But it is not like that; it is only impulses that move you and they are also not your own. They come from outside and make you do all sorts of stupid things. You fall into the hands of the Rakshasas. First they make you do stupid things and then they laugh. If you have a strong will, if your will, your impulses and all else are centred around the psychic, then and then alone can you have some taste of liberty and freedom; otherwise you are a slave.

(CWM, Vol. 15, p. 23)

\*

If you persist in your will and your effort, you are sure to learn how to come and find me at night during your sleep and afterwards to remember what has happened.

For this, two things are necessary, which you must develop by aspiration and by calm and persistent effort.

- 1) Concentrate your thought on the will to come and find me . . .
- 2) Establish a sort of bridge between the waking and the sleeping consciousness. . .

(CWM, Vol. 16, pp. 226-27)

\*

By what right do you want your will to influence others? Each one should be free. It is only the guru who has the right to impose his will on the will of the disciple who has chosen him. (CWM, Vol. 15, p. 253)

\*

. . . if you have a bad thought that annoys and disturbs you, write it down very attentively, very carefully, putting as much consciousness and will as you can. Then take the piece of paper and, with concentration, tear it up with the will that the thought will be torn up in the same way. That is how you will get rid of it.

(CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 309-10)

\*

*Mother, my sweet Mother, when shall I become one with You. When shall I live in You and for You?*

You must will with persistence, but not get impatient. Through calm determination you will achieve it more quickly. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 72)

\*

*Sweet Mother,*

*How can one remember at every moment that whatever one does is for You? Particularly when one wants to make a complete offering, how should one proceed, never forgetting that it is for the Divine?*

To achieve that, one must have an *obstinate will* and a *great patience*. But once one has taken the resolution to do it, the divine help will be there to support and to help. This help is felt inwardly in the heart. (CWM, Vol. 16, p. 398)

\*

*Sweet Mother,*

*We know that we should not do certain things and we do not really want to do them, but still we do them. Why does this happen? How can we avoid it?*

That's how it is when one is lacking in will and in force of consciousness.

Both of these can be acquired if one is sincere in one's aspiration.

(*Ibid.*, p. 327)

\*

*How can one transform the vital?*

The first step: will. Secondly, sincerity and aspiration. But will and aspiration are almost the same thing, one follows the other. Then, perseverance. Yes, perseverance is necessary in any process . . . (CWM, Vol. 4, p. 247)

\*

*I don't understand the difference between willing and aspiring, or how to do both things at once.*

If you cannot do both things at once, then just do one of them.

(CWM, Vol. 17, p. 123)

\*

*Are tapasya and aspiration the same thing?*

No, you can't do tapasya without aspiration. Aspiration is first, the will to attain something. Tapasya is the process — there is indeed a process, a method.

(CWM, Vol. 4, p. 343)

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“... *the mental will and the psychic aspiration must be your support.*”

[Bases of Yoga]

Yes, but the mind also can aspire. But psychic aspiration is more powerful than mental aspiration, and the mind must have its own will. If one speaks of the mental will and the psychic aspiration it does not mean that the mind has no aspiration and the psychic no will. It is just saying what is the most important thing in each of these. But it doesn't mean that it has only this. It can have all the other movements too. (CWM, Vol. 7, p. 9)

\*

*How can one increase single-mindedness and will-power?*

Through regular, persevering, obstinate, unflagging exercise — I mean exercise of concentration and will. (CWM, Vol. 16, p. 316)

\*

*Please give me some advice on how to concentrate and be ready to receive Your grace.*

Will for this concentration and strengthen your will. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 129)

\*

*What can I do to strengthen my will?*

Educate it, exercise it, as you exercise your muscles — through use. (Ibid., p. 30)

\*

*Sweet Mother, when one sees an illness coming, how can one stop it?*

Ah! First of all, you must not want it and nothing in the body must want it. You must have a very strong will not to be ill. This is the first condition.

(CWM, Vol. 7, p. 142)

\*

*You tell me to observe silence and to go into the solitude of my psychic being, but how can I do that? Only You can put me in that state.*

This is a completely tamasic reply. My consciousness is always at work, but you on your side must *exert your will and make an effort*. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 99)

\*

*Teach me how to make an effort to find You.*

You must exert your will. (*Ibid.*, p. 100)

\*

*Will You tell me, Mother, what to do to get rid of egoism?*

One achieves it by persistently willing it. (*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55)

\*

*How must one merge oneself one's separative ego in the divine Consciousness?*

. . . How can one dissolve, you mean dissolve in the Divine, and lose one's ego?

First of all, one must will it. And then one must aspire with great perseverance, and each time the ego shows itself, one must give it a little rap on the nose (*Mother taps her nose*) until it has received so many raps that it is tired of them and gives up the game. (CWM, Vol. 6, pp. 253-54)

\*

*I think that only the Grace can enable me to forget myself.*

You must also exert your will. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 148)

\*

*Please tell me how this great loss of Your Presence, of happiness and love, has come about and how to find them again.*

By a firm and steady will and a calm determination, by refusing to let external things disturb you, by trusting in the Divine Grace and surrendering to its decisions. (*Ibid.*, p. 149)

\*

*This prison that separates me from You and from the Divine must be broken. O Mother, I don't know what I ought to do.*

It is in a calm and persevering will that this can be accomplished.

(CWM, Vol. 16, p. 158)

\*

*My dear mother,*

*I don't know what to do. I want to open to you, but something prevents me from opening.*

My dear child,

You find it difficult to open because you have not yet made the resolution to allow my will, and not your own, to govern your life. As soon as you have understood the need for this, everything will become easier — and you will at last be able to acquire the peace you need so much.

I am always with you in this effort and aspiration. (*Ibid.*, p. 146)

\*

*Since this evening I have been feeling that a dark cloud has lifted and I feel happy. Is it true?*

You must *will* that it may be true and lasting. (CWM, Vol. 17, p. 30)

\*

*I want the psychic consciousness with all my heart; I will pay any price for it.*

The only price to be paid is a *persistent and unwavering will*. (*Ibid.*, p. 102)

\*

*Mother, I would like to know something about this flame of Agni.*

It is the flame of purification, the will for progress. (*Ibid.*, p. 80)

\*

*Mother, isn't it true that we should not think about our own progress?*

Certainly you should not worry about it, but you should have the will to progress.  
(*Ibid.*, p. 146)

\*

*. . . how can I avoid these contacts with the vital world and stop being tired?*

You must use your will before going to sleep. Have the will for a quiet rest during your sleep. (*Ibid.*, p. 149)

\*

*How can faith be increased?*

Through aspiration, I suppose. Some have it spontaneously . . . You see, it is difficult to pray if one doesn't have faith, but if one can make prayer a means of increasing one's faith, or aspiring, having an aspiration, having an aspiration to have faith . . . Most of these qualities require an effort. If one does not have a thing and wants to have it, well, it needs great, great, great sustained efforts, a constant aspiration, an unflagging will, a sincerity at each moment; then one is sure, it will come one day — it can come in a second. There are people who have it, and then they have contrary movements which come and attack. These people, if their will is sincere, can shield their faith, repel the attacks. (*CWM*, Vol. 6, p. 121)

\*

*Sweet Mother, how can we make our resolution very firm?*

By wanting it to be very firm! (*Laughter*)

No, this seems like a joke . . . but it is absolutely true. One does not want it truly. There is always, if you . . . It is a lack of sincerity. If you look sincerely, you will see that you have decided that it will be like this, and then, beneath there is something which has not decided at all and is waiting for the second of hesitation in order to rush forward. If you are sincere, if you are sincere and get hold of the part which is hiding, waiting, not showing itself, which knows that there will come a second of indecision when it can rush out and make you do the thing you have decided not to do . . .

But if you *really* want it, *nothing* in the world can prevent you from doing what you want. It is because one doesn't know how to will it. It is because one is *divided* in one's will. If you are not divided in your will, I say that nothing, nobody in the world can make you change your will.

But one doesn't know how to will it. In fact one doesn't even want to. These are velleities: "Well, it is like this. . . . It would be good if it were like that . . . yes, it would be better if it were like that . . . yes, it would be preferable if it were like

that.” But *this* is not to will. And always there at the back, hidden somewhere in a corner of the brain, is something which is looking on and saying, “Oh, why should I want that? After all one can as well want the opposite.” And to try, you see . . . Not like that, just wait . . . But one can always find a thousand excuses to do the opposite. And ah, just a tiny little wavering is enough . . . pftt . . . the thing swoops down and there it is. But if one *wills*, if one really *knows* that *this* is the thing, and truly wants this, and if one is *oneself* entirely concentrated in the will, I say that there is *nothing* in the world that can prevent one from doing it, from doing it or being obliged to do it. It depends on what it is.

One wants. Yes, one wants, like this (*gestures*). One wants: “Yes, yes, it would be better if it were like that. Yes, it would be finer also, more elegant.” . . . But, eh, eh, after all one is a weak creature, isn’t that so? And then one can always put the blame upon something else: “It is the influence coming from outside, it is all kinds of circumstances.”

A breath has passed, you see. You don’t know . . . something . . . a moment of unconsciousness . . . “Oh, I was not conscious.” You are not conscious because you do not accept . . . And all this because you don’t know how to will.

To learn how to will is a very important thing. And to will truly, you must unify your being. In fact, to be a being, one must first unify oneself. If one is pulled by absolutely opposite tendencies, if one spends three-fourths of one’s life without being conscious of oneself and the reasons why one does things, is one a real being? One does not exist. One is a mass of influences, movements, forces, actions, reactions, but one is not a being. One begins to become a being when one begins to have a will. And one can’t have a will unless one is unified.

And when you have a will, you will be able to say, say to the Divine: “I want what You want.” But not before that. Because in order to want what the Divine wants, you must have a will, otherwise you can will nothing at all. You would like to. You would like it very much. You would very much like to want what the Divine wants to do. You don’t possess a will to give to Him and to put at His service. Something like that, gelatinous, like jelly-fish . . . there . . . a mass of good wills — and I am considering the better side of things and forgetting the bad wills — a mass of good wills, half-conscious and fluctuating. . . . (*Ibid.*, pp. 346-48)

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*Mother, there are mistakes . . . one knows they are mistakes, but still it is as though one were pushed into making them. Then?*

Pushed by what? Ah, this is exactly what happens! It is the lower nature, the instincts of the subconscious which govern you and make you do things you should not do. And so it is a choice between your will and accepting submission. There is always



a moment when one can decide. . . .

And it is a choice between weak submission and a controlling will. And if the will is clear, if it is based on truth, if truly it obeys the truth and is clear, it always has the power to refuse the wrong movement. It is an excuse you give yourself when you say, "I could not." It is not true. It is that truly you have not wanted it in the right way. For there is always the choice between saying "yes" and saying "no". But one chooses to be weak and later gives oneself this excuse, saying, "It is not my fault; it was stronger than I." It is your fault if the thing was stronger than you. Because you are not these impulses, you are a conscious soul and an intelligent will, and your duty is to see that *this* is what governs you and not the impulses from below.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 343-44)

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*What is the place of training or discipline in surrender? If one surrenders, can he not be without discipline? Does not discipline sometimes hamper?*

Maybe. But a distinction must be made between a method of development or discipline and a willed action. Discipline is different; I am speaking of willed action. If you surrender you have to give up effort, but that does not mean that you have to abandon also all willed action. On the contrary, you can hasten the realisation by lending your will to the Divine Will. That too is surrender in another form.

What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will. (*CWM*, Vol. 3, p. 18)

\*

*Sweet Mother, how can we escape from other people's influence?*

By concentrating more and more totally and completely on the Divine. If you aspire with all your ardour, if you want to receive only the divine influence, if all the time you pull back towards yourself what is taken, caught by other influences and with your will put it under the divine influence, you succeed in doing it. It's a work that can't be done in a day, in a minute; you must be vigilant for a very long time, for years; but one can succeed.

First of all you must will it. (*CWM*, Vol. 7, p. 241)

(*Concluded*)

(*Compiled by Gautam Malakar*)

## THE LUMINOUS PAST

*(Continued from the issue of May 2011)*

THE school was behind the Playground. After Pranab-da came, the Mother gave him the charge of organising sports and games. A new life began for us. Boys and girls were treated alike in the physical education activities. Just as men and women began to have their meals together, in the same manner boys and girls too started playing together. The uniforms were almost the same also: the girls wore white shorts and white shirt, and tied a 'kittycap' on their head [to keep the hair out of the way during the sports activities] while the men wore navy blue shorts and a white shirt. Overnight the old bearded *sadhaks* were transformed into clean-shaven men. Everybody had to put on their uniform and attend the marching under Pranab-da's directions in the evenings. It started with a salute to the Mother. Even the elderly ladies, when asked how they felt about this transformation, openly answered, "We like it very much. We are enjoying ourselves." Pranab-da was particular about all that concerned marching. If the young men made a mistake, he would bring the mike closer to his mouth and call the person by name, and say, "You are making a mistake. Please correct yourself." But when it came to the ladies he would quietly go closer and say, "Please correct your step." We were all very happy about Pranab-da's politeness. The Playground was very small. So, the Mother rented a bigger place near the sea and made arrangements so that we could play different games such as basketball and tennis. Walking and running were done on the public roads. All the other competitions were held in the Tennis Ground. The Mother did not come in the morning. Pranab-da did everything himself. Every evening the Mother used to play tennis with Pranab-da [and some others]. By and by, everybody started participating more in the sporting activities. Arrangements were made for sea-swimming. The Sports Ground was made ready. It was a huge ground, and there was endless opportunity for sports. Football, cricket and all sorts of other games were played there. The swimming pool was constructed. The viewing galleries were built. Now the competitions were held in this Sports Ground. For the walking and running events, the Mother herself would stand with the tape at the finish line. On one side it was the Mother, while Vasudha held the other end of the tape. When one person finished, she waited for the next. It seemed to us that the Mother showed more compassion for the one who came last. She kept looking at him so that he would not give up midway and would reach the end. In the long distance races, there was someone who looked very weak, who came panting, far behind all the others, very slowly. It looked as if he couldn't continue any more. However, the Mother, sympathetically, waited for him. After great effort and after a long time,

when he finally came close to the finishing line, his speed increased. He somehow stumbled and crossed the line. The Mother, with her soothing smile, made it clear that he had come first in the test of perseverance. In the Mother's presence, through these games and sports, there was so much to learn! Patience, perseverance, tolerance, enthusiasm, will power and so much more.

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The Mother once organised at the Sports Ground a display by visiting Russian gymnasts. Before this the Mother took us to a cinema hall in Pondicherry to watch a film on Russian gymnastics. We had also watched a few Russian films in the Playground. However, there is a great difference between seeing a film and seeing it really before one's eyes. The members of the Russian team who came here did not seem to have much softness or gentleness outwardly; the women as well as the men were all very strongly built, but the suppleness of their body which I saw was beyond comparison. After I saw the gymnastics of the Russian men and women, it became very clear to me that man is indeed God's greatest creation. Their gracefulness was something to marvel at. Their bodies were trained to be light as flowers and they showed us through their performance how much control they had over every part of their bodies. Such bodies would be required to go beyond the human limits. The end of the event was the most beautiful part. By having the March Past with the Mother's flag along with the Russian flag, the Mother created a union of the East and the West. As a form of blessings, the Mother gave saris to the Russian ladies. They all wore those saris when they came to say goodbye. The Mother is the mother of the whole world. She is everyone's mother — she is the mother of the people of all races and all countries.

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Once we went to watch a football match between Bengal's Mohun Bagan Club and the Pondicherry team at the Pondicherry Military Ground. We went there marching in our shorts and shirts. Something very interesting happened on the way. The road which we took was very beautiful. As it was lined on both sides with large trees, it was very shady. An elderly Tamil gentleman was taking a nap under the shade of the trees along the road. He woke up as he heard our cadenced footsteps. He looked at us in surprised disbelief. On seeing women wearing shorts and shirts and marching on the open road he lowered his head in embarrassment. Then he sat down turning his back to us, with a gesture that seemed to say, "O Mother Earth, please open up!" However, the gentleman was silent. He did not comment or obstruct us.

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We reached the Military Ground. We waited for the Mother to come. A seat was placed for the Mother at the top of the gallery. The Mother arrived on time. Pranab-da accompanied the Mother to her seat then took the boys into the ground. We also sat down around the Mother on the gallery. Mohun Bagan versus the Pondicherry eleven. We saw the fantastic game played by Mohun Bagan. They were the winners. This Mohun Bagan team then came and stood in front of the Mother. The Pondicherry Governor handed to the Mother the cup which was given as a prize to the Mohun Bagan team. The Mohun Bagan boys created a memorable ambience. They stood in front of the Mother and in one voice, cried out three times, "Three cheers to our Ma." This word "Ma" was a shining proof of their deep respect, devotion, love and sweetness. The Mother was delighted. She accepted them as her devoted children by stretching out both hands in a gesture of blessing.

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The Mother invited Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee to inaugurate the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.<sup>1</sup> Our new Tennis Ground had just been acquired. For three days the Mother was herself present during the lectures delivered by Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee and other learned personalities. This happened after Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi. Dr. Shyamaprasad gave an emotional speech. Right at the beginning he addressed the Mother as "The Eternal Mother". His speech delivered in his deep and sonorous voice seemed to be full of a mantric power. He said, "This Mother is deeper than the sea, higher than the sky, bigger than the earth." His heart's devotion endeared him to us and we considered him a deeply humble disciple devoted to the Mother. The Mother, as a mark of her blessings, gave him many books and signed her name in the Bengali script on them.

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Many wise and learned people placed the Mother on the seat of high honour and thus expressed their adoration for her. The Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi showed their loving admiration for her. Quite a few Presidents desirous of the Mother's blessings came to meet her. From many countries those in search of Truth came seeking the Mother's blessing and advice. It was because of the Playground that these visits and meetings became easier as the annual programme held under the guidance of Pranab-da attracted many people.

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1. In fact, the inauguration was for Sri Aurobindo University Centre. Later it was renamed Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. [Translator's note]

In this Playground sometimes some funny incidents also used to take place. If Pranab-da came close to someone it was understood that the person was making a mistake. If we asked them afterwards, they did not want to admit it. Two *sadhikas* of the old days had a long heated argument on this subject after the marching practice one day. So I turned to them and laughingly said, “I too make mistakes. Even though I started learning marching before you, I still go wrong.” Then I added, “In spite of this, on seeing our marching, a captain from Bihar was full of praise. He had tried for a whole month to teach some policemen with the traditional orders of ‘One, Two’, but he had failed. So he tied some grass on the left foot and hay on the right foot and commanded, ‘Grass, Hay’ to teach them marching. With this method, they picked up the skill in a few days. The officer also was promoted. After listening to my story, both of them forgot their quarrels and went to wash their hands to receive the groundnuts.<sup>2</sup>

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Just after I came to the Ashram, at the beginning, I had a great curiosity to know all the little details of the Ashram’s early years. One day I asked Nolini-da why he washed his own dishes in spite of there being servants around. Nolini-da said in answer that in the early days they did their own work themselves. Following that habit he also washed his own clothes. They did not ask for more clothes than they needed. When they received new clothes, they returned the old ones. They had to be very careful about their expenditure.

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One day I asked Nolini-da, whether, in the Alipore Jail, Sri Krishna had actually given a printed copy of the Gita to Sri Aurobindo. After thinking for a moment, Nolini-da replied, “No, it was not a printed copy of the Gita. It was the message of the Gita which was given in the depth of his inner being.” As I was turning to go, he asked me to read Sri Aurobindo’s book, “Karakahini”. I read that book several times. Later I also read the English translation of the book by Dr. Sisir Kumar Ghosh. Sisir-da had gifted this book to me.

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Now I am going to narrate to you about two elderly *sadhikas* of the early years. From them I gathered a lot of sweet and interesting stories. They were Seetabala-di and Sabitri-di. They were not so well-educated. But with great joy they would recount

2. The Mother used to distribute groundnuts after the activities of the Playground. [Translator’s note.]

marvellous and enchanting anecdotes about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. One day, Seeta-di fried some puffed rice which had come from her village and added to it some pieces of fried brinjal and sent them to Sri Aurobindo. Along with it she sent a letter written in the incomprehensible Chittagong dialect. In it she wrote, “Gurudev, my nephew has sent some fine rice to make puffed rice with. If you eat this it will bring me great joy. I am adding to it a few pieces of hot, fried brinjal.” She gave the food and the letter to Nolini-da. The next day, in the morning, Nolini-da called Seeta-di and told her happily, “Sri Aurobindo has sent some Prasad for you. Here is the answer to your letter. He has written, ‘I relished your hot fried puffed rice and the fried brinjal. Blessings.’” Nolini-da added, “I could not understand anything of your letter. Sri Aurobindo explained it to me.” In the days that followed Seeta-di used to keep that letter with her like a shield of protection and she used to say that it was the greatest possession she ever had in her life.

The usually serene Sabitri-di once quarrelled with one of her colleagues in the kitchen and both of them complained against each other to the Mother. In those days the Mother used to receive people’s *pranams* every morning. On hearing about the quarrel, the Mother asked both of them not to come for the *pranam* for the next three days. That very day in the afternoon, at lunch time, the Mother saw the list of all those whose birthday was on the next day and on that list, she saw Sabitri-di’s name. The Mother told Nolini-da to inform Sabitri-di that she could come to the Mother for blessings on her birthday. But Nolini-da forgot to tell her. So the next day the Mother gave Sabitri-di the opportunity to come and see her in the morning as well as in the afternoon. She was thrilled that she could go twice, but she was even happier to know that the Mother had forgiven her. She was seen with the birthday flowers in her hands, holding hands and walking with the friend with whom she had fought, like a free bird, and talking about the Mother. We were happy to see this. Once, Sabitri-di went through a very sad experience. Her psychologically unstable son, who used to also live in the Ashram, ran away without telling anybody. The Border Police sent him away before he could enter East Pakistan. Six months later, unknown to others, he came back. Sabitri-di hid him in her own room without informing the Mother and started feeding him her own share of food. After having fasted for two days she told me about this. I wrote a letter to the Mother about her and giving it to her, asked her to hand it to Amrita-da. She did as I told her. The Mother immediately called Nolini-da and made arrangements for Mohini’s [Sabitri-di’s son] stay and food. Nolini-da gave the keys of the adjacent room to Sabitri-di. Arrangements for food were also made. Nolini-da said, “The Mother was very unhappy when she came to know that you had spent two days without eating. Can anyone go hungry in the Mother’s kingdom?”

I can remember some more stories concerning food being sent to Sri Aurobindo. When we were in the Sadhana Centre in Chittagong, one morning after relishing some tasty preparations, we were so full of praise that we remarked they were worthy of being offered to God. As soon as he heard this, Mohini-da, who used to live there, at once, took the remaining food [Parashuram's flat rice and some snacks] and sent them by parcel to Pondicherry for Sri Aurobindo. He attached a note which said, "These are not available in the market at the moment. So, even though we have taken some from this we are sending them because we consider them extremely delicious." Ten or twelve days later, we received Nolini-da's letter. In it he had written, "Since Sri Aurobindo knows that you have not eaten this yourselves and sent it for him, he is eating it a little everyday. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are pleased with you and send you their blessings." Enclosed within the letter were rose petals.

I had once heard that a devotee had sent by parcel a sack full of *rukmani* mangoes for Sri Aurobindo. When the parcel arrived, the mangoes were found to be spoilt. The sack was sent to the Dining room. That very day, a letter arrived from the devotee wanting to know whether Sri Aurobindo had liked the mangoes. The Mother sent someone to the Dining room and asked him to sort out the good ones and had them brought over. After reading the letter, when Sri Aurobindo enquired about the mangoes, these were sent to him. After eating the mangoes, Sri Aurobindo informed the devotee, "The mangoes were very sweet." The devotee's heart was filled with joy.

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Even though Nolini-da was a man of serious disposition, he loved a joke and if we cracked a joke at his expense, he would enjoy that too. Once, Sabitri-di went to Nolini-da to ask for some envelopes and postcards. Nolini-da asked her to come later. Sabitri-di came out and sat down. A little later, I went in. When Sabitri-di understood that Nolini-da was giving me some envelopes, she came running in and said that she too wanted some. After I explained to Nolini-da what she was saying, he said, "This is one language I don't understand. When they speak I cannot understand even a single word." I found Nolini-da's words very amusing. Once I played a trick on him. When I first started wearing glasses many people could not recognise me when they saw me. Indu-di would recognise me after scrutinising me. Indu-di used to take great pleasure in teasing Nolini-da. She told me, "Pramila, go quickly to Nolini-da. If he cannot recognise you, just do a *pranam* and come away." Hesitatingly I went to him and as soon as I entered his room, Nolini-da said in a happy tone, "Have you all arrived? Where are the others from Pathmandir?" As soon as I took courage and took off the glasses, Nolini-da said, "I could not recognise

you because you were wearing the new glasses. Some people from Pathmandir were supposed to come.” I put on my glasses again and did a *pranam* to Nolini-da. He wanted to know why I did this *pranam*. So I told him what Indu-di had asked me to do. Nolini-da laughed and said, “Could she recognise you?” I answered, “Not at first sight.” Nolini-da laughed once again and said, “Can you see well now?” “Yes, I can, Nolini-da,” I said and came away. After hearing everything Indu-di said, “The whole day, he is busy with such cerebral work that he surely did not mind a little joke. See how I had a little fun.”

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Once, Amrita-da went ahead of Nolini-da to quickly put his head on the Mother’s feet. The Mother was then on the way to her room, with a garland of flowers in her hands. The Mother had to go inside to free her hands. When she came back, she saw that her dear Amrita was still waiting with his head touching the ground. The Mother, smiling a little, put her hand on Amrita-da’s head. Amrita-da then quickly placed his head on her feet. The Mother pressed both her hands, poured her love and blessed him. He got up immediately and placed his notebook in the Mother’s hands to get her signature. Then he hurriedly went away to finish his work at the bank.

*(To be continued)*

PRAMILA DEVI

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

### A Correction

The lines quoted on p. 420 of the May 2011 issue of the journal should have been:

“In lotus-groves Thy spirit roves: where shall I find a seat for Thee?”

(CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 558)

And the second footnote on the same page should have been:

The song was written in Bengali by Anilbaran and set to music by Dilip Kumar Roy. Sri Aurobindo translated it into English.



## RETURN OF THE RHAPSODE

*“He holds him with his glittering eye”*

VYASA, master raconteur, weaves a bewildering skein of threads to create a fascinating many-splendoured web from which there was no escape for the listener in the days of yore and there is still none for the reader today. The thousands of years that separate us from Vyasa have not dimmed the magic of the art that had entranced King Janamejaya and Shaunaka and his fellow sages. If proof be needed, here it is:

Shells were exploding over Leningrad. Enemy bombs were falling on the streets stirring up clouds of dust. On one of those spring days during the siege, Sanscrit language was being heard in the building of the Academy of Sciences on the Neva River embankment, in a room overlooking the side that was safer during the artillery strikes. First, in the original, and then in translation, Vladimir Kalyanov, a specialist on India, was reading Mahabharata, a wonderful monument of Indian literature, to his colleagues, who remained in the besieged city. He had started the translation before the war. He translated during the hard winter of 1941, with no light, no fuel and no bread in the city. Two volumes of books — one published in Bombay and the other in Calcutta — were lying on the table in the room. In the dim light of a wick lamp, he was comparing these two editions of Mahabharata, trying to find the best and the most accurate translation of the Sanscrit into Russian.

When, after the war the first book of Mahabharata — Adi Parva was published in Leningrad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, noted with great satisfaction that, even during the hardest times, the translation of the Indian epic into Russian was never interrupted.<sup>1</sup>

What is it in this epic-of-epics, eight times larger than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined — denounced as “a literary monster” by Winternitz, and as “monstrous chaos” by Oldenberg — that appeals so irresistibly to the modern man in search of his soul, when the audience for which it was composed — the enthroned monarch and the forest-dwelling sage — has long sunk into the dark abysm of time?

Seeking answers to questions such as these, we find a storyteller *par excellence* laying bare, at times quite pitilessly, the existential predicament of man in the universe. Vyasa shows us what man has made of man, plumbing the depths of the humiliatingly petty pre-occupations of the Creator’s noblest creation. Indeed, the

1. [http://www.300.years.spb.ru/eng/3\\_spb\\_3.html?id=5](http://www.300.years.spb.ru/eng/3_spb_3.html?id=5)

dilemmas the characters find themselves enmeshed in cannot even be glorified as “tragic”. Perhaps, that is why we find the epic so fascinating. For, how many of us are cast in the heroic mould? We do not have to strain the imagination to reach out and identify with Yayati or Shantanu. We need no willing suspension of disbelief to understand why the Brahmin Drona should sell his knowledge to the highest bidder, or why Drupada does not protest too much when his daughter is parcelled out among five brothers who had taken him prisoner. Passions do, indeed, spin the plot and we are betrayed by what is false within. Then, as now, there is no need to look for a villain manoeuvring without.

If we resonate in empathy with Arjuna’s and Aeneas’s *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt* (the sense of tears in mortal things), we also thrill with joy on meeting the indomitable spirit of woman in an epic that many misconceive as celebrating a male chauvinist outlook. Whether it is Shakuntala proudly asserting her integrity and berating churlish Dushyanta in open court; or Devayani demanding that Kacha return her love and imperiously brushing aside a lust-crazed husband; or Madhavi spurning *svayamvara* in favour of forest-life after being gifted by her father to four men to provide them with sons; or Kunti refusing to be perverted into a mindless son-producer to gratify the twisted desires of her frustrated husband; or Draupadi setting Kuru elders a question that is never answered; — time and again it is woman standing forth in all the splendour of her spirited autonomy as a complete human being that rivets our attention and evokes our admiration.

The attempts at translating the longest epic in the world in full make an interesting study. H. Fauche began the first French translation (1863-1870) but died leaving it incomplete. L. Ballin continued the work. A new French translation by Guy Vincent and Gilles Schaufelberger has completed four volumes arranged thematically, not following the original’s Parvas. In St. Petersburg, the Russian translation was started in 1941 by V. Kalyanov and is nearing the end. In the USA, J.A.B. van Buitenen of Chicago University died after finishing the Virata Parva. Two other American universities are continuing the work, but do not follow the sequence of the original. The other American project by the Clay Sanskrit Library has run out of sponsors. We have to revert to the 19<sup>th</sup> century for an almost complete English translation by K. M. Ganguli under P. C. Roy’s sponsorship (1883-1893). A parallel effort was undertaken by the Rector of Serampore College, M. N. Dutt at the same time. Both are vitiated for either omitting or Latinising passages “for obvious reasons” in the Victorian ambience. In 1968 Professor P. Lal took up the first verse-by-verse transcreation of Vyasa’s monumental composition. As of now, 16 of the 18 books have been published, leaving the massive Shanti and Anushasana Parvas to be completed. In addition, a “Mahabharata-Katha” series is being published with introductions bringing out the significance of certain key stories in Vyasa’s composition. Ganguli had Ray to sponsor him. Lal transcreates and publishes single-handed.

No one, however, dreamt of recreating the epic as an oral-aural experience.

Yet, that is what the *Mahabharata* is. The itinerant rhapsode Ugrashrava Sauti, son of the suta Lomaharshana (whose recitation gave the audience a hair-raising experience), recites it to the hermits participating in sage Shaunaka's great sacrificial ritual in the forest of Naimisha. Sauti is reproducing, he tells them, what he had heard Vaishampayana recite to King Janamejaya in the presence of the composer himself during the intervals of the holocaust of Nagas. It was in October 1999, near the turn of the millennium, that P. Lal, D.Litt., Padma Shri, Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow and Professor of English, began to read his transcreation to a live audience. A twenty-first century Sauti had arrived in the Sanskriti Sagar library on the ground floor of Birla Mandir in Kolkata! Later, Ratikanta Basu of TARA TV, realising the signal contribution being made in bringing the world's largest epic as a live experience to the English-knowing Indian, began telecasting the reading in segments. On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Writers' Workshop in 2009, the Governor of West Bengal, Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, released the first instalment of ten DVDs of the telecast experience with the text in a companion volume in a gorgeously produced presentation box.

Those who have read his earlier editions, or his riveting valedictory address to the 1987 national seminar on the epic organised by Sahitya Akademi, will be mistaken if they give this recording a miss. The introductory talk is a completely new and brilliant overview of the key issues in the *Mahabharata*, unique as much for its insights as its style. The Professor is, after all, at his best delivering a lecture. It is spiced with inimitable touches of punning sarcasm ("This is the mother of all epics, in fact the grandmother of all epics", "The battle of Kurukshetra — call it genocide, parricide, gurucide, suicide — whatever; such brotherly butchery!" Or, "The fathering of Yudhishtira by Vidura is one of the best-kept open secrets"). Unfortunately, it has not been included in the companion volume. Therefore, let us glimpse some of those piercing rays of illumination.

Prof. Lal begins with a question: "When, how and why did a mini-Bharata, a *katha* of 20,000 shlokas become a Mahabharata, a *kavya* of more than 1 lakh shlokas?" Actually, the figure for *Bharata* is 24,000 shlokas. Perhaps the most famous shloka of the epic, the most quoted, is the one that says "What is here on dharma, artha, kama and moksha may be elsewhere; what is not here is nowhere else." Is Vyasa, then, suggesting that the *kavya* has an answer to every problem in life, provides a cure-all for ills of world, a universal panacea? Strangely enough, that is what he is claiming. All scriptures and *shastras* were weighed against it and *Mahabharata* tipped the scale, "heavier than all those other respected heavies. And as it was heavier, had more "*bhāra*", it was known as *Bhārata*. The perfect panacea." But there is another meaning of the word that Prof. Lal overlooks: "war" (cf. Bhasa's *Karnabhara*). Akbar knew this. That is why, when he commissioned the Persian adaptation in 1582, he named it *Razm Nama*, the Book of War.

What, in medical jargon, is the Rx? This worries Arjuna on Kurukshetra, with the deepest conscientious objection to war. Krishna gives him the options of various

yogas, including the bloody end of the Dvapara Yuga, the extinction of the Kshatriyas. Krishna will not fight for him — that is his business. “You decide what is right for you. You are free to choose — *yatha icchasi tatha kuru*,” he says. Arjuna responds, “You are confusing me with bewildering choices — this isn’t fair. Tell me that one truth by which I may know you.” The point is, asks Prof. Lal, is there a one truth, a single magic formula, presented by Vyasa in this epic tale?

Perhaps because of the multiple layers of meaning Vyasa insisted that his amenuensis, *lekhaka*, Ganesha understand each word before taking it down.

“For what is the point of listening without understanding and assimilating? The language enshrines ideas and values; the style is only the tool. What matters is the meaning.”

Take the four *purusharthas*, for instance, the fourfold goal of human life. What is Vyasa recommending: Should we chase money or the meaning of money (Artha); lust or love (Kama) and at the root of both is sex and you cannot do without sex; ritual or spirituality (Dharma); run away from life or transcend it (Moksha)? For Prof. Lal, Vyasa’s one message is: transform yourself — do not deny, do not denounce, do not blame. *Transform money into the meaning of money; lust into love; ritual into spiritual; escape into liberation*. But, as Krishna-Narayana (divinity in humanity), tells Arjuna-Nara (humanity in divinity), “**You are free to choose.**” Our problem is: why does pacifist Arjuna turn militarist? Why does Yudhishtira not refuse to lie? Why does Bhima hit below the belt? Why does Arjuna kill Bhishma and Karna unfairly? Why does Nara take the ignoble way to victory, which, at each time, is suggested by Narayana?

So many characters, so bewildering a congregation in the *Mahabharata*! Who is the hero on whom we are to focus our attention? The benediction gives some hints — though not very satisfactory.

*Nārāyanam namaskritya, naramcaiva narottama  
Devim sarasvatim caiva tato jaya udirayet.*

We namaskara Narayana, Nara and Narottama  
We make obeisance to the goddess Sarasvati and utter “jaya”, victory  
May success attend us.

Prof. Lal chooses a different version where “*Sarasvati caiva*” is replaced by “*Sarasvatim Vyasam*”, which is obviously something that Vyasa himself would never have composed in his own honour and is a modification added by the Suta reciting the received epic.

Is Vyasa the protagonist — forefather and part avatara of Vishnu, of divinity personified as preserver of universe? Or, asks Prof. Lal, is “jaya” the hero, i.e. Arjuna, who is also Nara? The transcreator makes an error here because Arjuna’s

name is not Jaya but Vijaya, along with Phalguna, Jishnu, Kiriti, Shvetavahana, Bibhatsu, Partha, Savyasachi and Dhananjaya. The clue lies right before us, as in the best detective stories, and we fail to see it, says Prof. Lal, pointing to the first word in the opening invocation: “Narayana” who is Krishna, the crux of the *Mahabharata*, without whom it is Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* without the prince of Denmark. It is all about “wonder-working war” in which Krishna, the omniscient hero, is present but will not fight. Nara will get no direct physical help. Narayana knows the best route to travel, but will not take us until we, Nara, tell him where we want him to take us.

He is the conscience that clarifies the confusion. If we still remain confused that is our problem, our karma, our tragedy, our hell. You can’t blame Krishna. It is Gandiva-wielding Arjuna’s decision to fight even after he is convinced that killing gurus, relatives, friends is a heinous crime.

The startling fact that he is given a Vishvarupa Darshana of Krishna’s divinity on the battlefield, yet not one of the 18 akshauhinis of soldiers sees or hears a word of the dialogue. Only Arjuna sees and hears. “It is a private struggle between his good and anti-good gunas — an inspiring conflict of conscience”, explains Prof. Lal. Why does he decide to fight and choose war despite Krishna’s warning that it will lead to their extinction? Krishna is the omniscient hero who advises Yudhishtira how to get Drona to lay down arms. Yudhishtira could have refused to tell the half lie, as Arjuna did. Why did he not? Bhima cannot defeat Duryodhana in fair fight unless he follows Krishna’s hint to hit below the belt. Why does he take that hint? The deaths of unarmed Karna and Bhishma are also effected on his advice by Arjuna. Why does Nara take the expedient, selfish way and reject the noble? And yet, at the very end why does Vyasa shout with arms uplifted,

From dharma come wealth and pleasure.  
Why is dharma not practised?

Hastinapura is entrusted to Yuyutsu, begotten by Dhritarashtra on a maid, as the regent; Indraprastha is left to the Yadava Vajra, Krishna’s greatgrandson. Who finally was the victor in this fratricidal holocaust?

Yet, we find that the first Arabic summary of the epic by Abu-Saleh in 1026 AD is astonishingly innocent of this overwhelming presence. Is Krishna’s role in the war a later interpolation?

After the war Vidura, having tried to console Dhritarashtra with the story of the man in the well (that travelled to Europe to become the biblical “Barlaam and Josaphat”), teaches Yudhishtira a lesson when he wishes to commit suicide after the war finding a devastated kingdom, all kith and kin dead, by suggesting that he

first find out what is common to river, tree, earth and woman. Yudhishtira turns back from suicide because he finds this out: slice a river and it flows on, fertilising the land; cut a branch and new shoots sprout; pollute the land and it yet produces food; exploit a woman and she gives progeny and ensures the continuity of civilisation — all without casting blame or taking revenge. Physical suffering is transformed into fruitful creativity. Yudhishtira will blame no one, neither himself nor Krishna, but rule nobly, creatively.

Learn! Vyasa urges. Learn from my life how to live as human beings should. For if you don't calamity awaits you and all around you. *Utthista*, stand up, wake up, learn and . . . *caraiveti*, keep moving. No regrets, no blame, no accusation, only transformation of pain and suffering into creativity and progress. That is the lesson of the *Mahabharata*.

There are a few errors, as when the transcreator states that Parikshit was assassinated by Takshaka because he insulted Takshaka's father a rishi. Again, he states that Vyasa narrates the account to Janamejaya, while it is Vaishampayana who does so in Vyasa's presence. A little later Prof. Lal says that Vaishampayana who has heard it from another suta narrates it to Janamejaya at the snake sacrifice. Actually, it is the suta Sauti who has heard it from Vaishampayana at the sacrifice.

Prof. Lal provides a brief background before beginning the recitation. He fixes the time of the war roughly at 3000 BC, the exact year being a matter of dispute. It is a pyrrhic victory. The kingdom is handed over to Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna, but entrusted to Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra's youngest son by a Vaishya woman, to supervise. So who wins the war? Duryodhana or Yudhishtira? In heaven too Yudhishtira is shocked to find Duryodhana and his brothers ensconced on golden thrones, with no sign of his brothers and Draupadi! Parikshit rules for 60 years. His son Janamejaya organises a massive snake sacrifice to annihilate all snakes because one — Takshaka, a terrorist who plays a very important role in the entire *Mahabharata* — fatally bit his father. By this time a century has passed since the war ended. Janamejaya is very curious to know exactly what happened. He has heard conflicting reports about his ancestors, varying and worrying accounts about how, why and when the gruesome carnage began that ended the Dvapara Yuga, wiping out both armies. That is the starting point of the epic. The entire epic is a flashback from a century since the war. Janamejaya wants to know about his family tree, its roots, shoots and fruits — *mula*, *sthula*, and *phula* — whether sweet or bitter.

The starting point of the greatest epic in the world is all about family roots, which one human being wants to know. For, how else can he know himself — for isn't he the latest leaf on that tree?

And so his ancestor "Vyasa narrates" (actually, it is Vyasa's disciple Vaishampayana who does so during the intervals of the sacrificial ritual) "this story, which is

also a history, an *itihasa* (so it is, so it happened), the autobiography of one man (Vyasa himself), a record of one family the Kaurava-Pandava cousins, a chronicle of one country Bharata that is India, and a symbolic universal drama of mankind slowly evolving through dissension and war to self-knowledge and peace — hopefully.” It is basically an aural epic spoken by Vyasa to his scribe Ganesha who is pledged to understand every word before he takes it down.

Prof. Lal’s is the only English version that sensitively shifts from verse to prose and vice-versa, following the complete “vulgate” shloka-by-shloka. He does not leave out passages as the critical edition does — so it is possibly the most complete edition of Vyasa’s composition that we are getting. It does not, however, have many passages occurring in the southern and eastern recensions (such as Arjuna’s wooing of Subhadra disguised as a hermit, Draupadi’s previous births as Nalayani, Mudgalani, Vedavati etc.) The disks cover the introduction (memorable for Dhritarashtra’s plangent lament *tada nashamse vijayeya Sanjaya*, “Then I no longer hoped for victory, Sanjaya”), the list of contents, the chapters on Paushya, Puloma, Astika (including the archetypal churning of the ocean, the wondrous story of Garuda and the snake sacrifice), the partial incarnations (including Vyasa’s birth and the war summarised), cutting off abruptly at verse 21 of section 66 of the Sambhava Parva recounting the descendants of Brahma’s sons. We look forward to the subsequent instalments. Do not look for colophons, chapter headings, annotations, glossaries, list of contents — the rhapsode does not need them!

Let us thrill to the evocative verses describing Creation transcreated with biblical resonance:

At first, there was no light,  
no radiance, only darkness;  
then was born the egg of Brahma,  
exhaustless and mighty seed of life . . .  
from which flow being and non-being.

Or savour the lovely description of Meru, evoking profound archetypal memories within us:

There is a mountain called Meru,  
a flaming heap  
of splendour.  
Sunlight falls on it  
and scatters  
at the summit.  
It is golden: it glitters:  
It cannot be measured . . .  
Mind cannot  
conceive of it.

# THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of May 2011)

## 2. *Harivamsam*

ACADEMIC studies of Indian culture cannot be brushed aside because they willingly and sincerely do strain themselves to get at what they consider to be the true impulsion of scriptures. For instance, when it comes to Krishna, the *Bhagavata Purana* has been analysed in hundreds of research papers and investigative publications. The Purana is seen as a marker for basic changes in the Vedic tradition. The fond term for Krishna as Gopijanapriya (Darling of Cowherdresses) gets scrutinised as indicative of a sociological change. Thus Richa Pauranic Clements:

Now women — traditionally equated with Shudras and sharing their dharma of selfless submission and exclusive devotion — are considered the supreme *bhaktas*, and especially those women who are lowest in *varna* categories considered for analysis, that is, the Vaishya/Shudra. The *Bhagavata Purana* employs rhetorical strategies for the purposes of social criticism, transforming caste and gender hierarchies in the religious sector, and privileges the *de facto* reality of their 'lower' gender and/or caste identity in the realm of *bhakti*. In this way, religion — as literature — functions as a social practice and as equipment for living, that is, as a strategy for dealing with the human condition.<sup>1</sup>

Time was when such in-depth examination was a source of inspiration, leading me to take up edgy explorations. Increasingly, my mind is now getting distanced (though I can never escape the critical needles, they are scattered all over my library) from such writings and prefer to remain closeted with the originals. Just read them and read them again. So, when was Krishna born in recorded literature, when did he become the Gopijanapriya? Where do I go for the earliest information about Krishna?

While discussing the historicity of the *Mahabharata*, Sri Aurobindo says Krishna's name goes back to a much earlier period and points out that

Dhritarashtra, son of Vichitravirya, Krishna, son of Devaki & Janamejaya are mentioned in Vedic works of a very early date.<sup>2</sup>

1. 'Embodied Morality and Spiritual Destiny in the *Bhagavata Purana*', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Volume 6, Number 2, August 2002, p. 137.

2. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 344.



It is somewhat unnerving that we go back thousands of years to find out whether such a person existed at all, though our instinct assures us that Krishna did exist, a Yadava prince or a cowherd hero. At the same time Krishna himself seems to dare us to know about him. We get to him in Chandogya Upanishad:

When Ghora Angirasa explained this to Krishna, the son of Devaki, he also explained — for he had become free from desire — in the final hour he should take refuge in these three thoughts: “You are the Indestructible; you are the Unshaken; you are the very essence of life (prana).”<sup>3</sup>

We can then take it that our first introduction to Krishna is as a disciple. A sustained preamble to Krishna first comes in the *Harivamsam*. Known as the ‘*khila*’ or ‘appendix’ of the *Mahabharata*, this work is quite huge. What I love most is the fund of legends found in the work. Repetitions perhaps; vapid at times, a sheer trial oftentimes for readers used to a speed-loving existence and brought up in the ‘Digest’ culture. And so many battles, defeats, victories. But Krishna contains worlds. So does *Harivamsam*. In any case, long ago I gave up searching for Krishna in logical, chronological terms. When, where, how was he born?

The Supreme’s choice for a parent when incarnating as Krishna was Vasudeva who had fourteen wives, says *Harivamsam*. Girls with lovely names, Rohini, Indira, Vaisakhi, Bhadra and Sunamni belonged to the Puru dynasty. Sahadeva, Santideva, Srideva, Devarakshita, Vrikadevi, Upadevi and Devaki were Devala’s daughters. Sutanu and Vadava were his servants. Rohini was very dear to Vasudeva, says the narrative.

Rohini’s eldest born was Balarama. She also had seven more sons and one daughter named Chitra. Vyasa is fecund with names and even as he sets up the lists of names, he inserts some tale never heard of by me, used as I was only to the mainline *Sri Vishnu* and *Bhagavata* Puranas. From *Harivamsam* we get to know that Chitra died in infancy. She was actually an apsara who had had to endure mortal birth for a short while. When she came to know that Krishna was going to be born in the Yadava clan, the heavenly virgin felt desolate. She had missed the joy of growing up with the darling of Brindavan! So she willed herself to be born, and became the tenth child of Rohini. This is the famous Subhadra who married Arjuna, a *vira patni*; also a *vira mātā*, the mother of Abhimanyu.

*Harivamsam* deals with the many incarnations of Vishnu, but the Vishnu Parva in the work is entirely about Krishna. Almost at the start is the striking ‘Arya Stuti’. Arya had been born to Yashoda but was exchanged for Devaki’s son Krishna at midnight by Vasudeva. Like the sublime prayers to Durga in the *Mahabharata*, this prayer has a shining grandeur, assuring us that we can acquire freedom from fear by reciting it:

3. Translated by R. E. Hume.

In all battles, houses on fire,  
 On river banks, among thieves  
 And plunderers, in darkling areas,  
 Alien lands, when bound by the king,  
 In all places which cause terror,  
 Embattled by enemies, You are there  
 To guard people in distress.  
 There is no doubt about this.<sup>4</sup>

There is a good deal about Krishna's childhood, boyhood and youth in *Hari-vamsam*. This is the first time we hear of the now-familiar episodes like the killing of demons like Putana, Chakata and Baka. The earliest report of the *rāsa-līlā* is to be had in this narrative immediately after the lifting of the Govardhan Hill. The cowherds, even the oldest among them were happy and hailed him as a great hero:

Guardian of cows! By your lifting up the Govardhan we realise that you are no mortal but a god. You are very strong. Who are you? Rudra, one of the Maruts or Vasus? How did Nanda become your parent? From childhood you have shown incredible strength, performed amazing feats, and all your actions divine. The one drawback is your taking birth in the cowherd clan. Ruminating on this we are full of doubts. Why have you put on the form of a cowherd and come to stay with us? Though you seem as powerful as the guardians of the world, why are you a herder of cows?

They go on and on. Is he a rakshasa or a gandharva? Krishna smiles. That is his hallmark. Even in Kurukshetra, when Arjuna had expressed his unwillingness to fight, had not Krishna begun his stinging reply with a face that seemed to smile (*prahasanniva*)? Then he assures the elderly cowherds that he is indeed one of them and their best way of blessing him would be to remain silent! So they spoke no more. The autumn moon was now pouring on earth its silvery light. Krishna spent a while in wrestling playfully with the youth of the settlement. He then took the youthful maidens of the clan to the forest. Dressed in shining ornaments and yellow silk Krishna received the embraces of these maidens with joy. The girls began to sing of Krishna's exploits, held hands and made circular formations. They were delighted when he called out to them by their names. The *rasamaṇḍala* (*cakravala*) where Krishna was surrounded by the cowherdresses brought joy to everyone on those autumnal nights:

*Evam sa kṛṣṇo gopīnām chakravalairalaṅkṛtaḥ  
 Sāradhīṣu sachandrāsu niśāsu mumudhe sukhī*

4. Translations used in this essay are by Prema Nandakumar unless otherwise stated.

Soon the Gokula days come to an end. With the killing of Kamsa and enthroning of Ugrasena, it is time for Krishna and Balarama to have some regular education. When the two princes went to Sandipani's gurukula, they laid aside their rich dresses and followed the lifestyle of the teacher's household. Pride was alien to them as they served their guru. In a short while they mastered archery. Watching the superior intelligence of the two brothers, Sandipani had a feeling that the Moon and the Sun had come to him as disciples. At the end of their education they brought back to life the teacher's dead son as their *gurudakṣiṇā*. Now followed the founding of Dwaraka, the marriage with Rukmini, the blessings of a huge family . . .

We hear of Krishna's family in the *Sri Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata* but in *Harivamsam* the sons and grandsons literally grab the lion's share of our attention. Krishna is very much in these legends too but more as a guardian, a heroic fighter and an able strategist to help his son and grandson who fall in love. Old wives' tales? So be it, for they are enjoyable to go back to repeatedly in my second childhood.

The contemporary global scenario can be unnerving and even prevents those moments of peace which we seek in domestic felicity. The invention of the television has taken away the privacy of our households. At such times, one can curl into one's own silences by taking up the romance of Pradyumna and Prabhavati in *Harivamsam*. As with the *Mahabharata*, here also we get to hear Vaishampayana recount the tale to King Janamejaya.

When the rakshasa king Vajranabha performed intense austerities atop the Meru Mountain, Brahma appeared and gave him the desired boons. No god may slay him. And he would be gifted with an impregnable city studded with gems. Innumerable rakshasas, ever inimical to gods, came now to stay in and around the city of Vajrapuri. Puffed up with pride, Vajranabha challenged Indra saying he would have to vacate Amaravati now. Indra said humbly, "Our father Kashyapa is performing a yajna. It is not right to disturb him. Let him give an opinion after the yajna is over." When Vajranabha returned to his kingdom, Indra went to Dwaraka and appraised Krishna of the problem. They discussed the future course of action as Vajrapuri was impregnable. How to enter it? They decided to wait till the Aswamedha yajna undertaken by Krishna's father Vasudeva was concluded. One of the actors who had given scintillating performances in the yajna was Bhadra. When the assembled rishis offered him a boon, Bhadra was impelled by Indra and Krishna within and spoke even thus:

Sages! May I be fed by all Brahmins. I should be able to wander freely in this world made of seven continents. May I have the ability to fly high in the air. I should be so strong that I cannot be killed by living beings or solid matter. Whatever be the character I put on, I must look exactly like them. May I be untouched by old age or sickness. May the sages and others be satisfied with my ways.

The rishis said, “So be it.” Even as Bhadra was carrying on an extremely successful career as an actor all over the globe, Indra called the divine swans to him. He asked them to go to Vajranabha’s city. They were to meet Princess Prabhavati there and gently instill in her information about Pradyumna and make her fall in love with the Yadava prince. When the swans went to Vajrapuri and played around in the ponds attached to the *antahpura*, Vajranabha saw them and assured them that they could enter his city without fear and stay on happily. Telling historical stories in their sweet voice, they captured the hearts of the rakshasa ladies. One of the swans was Shuchimukhi. She became Princess Prabhavati’s dear friend.

The events move forward quickly in the epic as Shuchimukhi gently bombards the princess with information concerning the youthful Pradyumna. Despite being guarded by forests full of rakshasas who had been warned against the designs of Krishna, Prabhavati falls in love with Krishna’s son. Meanwhile the swan goes to Vajranabha and speaks to him of the great actor, Bhadra. As Vajranabha had heard of this actor from Siddhas and Charanas too, he expresses a wish for Bhadra to come over. When the swan takes the message to Krishna, he sends Pradyumna and select Yadava heroes as actors to Vajrapuri.

Residing in the rakshasa-infested outskirts, the troupe goes into the city and begins the shows. One of their first shows is the *Ramayana! Ramayanam mahā-kāvyaṃ uddhisya nāṭakam krutam!* As the drama opens, Lomapada brings Rishyashringa and his wife Shanta. The characters of Rama, Lakshmana, Shatrughna, Bharata, Rishyashringa and Shanta are enacted by actors who seem very real. The elderly rakshasas who had lived during the time of Rama say that these are indeed exactly the people they had seen of old. Oh the costumes, acting, delivery, entrance on the stage! There is repeated applause and the rakshasas vie with each other in giving the actors gifts of garments, necklaces, bracelets and strings of gold studded with diamonds. Their enthusiastic reports reach King Vajranabha who then invites the actors into the city proper. The rakshasas who live in the periphery themselves lead the group of actors into the city where they are put up in palaces built by Vishwakarma.

Vajranabha now proceeds to celebrate a festival to Mahakala Rudra. Camps are set up for the entertainment of his armed forces. The actors are to present their programmes for the soldiers. While the ladies of the *antahpura* sit behind curtained recesses to watch, the King watches the programmes along with his courtiers. The Yadava youth, capable of terrifying feats on the battlefield now wear the costumes of actors and soon the audience is enthralled by the stage.

Reading these passages in *Harivamsam* is quite exciting for me who have been watching dramatic presentations during the last six decades or more. It is astonishing that our myths and legends have been kept in the racial memory by a variety of dramatic representations. I remember the production of “*Tholu Bommalatta*” in the frontyard of our Visakhapatnam home in 1950. A family of four brought to life the entire *Ramayana* for the people who had gathered from the neighbourhood.

The scene remains etched in my memory, the shadow-figures on the wall, the harmonium-playing lady, the hurricane lamp. For details I go back to my mother's account of the production written for the Tamil magazine *Dinamani* where she calls such productions the poor man's filmfare:

The producers and singers of this *tholu bommalattam* (Dance of the Skin Figures) are illiterate. But they repeat the entire content of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from memory. They produce the Mayilravana Story, the Nikumbala Sacrifice and Keechaka Vadham. The figurines made of skin are moved according to the content of the recitation, and are seen on the white cloth which is illumined by a hurricane lamp kept between the wall and the cloth. In the destruction of Keechaka, the figure was twisted into a round ball by Bhima. It is great fun when Hanuman knocks on the head of demoness Lankini, while entering Lanka. The way Lankini prostrates herself at the feet of Hanuman and invites him to come is as technically brilliant as what we see in films.<sup>5</sup>

I am not able to close the collection of my mother's essays which takes me to another world, when, to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, 'heaven lies around our infancy'. This is the secret of India's Sanatana Dharma. The nation's genius has held on doggedly to its secular legends to ensure the moral health of the people. Was it seeing such presentations (the '*tholu bommalattam*' artistes of Andhra are originally from Maharashtra) and listening to popular discourses on the twin epics that drew Bal Gangadhar Tilak to the political struggle? How can you call this nation poor and uncivilised? I turn the pages of my mother's book:

These families have no other profession and live by what they get when they take their art from village to village. When there is no opportunity to present a programme, the ladies go out with their harmonium to sing and beg while the menfolk remain behind making the figures, painting them and getting the figurines ready for display. Our people are never tired of listening to the twin epics. Rama, Sita, Lakshmana are considered divine and Arjuna and Bhima heroes: whatever the problem at home or outside, these ideals show them the way to face any type of crisis. Because of the unseen power of the nation's heroic past, these productions continue to educate the populace.<sup>6</sup>

So where were we? Ah, Pradyumna's troupe has been entertaining Vajranabha's soldiery. A variety of wind, string and percussion instruments are now sounded and different ragas are sung, pleasing the ears with their nectarean music. There is a musical presentation of the Descent of Ganga, and the rakshasas are delighted with

5. Padmasani, *Illathu Arasikku* (1981), pp. 48-49.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

the beat (*laya*). We ought to guess that Pradyumna's party showed Shiva Tandava which must have given importance to the drums; and the sounds of Ganga's onrushing waters need the drums too. *Gangāvatarana* is followed by *Rambhābhīsāra*, a drama on the ravishment of the apsara in Indra's court. The Yadava hero Soora puts on the character of Ravana, a courtesan called Manovati is Rambha and Pradyumna himself acts as Nalakoobara. It turns out to be a very realistic presentation.<sup>7</sup>

More dramatic presentations follow and the rakshasas keep loading the dramatic troupe with gifts galore. The swan Shuchimukhi utilises this time to bring Prabhavati and Pradyumna together in secret. The two get married and so do the other Yadava princes. Gadha marries Chandravati and Sambha marries Gunavati. Colourful events follow leading to a full-fledged battle between the rakshasas and the Yadavas. Though it is felt that this portion of *Harivamsam* could be a later interpolation, the romantic angle has kept it alive in Indian literature. It is interesting to note that Krishna's wedding results in Rukmi's disfigurement; Pradyumna's in Vajranabha's death; Aniruddha's in Banasura's defeat. Sri Aurobindo who had plunged into the vast seas of the *Mahabharata* when he came to Baroda in 1893 must have been drawn immediately to *Harivamsam* also, for already the news was abroad that an English translation of *Harivamsam* by M. N. Dutt was on the anvil.<sup>8</sup> The romantic poet in him immediately began a narrative in Bengali on the wedding of Pradyumna's son Aniruddha and Usha, which forms a prominent part of this epic. We hear of this enthusiasm from Manmohan Ghosh who wrote to Rabindranath Tagore commending his brother's capabilities as a poet and that "he (Sri Aurobindo) might do great things".

Unfortunately he has directed (or rather misdirected) all his energies to writing Bengali poetry. He is at present engaged on an epic (inspired I believe by Michael Madhusudan) on the subject of Usha and Aniruddha.<sup>9</sup>

But then, poets cannot easily reject poems dealing with love and war. *Harivamsam* has dramatic romances like the marriage of Prabhavati and Pradyumna as also the wedding of Usha and Aniruddha. Sri Aurobindo's enthusiasm was so keen that he plunged into the latter episode, delineated for the first time in detail in the epic. His *Ushaharan* is yet another manuscript of unfulfilled promise. We have only a few fragments. Milton's style opens the poem. The Purana-reciter parrot Shuka has become a nightingale, but no matter:

7. The legend is as follows. Once the apsara Rambha was proceeding towards the palace of Nalakoobara, a son of Kubera, when she was waylaid by Ravana who ravished her. Incensed, Nalakoobara cursed Ravana that in future if he happened to force his attentions on an unwilling lady, Ravana's head would be split in smithereens.

8. M. N. Dutt's English version of *Harivamsam* was published in 1897.

9. From a letter dated 24 October, 1894. See Sri Aurobindo, *The Abduction of Princess Usha* (1980).

Sing once again, O Coil, the song you sang,  
 Perched on a blossoming tree, in the form of a bird, the Lord,  
 The conflagration of a conflict in the three heavens, on Earth a great war  
 You started with your cry behind the screen of a flower show  
 At the very moment when Usha, the daughter of a titan, did her ablutions  
 Leaving her flowery bed in the city divine of Bana.<sup>10</sup>

The other fragments of the poem give us enough information that Sri Aurobindo's ambitious plan was for a stately epic. In *Harivamsam* the shock of Aniruddha's captivity gets the Yadavas on the war mode. Krishna proceeds to Sonithapura immediately. Sri Aurobindo, however, prefers a no-holds-barred war assembly of the Yadavas in *Ushaharan*. War or Peace? Krishna decides upon war but calms down the hysteria of heroes like Kritavarma. There are times when *kshatratej* has to come to the forefront!

Kritavarma, the wise, O Hridika of great intelligence,  
 The wise observe all around and then act courageously.  
 Peace for mankind is desirable, that I admit, Kritavarma.  
 But peace is not there in the human lot.  
 He seeks peace alone. But fate is stronger still  
 And secreted in the heart is the supreme force  
 That pushes with great strength the line of Karma.  
 Any creature that is lazy and cowardly  
 Neglects the inspiration; neither in this nor in the other world  
 Has the weak person liberation . . .

It is engaging oratory. But much as we like to watch Krishna in battle readiness, delivering another Gita and blowing the Panchajanya fiercely as the forces march towards Banasura's capital, it is the Flute-Player who fills our consciousness with Ananda. But where is he?

Ah, the Flute!

When did the Flute come into Krishna's hand? When did he begin playing on it? Not in *Harivamsam*. But as we wander in the Krishna world and come to the *Sri Vishnu Purana*, there he is playing the reed in the delightful haze of autumnal moonlight, accompanied by Balarama.

Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous . . .<sup>11</sup>

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

10. Translator's name not mentioned.

11. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 491.