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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIV

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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IN A MOUNTING AS OF SEA-TIDES

In a mounting as of sea-tides, in a rippling as of invisible waters,
On a cry in me my soul is uplifted, in a passion of my nature
My heart climbs up towards thee, O unimaginable Wonder and Resplendence,
In a striving for the caress of thy Light and for the embrace of thy Presence.

If once given were but a touch of thy feet on the thrilled bosom of my longing,
But a glance of thy eyes mingling with mine in the recesses and the silence,
Such a rapture would envelop me, such a fire of transfiguring effulgence,
I could never again be as a man upon this earth, but one immortal.

For my mind would be dissolved in a sun-glory of God-vision and of knowledge,
And my heart would be made suddenly more pure and illumined and self-tranquil,
And my nerves and my body would transmute into an ethereal divineness,
A fit vesture for the godhead thou buildst in me, for the immortal thy adorer.

O thou Life of my life and the unseen heart of its ecstasy and its beating,
O Face that was disclosed in the beginning of the worlds amid the immenseness,
Let thy Flame-wisdom leap down upon the coilings of our python inconscience,
Let the Love-wine be poured out in thy chalice, let me be drunk with it for ever.

I shall meet thee in the ocean of thy stillness, in the ether of thy splendour,
Thy Force shall be in my veins like the ichor in the Unaging who are deathless;
My soul shall be as one breath with thy soul and thy infinity around thee,
And shall quiver with the vision of thy beauty and the marvel of thy sweetness.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 636)

THE KARMAYOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

Part II

Karmayoga; the Ideal

Book III.

Chapter III. Social Evolution.

IN the early stages of the sub-tamasic state the question was not so acute, for differentiation in the society was not at first very complex; it proceeded upon broad lines, and as soon as it took definite form, usually as a result of intermixture with alien elements, it developed classes or castes, the priest, the warrior, the people, — merchant, tiller or artisan — and the thrall or servant. Character developed at first more on these broad lines than by individual irregularities, in types rather than in persons; for each kind of life, each broad line of pursuits and occupations would naturally mean the same general range of experience and the same habits of reaction to external impressions and so evolve broad developments of character falling into caste-types, within whose general predominance personal idiosyncrasy would be at first comparatively ill-developed and of minor importance. The priest-type would develop favourably in the direction of purity, learning, intellectual ability and acuteness, unfavourably in the direction of jealous exclusiveness, spiritual and intellectual pride, a tendency to trade on the general ignorance. The warrior type would evolve courage, honour, governing power as its qualities, arrogance, violence and ruthless ambition as its defects. The earning class would develop on the one side honesty, industry and enterprise, on the other desire of gain. Obedience and fidelity would be the virtues of the thrall. Society accommodating itself to the altered circumstances modified its single and rigid social morality and admitted the validity of the newly-formed habits of mind and action as within the caste to which it properly belonged. Thus arose the ethical phenomenon of caste morality. Outside the limits of the caste ethics the general social code remained in full force. As the life of the individual in the community expanded in extent and became more varied and complex in content, the social custom-code also became more complex in its details and wider in its comprehensiveness, in its attempt to pursue him into every detail of

his life and control not only his broad lines of life but his particular actions, allowing no distinction between private and public life. Its nature had not changed; it was as rigid and inexorable in its demands, as intolerant of individual originality and independence; its sanctions were unaltered, the ancestral tradition of the community and the fear of social punishments, death, ostracism, excommunication or other penalties which if less drastic were yet sufficiently formidable. The object to be fulfilled was still predominantly the same, the satisfaction of communal demands as the price of communal privileges.

In this attempt society could not permanently succeed and had either to abandon it or to call in the aid of other forces and stronger sanctions. The community grew into the nation; social divisions became more intricately complex, the priest-class breaking up into schools, the warriors into clans, the people into guilds and professions; the organization was growing too vast in size, too intricate in detail. Class began to push its individual claims against class, individuals began to question the old sanctions or doubt the sacredness of tradition. In small villages the old tyranny of society might be possible, in great towns it must necessarily become increasingly lax and ineffective. Above all, as the individual's mental life became enriched and vigorous, society found itself baffled by an insurmountable difficulty; it could control his outward acts by its rigour, but it could not ultimately control his mental and spiritual life, yet this inner life psychical and spiritual tended irresistibly to master and mould outer physical actions. No sanction by which society could enforce its decrees, is of any ultimate utility against the victorious advance of the individual life pressing forward in its irresistible demand for progress and freedom. Society may command the homage of conformance in speech and act to its fixed and conventional ideals; it may control a man's bodily organs; it has no jurisdiction over his heart and mind or only so much as he chooses to allow it. But speech and act cannot long remain divorced from the heart and mind without affecting the soundness of society itself by a dry rot of hypocrisy and falseness; the end of which is either the decay and death of the community or a purifying revolt. Society can save itself only by conceding within limits the claim for individual freedom; outside those limits it must persuade or compel him to conformity by influencing his mind and heart, not by direct coercion of his words and acts.

In the later stages of the subtamasic social period we find that society has to a less or greater extent contracted its demands on the individual. Over his inner life and a certain part of his conduct, it exercises no other coercive influence than that of social disapproval expressed but not enacted; over another part of his conduct it exercises the right of enacting that disapproval in the shape of ostracism or excommunication; but that part of his life which most strongly concerns the community, it still insists on regulating by the infliction or menace of social penalties more or less severe. Social disapproval unenacted is, however, an ineffective control over mind and spirit. Society therefore, by no means content to leave the inner life of the

individual free from the demands of its moral code, since any such abdication of its rule would lead, it instinctively felt, to moral anarchy, sought to dominate the individual intellect and imagination by the more radical process of education. Its view of life and its unwritten code of customs, manners, traditions had always been naturally accepted as sacrosanct, now the individual was consciously habituated and trained from his childhood to retain this impression of venerable and inviolable sanctity. Social morality was no longer unwritten but gathered into codes and systems of life associated either with the names of the primitive makers of the nation or with the deified or half-deified historic individuals who first harmonised and perfected its traditional ideals and routine of life and expressed the consciousness of the race in their political or ethico-legal systems. Such were Lycurgus, Confucius, Menes, Manu. For in those days individual greatness and perfection commanded a sacred reverence from the individual consciousness, because in each man it was to this greatness and perfection that individuality impelled to achieve its complete emancipation was painfully striving forward. Thus in the subtamasic state even at its highest development the social code retained its sacrosanct character in the new form of a consciously cherished and worshipped national tradition; and the repositories of that tradition became the dominant class of the community, whether an oligarchy as in Sparta and early republican Rome or a theocracy as in Egypt. For in order to control not only the heart and imagination but the deepest self in the individual society called in the aid of a spiritual force rapidly growing in its midst, the power of religion. In some communities, it strove even to give the religious sanction to all its own ideas, traditions, demands, sanctions.

In the older races and nations Mongolian, Dravidic, Mediterranean the subtamasic stage of social culture was of long duration and has left its impress in the only civilizations which have survived unbroken from that period, the Indian and Chinese. In the younger races, Aryan and Semitic, the development of the individual was far more rapid and urgent and left no time for the peculiarities of the later subtamasic period to crystallize and endure. Their evolution passed quickly into the rajaso-tamasic or even into the rajasic stage. In the rajasic state the individual forces himself into predominance and gets that emancipation and free play for his personality which his evolution demands, while the society degenerates into a mere frame for a mass of individuals. Social morality, once so rigid and compelling, dissolves into a loose bundle of superstitions and prejudices; tradition is broken into pieces by the desire for progress & novelty and free play of mind. The individual is governed in his conduct not by social sanctions or religious obligations and ideals, but by his personal idiosyncrasy and the stress of his own ideas, desires, passions, capacities and ambitions, which clamantly demand satisfaction. Individual originality being given free rein, there is an immense outburst of genius, talent, origination, invention or of splendid personal force and activity. Periods such as the revolutionary epoch in France when the rajasic element gets free play and communities like the Ionian

democracies of which Athens was the head and type, are not only the most interesting from their fascinating abundance of stir, passion, incident, brilliance of varied personality, but also among the most fruitful and useful to humanity. In such periods, in the brief history of such communities the work of centuries is done in a few years or in a few decades and future ages are fertilized from the seeds of a single epoch. But the history of rajasic communities is necessarily brief, the course of rajasic periods is soon run. Rajas has in itself no principle of endurance; if it is to work steadily and enduringly, it must either be weighted down by a heavy load of tamas or sustained and uplifted by a great strength of sattwa. But sattwa as a social force has not yet liberated itself; it operates on society through a chosen and select few and is only rudimentary as yet in the many. For the preservation of a people tamas is absolutely necessary; a mass of blind conservatism, intolerance of innovations, prejudice, superstition, even gross stupidity are elements essential to the safety of society. The Athenian thinkers themselves dimly realized this, hence their dislike to the mobile spirit of old democracy and their instinctive preference for the Spartan constitution in spite of its rigid, unprogressive and unintellectual character. They felt the transience and insecurity of the splendid and brilliant life of Athens. Politically the predominance of the individual was dangerous to the state and the evil might be checked but could not be mended by occasional resort to ostracism; the excessively free and varied play of intellect turned out a corrodent which too rapidly ate away the old beliefs and left the people without any fixed beliefs at all; the old prejudices, predilections, superstitions were exposed to too rapid a tide of progress: for a time they acted as some feeble check on the individual, but when the merciless questioning of Socrates and his followers crumbled them to pieces, nothing was left for society to live by. Reason, justice and enlightened virtue which Socrates and his successors offered as a substitute, could not take their place because the world was not, nor is it yet sattwic enough for society to subsist entirely or mainly by the strength of reason, justice and enlightenment. The history of Athens may be summed up from the Vedic standpoint as rajas too rapidly developed destroying tamas and in its turn leading to a too rapid development of sattwa; till by an excess of the critical and judging faculty of sattwa, the creative activity of rajas was decomposed and came to an end. As a result the Athenian social organism lost its vitality, fell a prey to stronger organisms and perished.

Those communities have a better chance of survival which linger in the rajaso-tamasic stage. For that is a social period when the claims of the individual are being constantly balanced and adjusted in a manner which strongly resembles the replacement in the physical organism of waste tissue by sound, bad blood by good, corrupted breath by fresh inhalations; the individual is given legitimate scope, but those irreducible demands of society which are necessary to its conservation, are thoroughly enforced; progress is constantly made, but the past and its traditions are, as far as is consistent with progress, jealously preserved and cherished. England with its rapid

alternations of progress safeguarded by conservatism and conservatism vivified by progress is an excellent example of the rajaso-tamasic community. The English race is preeminently rajaso-tamasic; tamasic by its irrational clinging to what it possesses not because it is inherently good or satisfying but simply because it is there, because it is part of its past and its national traditions; tamasic by its habit of changing not in obedience to any inner voice of ethical aspiration or sense of intellectual fitness but in answer to the pressure of environment; but rajasic by the open field it gives to individual character and energy, rajasic by its reliance on the conflicts and final balance of passions and interests as the main agents of progress and conservation political and social. Japan with her periods of splendid and magnificently fruitful progress and activity when she is absorbing new thoughts and new knowledge, followed by periods of calm and beautiful conservation in which she thoroughly assimilates what she has absorbed and suits it to her system, — Japan with the unlimited energy and personality of her individuals finely subservient to the life of the nation is an instance of a fundamentally rajaso-tamasic nation which has acquired by its assimilation of Indian and Chinese civilisation the immortalizing strength of sattwa.

Sattwa is present indeed in all communities as a natural force, for without it nothing could exist; but as a conscious governing strength, it exists only in India and China. Sattwa is physically the principle of retention which instead of merely reacting to impressions retains them as part of its inner life; it is therefore the natural force which most helps consciousness to develop. As rajogune is the basic principle of desire, so sattwagune is the basic principle of knowledge. It is sattwa that forms memory and evolves judgment. Morally it shows itself as selfless sympathy, intellectually as disinterested enlightenment and dispassionate wisdom, spiritually as a calm self-possessing peacefulness as far removed from the dull tamasic inertia as from the restless turbidity of rajas. The growth of sattwa in a community will show itself by the growing predominance of these characteristics. The community will be more peaceful and unaggressive than the ordinary rajasic race or nation, it will present a more calm and unbroken record of culture and enlightenment, it will record its life-history not in wars and invasions, not in conquests and defeats, not by the measure of the births and deaths of kings and the downfall of dynasties but by spiritual and intellectual evolutions and revolutions. The history of tamasic nations is a record of material impacts thrown out from the organism or suffered by it; its life is measured by the duration of dynasties or outward forms of government. The history of rajasic nations is a bundle of biographies; the individual predominates. The history of sattwic nations would be the story of the universal human self in its advance to knowledge and godhead. Most of all, the sattwic leaven will show itself in an attempt to order society not to suit material requirements or in obedience to outward environments or under the pressure of inward passions and interests, but in accordance with a high spiritual and intellectual ideal applied to life. And until *sattwa* is fully evolved,

the community will try to preserve all the useful forces and institutions gathered by the past social evolution, neither destroying them nor leaving them intact, but harmonising and humanising them by the infusion of a higher ideal and vivifying them from time to time by a fresh review in the light of new experience and wider knowledge. The sattwic nation will avoid the dead conservatism of tamasic communities, it will avoid the restless progress of rajasic nations; it will endeavour to arrive at a living and healthy stability, high, calm and peaceful, in which man may pursue undisturbed his nobler destiny.

The true sattwic community in which life shall be naturally regulated by calm wisdom, enlightenment and universal sympathy, exists only as an Utopia or in the Aryan tradition of the Sattwayuga, the Golden Age. We have not evolved even the rajaso-sattwic community in which the licentious play of individual activity and originality will be restrained not by the heavy brake of tamasic indolence, ignorance and prejudice, but by the patient and tolerant control and guidance of the spirit of true science, sympathy and wisdom. The farthest advance made by human evolution is the sub-rajaso-tamasic stage in which sattwa partially evolved tries to dominate its companions. Of this kind of community China, India and more recently Japan are the only known instances. In China the tamasic element is very strong; the passionate conservatism of the race, the aggregativeness of the Chinese character which seems unable to live to itself and needs a guild, an organization or some sort of collective existence to support it, the low physical and emotional sensibility which permits the survival of a barbarous and senselessly cruel system of punishment, are striking evidences of prevalent *tamas*. The rajasic element is weaker but evident enough in the religious, intellectual and, in one sense, political liberty allowed to the individual and in the union of Mongolian industry and inventiveness with the democratic individualism which allows every man the chance his individual capacity and energy deserve. Sattwa finds its place in the high place immemorially assigned to wisdom, learning and culture and in the noble and perfect Buddhist-Confucian system of ethics and ideal of life which regulates Chinese politics, society and individual life. In India on the other hand, as we shall perceive, we have an unique and remarkable instance of sattwic, rajasic, tamasic influences acting upon the community in almost equal degrees and working at high pressure side by side; tamasic constraint and conservatism governs the arrangement of daily life, rajasic liberty, progress and originality brilliantly abound in the affairs of the mind and spirit, a high sattwic ideal and spirit dominate the national temperament, humanise and vivify all its life, social polity, institutions and return almost periodically, a fresh wave of life and strength, to save the community when it appears doomed to decay and oblivion.

From sattwa springs the characteristic indestructibility which Chinese and Indian society, alone of historic civilizations, have evinced under the pressure of the ages and the shocks of repeated, even incessant national disaster. Sattwa is the principle

of conservation. The passive tamasic organism perishes by decay of its unrepaired tissues or disintegrates under the shock of outward forces against which it has not sufficient elasticity to react. The restless rajasic organism dies by exhaustion of its too rapidly expended vitality and vigour. But sattwic spirit in the rajaso-tamasic body is the nectar of the gods which makes for immortality. China and India have suffered much for their premature evolution of the sattwic element; they have repeatedly undergone defeat and subjugation by the more restless and aggressive communities of the world, while Japan by keeping its rajasic energy intact has victoriously repelled the aggressor. At present both these great countries are under temporary obscurity, they seem to be overweighted with tamas and passing through a process of disintegration and decay. In India especially long continuation of foreign subjection, a condition abhorred by Nature and accursed by Heaven, has brought about disastrous deterioration. Conquering Europe on the other hand, for the first time flooded with sattwa as a distinct social influence by the liberating outburst of the French Revolution, has moved forward. The sattwic impulse of the 18th century, though sorely abused and pressed into the service of rajasic selfishness and tamasic materialism, has yet been so powerful an agent to humanize and illuminate that it has given the world's lead to the European. But these two great Oriental civilizations are not likely to perish; always they have conquered their conquerors, asserted their free individuality and resumed their just place in the forefront of the nations, nor is the future likely to differ materially from the past. So long as the sattwic ideal is not renounced, it is always there to renew itself in extremity and to save. Preeminently sattwic is the Universal Self in man which if realized and held fast to, answers unfailingly the call for help and incarnating in its full season brings with it light, strength and healing. "For the deliverance of the good and the destruction of evil doers, for the restoration of righteousness I am born from age to age."

Chapter IV. The place of Religion in ethics.

If the view of human development as set forth in the last two chapters is correct, we shall have to part with several notions long cherished by humanity. One of these is the pristine perfection of man and his degradation from his perfect state by falling into the domination of sin; God made man perfect but man by his own fault brought sin and death into the world. This Semitic tradition passed from Judaism into Christianity and less prominently into Mahomedanism became for a long time part and parcel of the fixed beliefs of half humanity. Yet it is doubtful whether the original legend which enshrined and prolonged this tradition, quite bears the interpretation which has been put on it. If rightly understood, it supports rather than conflicts with the theory of trigunic development. The legend does not state that

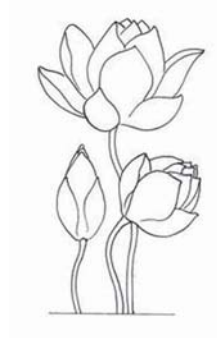
man was unfailingly virtuous by choice, but that he was innocent because he did not yet know good and evil. Innocence of this kind is possible only in the primitive state of man and the description of man as naked and unashamed shows that it is precisely the primitive state of society before arts and civilization were developed, to which the legend alludes. Man was then innocent, because being unable to distinguish between good and evil he could not choose evil of free choice and therefore had no sense of sin and no more responsibility for his actions than the pure animal. His fall from the state of innocence was the result of the growth of rajasic individuality in his mind which led him to assert his own will and desires and disobey the law imposed on him by an external Power. In this first stage of his evolution he is not guided by a law within himself, but by prohibitions which his environment imposes on him without his either understanding or caring to understand the reason for their imposition. Certain things are forbidden to him, and it is as much a necessity for him to refrain from them as to refrain from putting his hand in the fire lest he should be burned; all others are allowed to him and he does them freely without questioning whether, apart from their legality, they are bad or good. Sin comes by disobedience and disobedience by the assertion of an inner standard as against the external standard hitherto obeyed; but it is still a standard not of right and wrong, but of licit and illicit. "What I desire, what my individual nature demands, should be allowed me", reasons the rajasic man; the struggle is between an external negation and an internal assertion, not between two conflicting internal assertions. But once the former begins, the latter must in time follow; the physical conflict must create its psychical counterpart. From the opposition of punished and unpunished evolves the opposition of licit and illicit; from the opposition of licit and illicit evolves the opposition of right and wrong. Originally the sanction which punishes or spares, allows or disallows, approves or disapproves, is external and social; society is the individual's judge. Finally, in the higher stage of evolution, the sanction is internal and individual; the individual is his own judge. The indulgence of individual desire in disobedience to a general law is the origin of sin.

With the rejection of this theory of an originally perfect humanity, the tradition of an infallible inner conscience which reflects a divinely-ordained canon of absolute right and wrong must be also rejected. If morality is a growth, the moral sense is also a growth and conscience is nothing more than activity of the moral sense, the individual as judge of his own actions. If conscience be a divine and infallible judge, it must be the same in all men; but we know perfectly well that it is not. The conscience of the Red Indian finds nothing immoral in murder and torture; the conscience of the modern civilised man vehemently condemns them. Even in the same man conscience is an uncertain and capricious quantity changing and deciding inconsistently under the influence of time, place and circumstances. The conscience of one age or country varies from the conscience of another age or country. It is therefore contrary to all experience to assert the divinity or infallibility of conscience.

A man must be guided ordinarily by his moral sense, not because it is infallible or perfect, but because moral growth depends upon development from within and to this end the independent use of the “inner monitor”, when once evolved, is the first necessity.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 290-301)



‘. . . IN A DEEP CONTEMPLATION AND MUTE ADORATION . . .’

March 10, 1914

IN the silence of the night Thy Peace reigned over all things, in the silence of my heart Thy Peace reigns always; and when these two silences were united, Thy Peace was so powerful that no disturbance of any kind could resist it. Then I thought of all those who were watching over the boat to safeguard and protect our course, and in gratefulness I wanted to make Thy Peace spring up and live in their hearts; then I thought of all those who, confident and free from care, slept the sleep of inconstancy, and with solicitude for their miseries, pity for their latent suffering which would arise in them when they awoke, I wanted that a little of Thy Peace might live in their hearts and awaken in them the life of the spirit, the light that dispels ignorance. Then I thought of all the inhabitants of this vast sea, both visible and invisible, and I willed that Thy Peace might spread over them. Then I thought of those we had left far behind and whose affection goes with us, and with a great tenderness I wanted Thy conscious and lasting Peace for them, the plenitude of Thy Peace as far as they could receive it. Then I thought of all those towards whom we are going, who are troubled by childish preoccupations and fight in ignorance and egoism for petty rivalries of interest; and ardently, in a great aspiration, I asked for them the full light of Thy Peace. Then I thought of all those we know, all those we do not know, all the life in the making, all that has changed its form, all that is not yet in form, and for all these, even as for all that I cannot think about, for all that is present to my memory and for all that I forget, in a deep contemplation and mute adoration I implored Thy Peace.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 94-95)

A VISION

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

(5)

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

I SLEPT and now I am awake.

I awoke in the remote past, beside a pool with waters of deep sapphire, as calm as a mirror.

To the east of the lake I see a magnificent grove of rare species of trees and shrubs, whose long outcurving branches play upon the surface of the still, limpid water, reflecting bright flowers of rich and variegated colours. In the shade of this charming natural retreat bloom splendid white lotuses.

The whole retreat is radiant with rainbow light, and the centre of this radiance is a young, fair-haired medium¹ asleep in her graceful beauty, reclining upon the wide flat leaves, her head resting against one of the beautiful five-petalled flowers. Her ample white garment is girdled with a golden belt.

On her left, erect and proud, like a vigilant sentry, stands a white ibis perching on one of its coral legs. Above the sleeper hangs a protective mantle of dark amethyst. A calm and serene beatitude pervades the scene. The medium¹ seems to be resting in an enchanting dream.

A sweet fresh breeze rustles the leaves and gently ruffles the waters; with its caressing breath it seems to murmur, “Queen of the isles of the deep waters.” — “Queen of the isles of the deep waters” echoes a melodious voice rising from the fathomless sapphire depths.

Then I fell asleep, and I awoke in the vast hall of a palace.

From the shape and ornamentation of the columns, the paintings that embellish the walls with such lavishness and yet restraint, I gather that I am in one of the superb palaces of ancient Egypt, at Memphis or Thebes.

The hall is filled with a picturesque crowd; the brightly-coloured loin-cloths, the feather head-dresses, the jewels, the hangings all form a rich and curious harmony. Every gaze is turned towards the north end of the hall, in the middle of which stands a throne raised upon twelve steps and crowned with a velvet canopy. At the foot of the steps lie two young lions like two strong and peaceful guardians. At the left of the throne a white ibis stands on its pink legs. The throne itself is wrapped in dazzling

1. *Passive*: medium open to the higher subtle planes.

light, and at the centre of this light I see the young, fair-haired medium² with a white lotus in her left hand.

Each of those present passes in turn, bows before the steps and swears an oath of allegiance.

For a second time I fell asleep, and when I awake I find myself before a temple in the strange and sumptuous Hindu style. Kneeling stone elephants support the pillars on either side of the square door. The door is open, and men in long white, blue, violet or scarlet robes, enter singly or in groups. I follow them, and after crossing several vestibules, I come to a small square hall with a dark amethyst vault supported by thirty-six mighty pillars. The men assemble in order of function and rank, and remain silent; they are waiting for someone. Suddenly the curtain that screens one end of the hall is lifted, revealing a veiled figure of brilliant light. The figure steps forward and takes its stand at the centre of the circles of the hierarchy. I recognise the young medium.² The only ornament she wears is a white lotus flower in her loose blond hair; she is dressed in a long white tunic girdled with a golden sash.

Once again all fades from my sight. Upon waking, I find myself in the midst of a vast oak forest. In the distance, between the tall tree-trunks, one glimpses the green sea burning copper in the setting sun. I feel that I am on a Western Isle.

Through the coppice I see advancing a long line of virgins in white raiment; those leading the column hold musical instruments in their hands and wend their way forward chanting to the sound of the lyre and the timbrel. Then the maidens join hands and begin to dance; they pass by, weaving a circle around the oak at the centre, which is taller and stouter than the others.

Attended by four of her companions, now comes the young, fair-haired medium.² She holds a golden sickle in her hand and moves forward with a solemn and meditative step. At the foot of the ancient oak she stops and hands her sickle to a young boy who has come with her. He nimbly climbs the tree. With a single stroke he cuts the great ball of parasitic mistle-toe, which falls into the tunic that the young girl has held out to catch it.

Then, resuming their melodious chant, the maidens return the way they came.

I fall asleep for the fourth time, and upon waking I recognise the unique, wonderful setting of the Queen of the Adriatic at the finest hour of her royalty.

Venice, the strange and untamed — Venice, the city of art and of reckless passion — Venice, with crime oozing from her walls and drama exuding from her canals . . . Here are the magnificent palaces in all the splendour of their flourishing youth; here are the graceful gondolas carrying gentle ladies and great lords in fine array.

2. *Passive*: medium open to the higher subtle planes.

But I am drawn by a powerful inner sensation³ towards the Ducal Palace; I know that there I shall find the one whom I have just seen down the centuries.

I enter the great courtyard; and there indeed, near the Staircase of the Giants, half-hidden behind a column, I see the young fair-haired medium⁴ dressed in a white robe. She clings to the shoulder of a fine-looking old man who has his arms around her, as if to protect her. Their faces are sorrowful, their bearing solemn. Thus clasped together, they watch a gorgeous procession slowly mounting the steps that lead to the palace. And it is clear to me that their fate lies in the hands of these men, who are their mortal enemies.

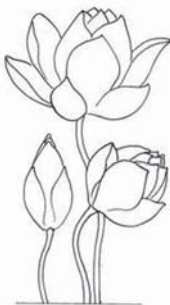
Then the old man bends forward and kisses the brow of the child, saying gravely, "Many aeons we have struggled and suffered for the sacred cause and the salvation of mankind, in many varied lands and changing circumstances.

"Once again we have attempted our sublime endeavour, and it cannot be in vain. The enemies of man may now be stronger than we, but our time will inevitably come. They work for division and falsehood; we belong to those who struggle and have always struggled for Truth and Harmony; these alone are immortal. The more arduous the battle, the fairer the victory. Effort matters little when the outcome is sure."

And the child replies in a gentle voice, "Indeed it is so, and I am certain that upon our next coming to earth we shall witness the Victory!"

THE MOTHER

(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, November 1983)



3. *Sentientiation*: being aware with all the senses (physical and subtle) together.

4. *Passive*: medium open to the higher subtle planes.

“TRANCE-SOLITUDE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

I wrote, rather finished, this poem before going to Harin's to-day. As usual I was diffident about the result; but Harin, and Venkatraman also, liked the lines very much. Do you think they really are good — and complete in mood-expression?

TRANCE-SOLITUDE

By unexplored vague vistas speechless-stirred,
Lone tears of God-surmise have often blurred
 My gaze; and to the earth-self suddenly
 Came through remote entrancèd marvelling
 Of adoration ever-widening
 A spacious sense of immortality.

Then lips could form no prayer, a calm so deep
In-drew the soul; but to my plumbless sleep
 The wind's majestic moan, bird-happy trill,
 Sedge-whisper, cataracted eloquence
 Were all a wordless music-frankincense
 Kindled by dream of the Immutable!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

Yes, it is very good — and the expression quite complete.

9 December 1933

* * *

[Version from The Secret Splendour —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 448:]

TRANCE-SOLITUDE

By unexplored vague vistas speechless-stirred,
Lone tears of God-surmise have often blurred
 My gaze; and to the earth-self suddenly
Came, through remote trance-visaged marvelling
Of adoration ever-widening,
 A spacious sense of immortality.

Then lips could form no prayer, a calm so deep
In-drew the soul; but to my plumbless sleep
 The wind's majestic moan, bird-happy trill,
Sedge-whisper, cataracted eloquence
Were all a wordless music-frankincense
 Kindled by dream of the Immutable.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 12)

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

Saturday, 6 November 1926

During the first part of the week I was disturbed by some movements of the vital which were possibly due to a hostile influence. Even when the possibility of the influence was removed, some anxiety was still felt, due perhaps only to the novelty of the movement. But later this anxiety was thrown away and calm came again.

The chief difficulty is always the activity of the mind. It is neither possible to quiet it completely nor to stand aside from it. Even when, for a very short time, it does not interfere with the concentration, it is not truly quiet and so it resumes its activity at the very first opportunity. It seems to me that if it were possible to quiet it, progress would be rapid, for concentration would be easy. Now I am always disturbed and concentration is very imperfect.

THIS activity of the physical mind will only be completely transformed when the physical itself has been changed, but what should be arrived at is that during meditation it simply drops off.

But what about the activity of the mind that observes what is going on and expresses it? Shall I try to suppress it?

Not suppress, but simply discard it. But there are movements of the mind that are more true in character; they are reflections from above and bear some stamp of truth. Are these not of this kind?

I don't think so. There is nothing of an especially true character in them. They are ordinary mental movements as far as I can see.

Nowadays, at the beginning of every meditation, I call in the Force to effect this silencing of the mind and, open to it, let it work it out. I suppose this is correct.

Yes, it is. (Silence)

What did you say to Mme. X?

I told her what you said, but as coming from me. I told her that you would not allow any of us to make any political move and that from the very beginning you have kept the same attitude. I suggested that a third party should go and meet these gentlemen from Chandernagore and hint at what was behind the present situation, explaining also the attitude of the Governor and of X's family towards us. And I said that if their suspicion had been aroused, they would have come here for information and they would have been told the truth.

Nolini told me that you said she was surprised that we would not help them after what they did for us.

No, I did not mean that. I simply said that I took care to explain in the right way in order to avoid such a feeling.

They must understand that I cannot and will not take any step in any political affair.¹ What they might expect from me is purely spiritual. The only thing they can expect for the help they gave you and Mme. Z is a spiritual return. And if they can receive it, it is all right. My only action is on a spiritual plane and when I decide to act in a case like this, it is from above. When C. R.² came to me asking for help, I did not act otherwise. For some time he remained open and was able to receive something. He succeeded in all he did and even recovered from ill health. After some time he severed the connection. He had asked me for some public recognition, some public blessing, etc. This I refused to give. And if the Xs use the power for public good . . . But you know how corrupt the political atmosphere is here!

May I tell her this?

Well, by and by, and if the opportunity presents itself. You may tell her that I have retired completely from physical action for the present and am engaged only in spiritual work.

* * *

1. At this time Sri Aurobindo was a political refugee in French India; any intervention by him in political affairs would have given the British an opportunity to demand his extradition.

2. Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925), a prominent political leader and head of the Swaraj Party in Bengal. An eminent Calcutta lawyer, he defended Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case. In 1923 Das came to Pondicherry for spiritual as well as political advice.

Saturday, 6 November 1926

(Conversation with the Mother at 7.00 p.m.)

The day was calm and peaceful. During my meditation this evening, the work was in the outer consciousness. A calm and peaceful Light descended which filled the whole upper part of the body, though exactly where it emanated from I cannot say, and a work of calming went on in the outer mind. The lowest centre was also active — in short, the whole outer consciousness. In this case I made no effort to concentrate within myself.

Yes, naturally one has to follow the movement of the Force. It is a work of stopping this outer consciousness so that there will then be only one consciousness.

There is an entire part of the mind that always remains active; it is the part that observes, or rather it is the part that formulates what I observe into words; it follows the experience and expresses it. I cannot stop it.

For the moment it doesn't matter. You are conscious of something only when it is expressed in words. For the moment this is still necessary.

But later, should even this disappear?

You will be conscious directly, without this intermediary. Naturally, for expression, words will always be necessary, but then the mind is no longer needed.

When Sri Aurobindo wrote the *Arya*,³ his mind was absolutely silent, passive. His consciousness was high above in the supermind, and the consciousness in the hand formed the words; he was conscious of them as they were being expressed. From the intellectual point of view, the *Arya* is perfect — clarity, order, logic — and yet the mind had no part in it. This does not mean that the mind is useless; it has certain useful activities, but it is . . .

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

* * *

3. *Arya*, a monthly philosophical review in which most of Sri Aurobindo's major works first appeared between 1914 and 1921.

November 1926

(Conversation with the Mother. The beginning is missing.)

. . . manifestation.

Is it not possible that some mental elements come from one source and others from another source?

Yes, but usually this is not important. In some cases, in Egypt for example, there was an advanced occult knowledge. Certain men accumulated an occult mental knowledge which has remained there, quite ready, at your disposal when you enter into contact with it. But such cases are rare. Generally, these are tendencies or it may be a capacity or a memory more or less important.

This divine aspect is, in short, the individual higher Self?

Are you speaking of the Jiva, the individual element that persists and presides over the reincarnations? It is more than that. Normally these Jivas, except in very rare cases, are like emanations of divine beings who have put forth from themselves numerous Jivas, and it is those Jivas that incarnate.

In your case the divine aspect in question has put itself forth in Jivas, but there is one of them that represents this aspect more directly, as the direct projection or emanation by which it will find its fulfilment. And this Jiva, from what I can see, has already incarnated three times on earth; you would be the fourth. When an emanation like this prepares and chooses a vehicle, that preparation is still made under the distant guidance of this Force, and often there are certain tendencies in childhood that cannot be understood until one becomes conscious of the aim of one's life. Then these tendencies, sometimes quite opposed to one's milieu and heredity, take on their *raison d'être*. But it is only when one penetrates the depths of consciousness that one really becomes aware of the reason for things.

And what is there behind you is your true Self, clothed with all the experiences of terrestrial life.⁴

* * *

4. The following note is part of a preceding page torn out of the notebook. The Mother is apparently referring to the "divine aspect" that was trying to come down into the disciple: "At the beginning it remained behind. But gradually as your consciousness was clarified, it drew close. I spoke to you about it only when your consciousness was sufficiently transparent for you to begin to perceive it."

Saturday, 13 November 1926

My vital being is beginning to take part fully in the meditation, and I have the sensation that my consciousness extends from the head to the feet, like a calm and transparent medium. It would be quite limpid if the physiological sensations of sight would stop, which they do sometimes, but not always. Then I am conscious of a presence behind me, which feels like a duplicate of my consciousness. I even feel it as if it were the same size as my physical body and it presses to unite with my outer consciousness.

Today the unification was nearly made, though I did not experience any change of consciousness. I have the impression that this presence has entered me and that a slight touch would be enough to awaken my full consciousness to it.

Isn't this luminous consciousness the physical consciousness — I mean the whole physical, the physical mind, vital and body?

I suppose it is the normal consciousness, including the physical, and the consciousness behind is the inner one, which is trying to unite with the outer one.

I also became conscious of the movements of the vital, which we may call egoistic movements. They rise from the vital and become conscious at the emotional centre. The thoughts by themselves have no character of vanity or selfishness, but when dwelling on certain thoughts, vital movements of this character appear and I cannot stop them. I suppose they will disappear, won't they?

Yes. The first thing is to become conscious that they do not come from the mind. When the mind is free from them and the emotional being is sufficiently free, they rise but they don't cloud the mind. They are then in their proper place and, by refusing them consent and calmly putting them aside, they will disappear. Most men cannot get rid of them because they cannot make this separation and are not conscious of this rising.

I feel, as before, something very deep and grand.

Yes.

* * *

November 1926

(Conversation with the Mother. The beginning is missing because several pages of the notebook have been torn out.)

... philosopher's stone. And they said that this stone could even transform the physical body. Does this not prove a realisation in the physical?

Yes. This is something that has always been known, this possibility of transformation. But their vision was very partial. They were rather the scientists of the age.

What did you see yesterday?

My physical eyes did not see anything special. But I felt very powerfully the force and majesty.

You should not expect to see a complete change. But some see very different aspects.

I saw a luminosity, a halo.

Yes, it rarely goes further. Still, some see changing aspects.

I saw in fact modifications of the shadows of faces, which could give this idea of successive changes; but as it was unsteady, I did not pay much attention to it.

There are different aspects which manifest successively. The modifications are still imperfect, because the flesh and what is most physical are not transformed; it penetrates into the blood. Yesterday, it was especially the aspect of wisdom that manifested in all its power — the knowledge in the Word. There is quite a work going on in your eyes. Do you feel it?

Yes. I have spoken about it several times.

Everything depends on how far your outer consciousness is united with the inner consciousness. When you have overcome the difficulties of your outer being, you will pass through a progressive initiation. I will show you, through the eyes, all that is there in the universe; then you will see the exact place of all these things. You have to get rid of all these difficulties.

Is there something special I should do?

As you know, the best thing is to open yourself and ask that it be done.

Saturday, 20 November 1926

I suppose the Mother must have told you the way I am progressing.

Yes.

There is nothing much to add that is important. I am conscious of the process of identification with that greater consciousness which is behind me, but it is not yet done. The difficulty lies always in the outer consciousness and the mechanical part of the mind which carries me away.

That is again the old story. You are paying too much attention to these workings.

I am not trying to suppress them by force. But is it really that they have no importance?

It is only an outer working which will be left aside and cast away in the process. This outer being is only the aggregate of what belongs to this lifetime, with a personality that is not your true personality.

How will it disappear?

When the inner consciousness is fully awake, it will absorb the outer one, or what cannot be absorbed will be rejected. There is no doubt that the change will occur.

You spoke of your experience with Lele.⁵ At that time did this mechanical working stop?

Yes, everything stopped. But everybody cannot do it. I could do it because there had always been a tendency to calm in my being and because I became aware of the thoughts coming from outside. When I rejected them, the calm descended upon me. Everything appears in the mind but does not evoke any response in it. I see, I hear, but no responses are awakened. At that time a complete silence came down. Everything that happened was like a cinema. After that, I had to take things back again into me, but in their right place.

So, I should not expect this?

5. Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, the Maharashtrian Yogi who helped Sri Aurobindo to obtain silence of mind.

It will come as something pressed from above. But it may not come in the beginning. Of course, the faculty of silence at will is needed and has to come.

Up to now no fundamental change in consciousness has occurred. I feel that my mind is deeper and has a sort of deep background behind. I am more and more conscious of the working of the forces in me. But no radical change yet.

(The last ten pages of the notebook have been torn out.)

(Concluded)

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.]

Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with his endeavours that come in in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral-temple, half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail but always fantastic with a significance — crumbling or badly outworn in places, but a cathedral-temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and its real presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. The outer social structure which it built for its approach is another matter.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 139)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

Chapter: IV

The Time that Was

*Henceforth a series of new time began,
The mighty years in long procession ran:*

Dryden

CHILDREN born after 1947 often wonder how a handful of foreigners sailing in from across the distant seas kept this vast subcontinent of ours numb under their whip. The gradual domination of the country by hook or by crook by a determined band of merchant-conquerors had been possible because of, on the one hand, a plethora of the country's weaknesses and the unsuspecting nature of those who mattered and, on the other hand, the preoccupation of its people with ideals originally lofty but which had, unfortunately misinterpreted, cultivated a negative outlook on life among its masses.

Indeed, it is not easy to identify ourselves with the mind and outlook of a bygone era. And yet we must note that the foreign rule in India did not go utterly unchallenged. Several rebellions and mutinies marked every phase of it. However, the brutal persecution and sustained repression that followed the great rebellion against the colonial rulers commonly referred to as the 'Sepoy Mutiny of 1857', kept the masses stupefied for long. Short of a national uprising, the one force that could have meant a real challenge to the British was the community of native rulers, the princes. But they were never united and the British, after the unforgettable lessons they had received from the legendary Rani of Jhansi, Nana Sahib, Kunwar Singh and their like had begun pampering the princes in an unabashed manner.

There was more or less a lull in the political atmosphere of the country in the second half of the 19th century — the British rule was taken for granted, it would continue, it was felt, for an indefinite period of time. The leading personalities of the day devoted their talent and zeal to religious and social reforms. Not that all of them had given up all hope for India's political redemption, but they knew that any radical aspiration in that direction must be preceded by adequate development of strength and discipline in other areas of the nation's social life.

Let us glance briefly at the country's condition on different fronts prior to and around the time of Sri Aurobindo's birth.

Decades had passed since a brave Maharaja, Nandakumar,¹ who had the audacity to notify the authorities of the East India Company about the gross corruption resorted to by Warren Hastings, the Governor-General employed by it, was summarily tried and hanged on the silly grounds of forging someone's signature and the penal laws had since been revised; but the arrogance of the ruling class had hardly subsided. The celebrated thinker and reformer, Raja Rammohun Roy, born a century before Sri Aurobindo on 15 August 1772, and who was one of those notables whom the British Indian administration had decided to accord some respect, had to face a volcano of 'epithets of abuse too great to admit' from one Hamilton, the district collector of Bhagalpur, simply because his palanquin passed by the Englishman and he did not get down and salute the collector. The Raja's pleadings that the door of his palanquin was closed and that the Sahib stood behind some rocks invisible from the road was of no avail.²

If Rammohun Roy could be taken to task for an imaginary act of discourtesy to an Englishman, no wonder that native officials were required to pay their obeisance to their English masters as they did to their gods. The *Brahmo Public Opinion* reported the misfortune of one Ramesh Chandra Mitra, a departmental sub-registrar, being obliged to resign his post as his boss took terrible offence at the gentleman entering his office without removing his shoes.³

Yet were there benevolent, even highly benevolent elements among the ruling race and India came to owe much to the Indologists and archaeologists emerging from that community. But for the mass of this class the Indian traditions and heritage did not mean much. What was more, among them were such detectives who saw in the picture of the dark Goddess Kali stepping on the white Lord Siva's chest a symbolic representation of a call to the dark-skinned Indians to trample upon the white Westerners. This outlook survived even into the 19th century.⁴

Things, however, were changing. The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 at the initiative of an Englishman — even though with the avowed aim of strengthening the hands of the British empire — and the support it received from the colonial administration was indicative of the ruling class recognising the importance of mobilising the moral support of the principal section of Indians — a clear departure from its sole faith in sheer physical might and a policy of arbitrary and brazen manipulations. The response from the Indian side must have pleased the patrons immensely, for thus spoke the President of the first session of the organisation:

It is under the civilised rule of the queen and the people of England that we meet here today, hindered by none, freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear or hesitation. Such a thing is possible under British rule; under British rule only.⁵

The formation of the National Congress had in its background the growth of the middle class in the Indian body politic.

Long before Karl Marx propounded the theory about the role of the middle class people in shaping revolutions, Rammohun's vision clearly saw this development.⁶

This is what Rammohun Roy wrote:

A class of society has sprung into existence, that was before unknown, these are placed between aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class . . . It is a dawn of a new era — whenever such an order of men have been created, freedom has followed in train.⁷

This was indeed an ominous prophecy to be made in 1829; but obviously it went unnoticed by the rulers. It took years for them to grow sensitive to the published word in their largest colony. In Roy's time papers hardly played any role in influencing the public. Later, with the end of the East India Company's rule, the British felt secure about their stability in India and with the formation of the Congress they were confident of satisfying the Indian sentiments and demands by doling out spoonfuls of charity from time to time. Joseph Chamberlain, who had been the Secretary of State for the colonies from 1895 to 1903 and so ought to have known the situation better than his colleagues, declared in 1904 at Birmingham that "The day of the empire has come!"⁸

While most of the pioneers of the social awakening in the 19th century came from the middle class, even those hailing from the aristocracy could thrive only through the support of this newly created base. Yet was there no opportunity for any collective voice to be shaped, not to speak of any means for its articulation. Literacy was negligible all over the world. Barring the elite or those involved and concerned, few among the population of the world that had touched 1.7 billion in 1900 were aware of events beyond their environs, for example the Boer War (1899-1902) continuing in South Africa or the Russians occupying Manchuria and perpetrating a massacre of 45,000 Chinese (1900). Travel was difficult. The first Prime Minister anywhere to use a motor car was Lord Salisbury, in April 1902. The radio broadcast, begun experimentally in 1906, was still a couple of decades away, and the TV was sheer fantasy.

A bishop who believed that nothing new beyond the Biblical perspective could be invented, fairly bristled when a member of his congregation observed that one day man would probably fly! "I beseech you," shouted the agitated holy man, "never again to utter such blasphemy, for flying is the prerogative of angels!" The bishop had to eat humble pie — and it must have tasted delicious! — for he was none other than Milton Wright, father of the celebrated Orville and Wilber Wright

who were to launch their epoch-making invention, the first aircraft, in December 1903.

An experimental tram car drawn by horses was launched in Kolkata in 1888, it could reach a speed of six miles an hour. In *The Statesman* of 29 June, 1881 we read an unusual headline: “Electric Light” and the sensational news below: “We hear that Messrs. Mackinnon Mackenzie and Co.’s Garden Reach Cotton Mills are to be lighted with electric lights. The inauguration is to take place within a day or two . . .”

While Lord Clive described Kolkata, way back in 1765, as “one of the most wicked places in the universe”⁹ and more than seventy years later F. H. Eden exclaimed “What a damp furnace Calcutta is!”,¹⁰ the scene had totally changed by 1890, at least according to the unofficial mouthpiece of the British Indian administration, *The Statesman*. It wrote editorially:

Great as is Bombay and as we may say in the spirit of a compliment, interesting as is Madras, neither of these towns have the prestige or importance of Calcutta. As the capital of a vast empire, Calcutta is invested with the interest and glamour that attaches to all great capitals. He surely was not far wrong who wrote that what imperial Rome was to the world, Calcutta is today to the whole of Asia. Not only is this city the Mecca of political India to which the millions of the country politically turn, but it is the nerve centre of the whole of political Asia. From Peking to Teheran and Samarkand, the long lines of politics find their converging spot in Calcutta, and if events of any importance occur in any of the countries of which these towns are the capital, that in its turn asserts its influence for good or ill thereon. Calcutta may not deserve the title of the City of Palaces; but there is no other town in Asia which presents such a magnificent array of imposing buildings, and which from the vast and varied masses of its population, the many signs of opulence, and the manifestations of liberality and enterprise, can extort the cry — “This indeed is a great city!”¹¹

But orthodoxy and taboos still held society in its grip. Here is the case of a young man of the nobility going to England even about three years after Sri Aurobindo making news:

A scion of Maharaja Narendra Krishna, named Kumar Manabendra Krishna Deb, has, we hear, started for England . . . It now remains to be seen whether Hindoo society will cast him out of its pale when the Kumar returns to India to join his family.¹²

By the last quarter of the 19th century the city had begun to throb with cultural and literary activities. The young Rabindranath, eleven years older than Sri Aurobindo, was becoming an attraction for the elite. But his admirers must have been amused

when a newspaper announced that “Baboo Rabindra Nath Tagore would deliver a lecture on Magic and Expression” on the 20th of April 1881, under the auspices of Bethune Society. If a part of his audience looked forward to some surprising tricks on the stage to be performed along with a speech by this scion of the famous family of Jorasanko, they must have returned cursing the newspaper, for what he spoke on was “Music and Expression”.¹³

But the time and space had their other — far greater — significant aspect. While paying his tributes to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), Sri Aurobindo wrote, signed with a pseudonym ‘Zero’, in the *Induprakash* of Mumbai (then Bombay):

The society by which Bankim was formed, was the young Bengal of the fifties, the most extraordinary perhaps that India has yet seen, — a society electric with thought and loaded to the brim with passion. Bengal was at that time the theatre of a great intellectual awakening. A sort of miniature Renaissance was in process. An ardent and imaginative race, long bound down in the fetters of a single tradition, had suddenly put into its hands the key to a new world thronged with the beautiful or profound creations of Art and Learning. From this meeting of a foreign Art and civilisation with a temperament differing from the temperament which created them, there issued, as there usually does issue from such meetings, an original Art and an original civilisation.¹⁴

Among the several unexpected and unusual happenings in the 19th century Bengal one was the emergence of David Hare and Derozio, the former a Scot, coming in 1780 to live in India and the latter, born in Kolkata in 1809 of Indo-Portuguese parents. The first began his life as a watch-repairer but soon turned to serve Indian society and was the prime inspiration behind the founding of the famous Hindu College (1817).

Derozio served as a teacher in the same college. Both proved a great influence on the students and the youth and taught them to think freely and progressively. Derozio’s love for the country can be assessed from his verses; here is a sample:

My country! in the days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?¹⁵

If, globally speaking, the 20th century was the most eventful of all the centuries known to us, it would be a mere truism to say that the 19th century contained in a concealed manner the seeds of all the events and ideas that flourished later. Two of the prominent, though seemingly contradictory, trends that marked the 20th century

were clearly evident in the 19th — a growth of the national spirit and an aspiration for human unity transcending national barriers. The first was indispensable for several nations like India not only for the reconstruction of their own national identities, but also for wresting their freedom from their imperial masters; the second was an evolutionary necessity. When we scan these developments, it appears that while the first was a conscious collective drive, though necessarily pioneered by inspired individuals, the second was a compulsive command leading humanity towards a future goal even at a time when man, quite unaware of it, could not quite consciously collaborate with it.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Hastings silenced his adversary through his friend Impey, the judge. Nandakumar's last moments, as recorded by one Mr. Macrabie who was required to see through his execution, is at once moving and ennobling. Nandakumar did not show even the slightest sign of uneasiness. He went on with his daily chores, read the Gita, looked into the account book and when it was time to proceed for the gallows, stood up and said that he was ready. It was Macrabie who felt nervous. Nandakumar consoled him saying, "God's will be done!" See *Echoes of Old Calcutta* by H. E. Basteed; Thacker, Spink & Co., London and Calcutta, 1817.
2. For the full incident, see *Correspondence of Raja Rammohun Roy*, edited by Dilip Kumar Biswas, Saraswat Library, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 1-19.
3. *The Statesman*, 19 January, 1883.
4. *The Indian Mirror*, February, 1909, preserved at the National Library, Kolkata.
5. From the address of W. C. Bonnerjee (1844-1906) who presided over the 1st session of the Indian National Congress. He presided over the Congress for a second time in 1892. He migrated to England in 1902 for good.
6. 'Raja Rammohun Roy' essay by Prabhat Chandra Ganguly in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, edited by Atul Chandra Gupta; The National Council of Education, Bengal; Jadavpur, 1958.
7. *The Bengal Herald*, 13 June, 1829, quoted in the above essay.
8. 'Farewell to a Century', *The Statesman* Annual Festival Number, 1999.
9. Robert Clive's letter to George Grenville; *The Travellers' Dictionary*, Routledge Kegan Paul, London, p. 463.
10. The Hon. F. H. Eden, *Letters from India* by Emily Eden, Hesperides Press, London; 1872.
11. *The Statesman*, 4 January, 1890.
12. *The Statesman*, 18 February, 1881.
13. *The Statesman*, 20 April, 1881. The following day the paper carried the correction.
14. Sri Aurobindo: 'Bankim Chandra Chatterjee', CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 94.
15. 'Derozio and Young Bengal', essay by Subhas Chandra Sarkar in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*; The National Council of Education, Bengal; Jadavpur, 1958.

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

Chapter XIII

A Time of Bereavements

On January 10, to use the expression acceptable to both Paul and Philippe, Madeleine's "terrestrial experience" came to an end. It was the occasion for Pavitra to expound for his father his convictions about the transition from life to death: the gradual cutting off of the ties and the habits of a whole life; then the ascent to a place of temporary repose, "some parts of the being which have a violent desire to live" and others not; the irruption of death which "is never a surprise for the soul" . . .

Paul therefore had to deal with the death of his wife; their married life had lasted for more than fifty-five years and, during the last thirty years, had been a testing time. When he questioned his son on the possibility of life after death, Philippe replied that although he did not have material proof of the immaterial existence of the being, he was sure of his personal existence outside time and space, beyond the body, desire and thought. This subjective conviction seemed to have more value for him than a conviction founded on objective observations and on a rational construction, and which, often proves to be wrong!

Philippe's world changed. Sri Aurobindo "left his body" in December 1950; the passing of the Master changed the foundation of the Ashram and the way of life of the disciples in Pondicherry. Two years earlier, his mother, Madeleine, too had been taken away from his affection; moreover, his memories too were disturbed by his parents' changing their residence in Paris, then by the sale of La Minelle. This property had been for Paul a source of income first as a cheese factory then as a farm; it had been, during the two world wars, a refuge for the couple, a home made charming by Madeleine; and at least for the two sons, it had been a place of childhood and of holidays. It was sold because Albert and his wife did not want to keep it; before taking the decision to give it up, Paul, concerned about the future material conditions of Philippe's old age, had renewed to him his proposal of financing his return to France and of settling him at La Minelle. Philippe replied to him, as he had done earlier, that he refused to worry about his future because he had confidence in the Divine to whom he had given himself.

This final portion of Philippe's correspondence reveals three ideas:

The first is found in this sentence: “To you, my dear Father, who knows the pleasures of doubt, I wish above all the joy of certitude” *for* : “. . . the consciousness, which, little by little, retires from the world, needs then to lean resolutely on the superior consciousness. If the soul has a religious tendency, it is relatively easy; the rationalist faces more difficulties.”

The second in this: “. . . and always with the regret that you have not known the Ashram, that you have not been able to see our life and our efforts with your own eyes. You would certainly have understood us. I do not say that you would become one of us. But you would have perceived the living ideal which we want to realise. You would have loved us, and probably, in the core of your heart, you would have approved of us.”

The third is a farewell: “You may rest assured on your side of all my grateful and filial affection. I regret that destiny has separated us physically . . . I have too much confidence in the meaning of the earthly life to think that the future will not reveal to us, to you as to me, the significance of all our joys, our sorrows, our hopes and our worries.”

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
January 19, 1949

My dear Papa,

I have just received your letter. It has not come as a surprise; Maman's last letter, in which you too wrote to me on January 2, was a presage of the fatal outcome.

As you say, her earthly experience is over. But it does not mean that she has ceased to be and has no more need that we think of her. On the contrary, perhaps she has more need of affection and comforting. Many people think that death is a passage from a state of obscurity and ignorance to a state of light and knowledge. Those who have an occult experience say that it is rarely so. Obscurity and ignorance are not characteristic of the corporeal vesture only. The cutting off of ties, of the habits of an entire life, is more or less slow and the ascent to a place of temporary repose is gradual. This is why all religions (those which have incorporated an occult knowledge in their ritual) include prayers and ceremonies for the dead. It is not a vain superstition, although the effective help that one can obtain in exchange of a remuneration paid to the priests is quite insignificant.

It is often affirmed that those whose consciousness is strongly attached to

material things pass through a difficult period after their death. They are as though disoriented, in a region which is not familiar to them, obstinately looking for pleasures dear to them, without having the objects to satisfy them. They need some time to understand the situation, so that the detachment is made and they learn to turn towards the height instead of clinging below. In any case, the loving thoughts of the living are a very effective help for the dead; these provide them with a comfortable shelter where the cutting off of ties can be carried out progressively and without conflicts. We must realise that they take refuge in our mental and vital atmosphere and that they must be given the warm comfort of a calm and illumined affection, without upsetting them with our outbursts of useless despair.

Therefore, we can, all of us, we who loved Maman, continue to love her as in the past. The fact that she does not have a physical body, does not cancel her out of existence. If we were sensitive, we would feel her presence. We can help her with the thoughts and the feelings which we direct towards her. Thus the great void of physical absence can also be filled and mitigated to a certain extent.

It is evident that the help of those who have the occult knowledge is infinitely useful and I have informed the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about Maman's death. I hope that the contact may be established and that in this way Maman will be guided to the abode of peace. I wanted to write to you on January 16, for my birthday, and to express my gratitude to you once again for everything that I owe you in this life. I am sorry that I could not do it; but I thought much about you during these days. In any case Maman would not have received this letter.

I have often told you, my dear Papa, how much I feel you close to me at times. Perhaps there is a little atavism; but there is certainly something more, something else. I feel your presence in a very real manner, as if I were holding you against my heart, and that, I do today with my love and my filial solicitude.

Tell Albert that I include him in my affection and that I often think of him also. I embrace you lovingly,

Signed: Philippe

P.S. I hope that my telegram, sent today, will not have taken too long to reach you.

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SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
February 10, 1949

My dear Father,

A month has passed since Maman has left you. I would like to send you today a few words of affection and support.

I would like to know if the feeling of emptiness of the first few days still persists or if it has lessened, even if in appearance, by the force of circumstances, rather or especially, because a subtler contact has been established, a recognition that the absence is only apparent.

It is normal that the physical disappearance of a companion of half a century would cause a rending, that the changing of habits of a shared life would be painful, perhaps above all the habit of thinking constantly of her who depended entirely on you. But I hope and pray that this emptiness in the physical and emotional life may be filled by a new opening to the psychic life (the life of the soul).

It is there in fact, in the psychic being — our true soul — behind the heart, that we find anew the contact with the other souls, that is to say, with that which we love in men: what they manifest of beauty, of love, of knowledge or of power, with their aspirations and with their desire for perfection.

An *Upanishad* says: “It is not for the love of the wife that the wife is dear, but for the love of the Self (*atman*).” It could be taken in the sense of La Rochefoucauld; but it is true in a much more profound manner. What we are seeking, ignorantly and blindly, in the whole universe, is the Divine, the unique Reality, which manifests itself as the innumerable forms of this universe. If they are pleasant, it is because they radiate a little of the divine Love; if they are beautiful, it is because they reveal a little of the divine Beauty; if they are wise, it is because through them the divine Wisdom appears; if they are strong, it is because they contain a little of the divine Power.

Finally the day dawns when the veil is torn. Each form becomes a messenger who speaks to us of Him. Behind the disguise appears the incarnate Divine. It is an admirable discovery which transforms life. I wish with all my heart that this be your portion.

Most lovingly I embrace you.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
March 12, 1949

My dear Father,

It is already some time since I received your letter of February 19, but it came at a time when crowds of visitors flooded the Ashram for the *Darshan* and I did not find the time to reply to you sooner.

I read with much interest the story of the divorce.¹ I am not quite familiar with legal matters, but I fully understand your reasons. It goes without saying that I do not object to anything and I claim nothing. I am only too happy to know that you are well protected from material worries — worries which succeed so well in poisoning one's very existence.

Your offer has touched me much and I thank you for it with all my heart, but so far as I am concerned, I have no need of money. I get everything I need, for myself as well as for my work. If some time you come across a book which you think might interest me, I shall be happy to get it from you. Really, I cannot think of asking you for anything else.

That Maman did not suffer, and that her death was peaceful were probably the result of, as you too think, the fact that she had accepted her fate. Besides, I am convinced that one dies only when one wants to — that is to say, when the soul consents; that is, it decides that the experience has been completed till the end and that it has nothing more to do on the earth. It is not always the opinion of the other parts of our being which is complex and often consists of discordant elements. Some of these elements may have a violent desire to live and to cling tightly. But, even for the young ones, in the case of an accident, for example, I think that death never comes as a surprise to the soul and that the soul accepted it. How many soldiers have had the presentiment that "this time they would die"?

You ask me if I have anything more than mere affirmations regarding the after-life. I do not have **material proof of the immaterial existence**. My conviction is based on the certitude of my own existence outside time and space, not only beyond the body and the desire, but beyond thought. It is certainly a personal and subjective experience, but which has as much value for me as any other. Moreover, I do not see what else I could ask for which would be more satisfactory.

1. Paul and Madeleine had been married under the dowry regime which forbade any arbitration of the components of patrimony and which revealed itself as catastrophic in the 20th century. While it had been legally possible, in 1945, they had got divorced to get married again immediately under the marriage clauses of common law.

Added to that, there are minor experiences: dreams, visions, etc., which can hardly be explained except by admitting a life independent of the body. But I consider them as confirmations, not proofs.

Finally, I cannot ignore the words of those whom I know to have profounder knowledge than me and in whom I have confidence.

I do not know if one day it will be proved scientifically that something survives the physical body. It is possible. But it will not be a proof of immortality — and it is the only thing that matters. Its only proof is to become aware of “the immortal in the mortal”, as the *Upanishad* said long ago.

Here are three very recent photos of me (my 55th birthday), with very different expressions. They are interesting to me because of the resemblance. You will notice that I have the family nose in a very marked manner.

I embrace you very affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
June 26, 1949

My dear Father,

I have received only today your letter of May 14, which, through the inspired action of a postal worker, went on a trip to Djibouti (postmark of May 30). The news that it brought me caused me much pain. But I hope that since you wrote it, things have improved considerably and that you are once again your former self.

It is a curious phenomenon which I think is common enough. I myself have experienced it. One remains without appreciable physical change for a number of years; then a crisis occurs and, in a short period of time, one has the impression of aging by several years. All sorts of difficulties and obstacles crop up. There is a struggle, as if a strong current wants to sweep you away; you resist. Then the crisis resolves itself; you regain much of the lost ground and a new period of equilibrium begins. Perhaps it is this that the astrologers had in mind when they spoke of critical periods.

It is sad that you have been obliged to give up your exercise. I know all that I

owe it, and often while doing my exercises in the morning, I think of you whose example I have followed. In the afternoon, I have another session of physical exercises between five and eight o'clock. At present, it is a set of tennis, then sea-bathing, followed by a half hour of drills, gymnastic marching, medicine ball, etc. I have not put on much weight (64 kg), but once more I feel myself to be in good form.

Have you received the first issue of our *Bulletin of Physical Education*? I have sent a copy also to Albert.

As for Albert, I would like very much to know the reason, if there is any, why he has stopped writing to me. Could I have said or done something to displease him? Or is it simply a lack of interest in our work? I have sent him several letters which remain unanswered. So I too have stopped corresponding, knowing that he receives my news from you and vice versa. I would only like to know if he would be happy that I keep him posted about my activities. Don't tell him anything about my question.

I have read a first book by Spalding, translated by my friend Weiss. As you say, they are stories for children. What is strange is the ease with which such stories receive credence in Europe and in America. Those who have the intuition of something other than the material world, have so little discernment that they swallow anything they are told, even the most absurd of things. The westerner lives in his physical consciousness to such an extent that, as soon as he comes out of it or wants to come out of it, he is at a loss. There is no tradition to guide him, because the catholic mysticism has lost all vitality since it began to dwell on platitudes of the Sacred Heart type.

In this context, there is a book I warmly recommend to you. It is translated from the English. I think the French title is *L'Éminence grise* (*The Grey Eminence*) by Aldous Huxley. It is a penetrating study of the famous Father Joseph, Richelieu's grey eminence. I am sure you will enjoy reading it.

I have received the Power of Attorney this morning. What is necessary will be done and I will send it to you in a few days.

Here is a photo of me with a few of the younger children of our school.

I think of you and lovingly embrace you.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

July 15, 1949

My dear Father,

Here is the Power of Attorney [proxy] asked for by André Vincent.² I think it is in order, having been stamped with several imposing seals.

A Pondicherry official returning from a leave in France told me of his meeting one of my cousins in Nantes. From what he told me of her, I think that it must be Colette. I have often thought that now I won't be able to keep up with the increasing number of the members of the family. I would very much like to have, if you can do it for me, a genealogical chart which I shall keep for future reference. I have fallen behind by 30 years. Besides, even regarding the relatives I know, the ones of de Varreux, the Vincents, the Chavanes, I am not sure about the family connections.

In a few days, I will send you the two following issues of the *Bulletin of Physical Education* of which you must have received the first one at the end of the last year. There are many photos of our activities.

I have learnt from a telegram that the first volume of the French translation of *The Life Divine* has come out. I am not sending it to you from here because we shall not get the copies before two months and it will take another month and a half to reach you. But I would like you to read it because it is Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece. If you ask a bookseller, he will easily get it for you. The publisher is Ophrys à Gap.

I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

September 27, 1949

My dear Father,

I find that I have forgotten to inform you about the forthcoming visit of a friend, Paul Repiton-Préneuf, of whom I have spoken to you in an old letter. It is even possible that he has already visited you, which he had promised me to do, because it was in September that he was to be in France. He is an X [an alumnus of the École Polytechnique], younger than me, who has made a successful career in the petroleum industry. He was director of Shell in Indochina and has also worked

2. Who was the family lawyer.

in Tunisia and in Morocco. Desiring to come to India to be close to the Ashram, he has changed his allegiance and is now engaged in negotiating contracts with the Indian Government for the big public works (barrages, ports, etc.). He travels a lot and was here with us on August 15.

During the war, Colonel Repiton served on the staff of the 2nd Armoured Division of General Leclerc. He was present at the surrender of Japan on board the *Missouri*.

He is a very refined, very sensitive person, with a great power of enthusiasm and an equally good capacity for realisation. I am sure that you will be pleased to meet him and hear him talk to you about the Ashram.

I hope that my letter will not arrive too late, because it is better that you are informed beforehand. I have given him only your address on Victor-Hugo Avenue. May be Albert would have been easier to contact in his office, but I do not know his business address, and I am not even sure that I have his present private address: 28 Rue du Ranelagh?

Apart from that, nothing new. I often think of you. Have you received my letters of June 26 and July 15?

I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

“This, then, is the meaning of gratitude: that the Divine exists and a sublime joy fills our being with a marvellous sensation of self-giving in an act of perpetual thankfulness, and we submit ourselves in a peaceful adoration to the Supreme Lord of our being.”

(Mona Sarkar's recollection of what the Mother told him. *The Supreme*, p. 80)

MOTHER INDIA

*“A great nation which has had that vision can never again
be placed under the feet of the conqueror.”*

— Sri Aurobindo

MOTHER INDIA is not a mere name or a figure of speech; she is a Soul and a personality, a goddess Power who has a mission to fulfil in the world. She is a conscious formation, a living aspect of the one whom we adore as the Divine Mother, the one who as the consciousness and force of the supreme Being creates the universe and upholds and dominates all existence. The Divine Mother's play is infinite and the totality of her movements is beyond the comprehension of mortal men; but she manifests herself to her creatures in different goddess forms for different cosmic ends. “Determining all that shall be in this universe and in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action and she sends down emanations of them into these lower worlds to intervene, to govern, to battle and conquer, to lead and turn their cycles, to direct the total and the individual lines of their forces. These Emanations are the many divine forms and personalities in which men have worshipped her under different names throughout the ages.”¹ Mother India is even such an emanation of the Divine Mother and she presides over the evolution of India as its soul and informing Power.

Those who are in touch with the true soul, the ‘Swadharma’ of India, those who are able to open and give themselves sincerely to the Shakti of India, the Mother will use as her direct instruments, as her chosen soldiers; she will be might in their arms and love and faith in their hearts and through them will fulfil the mission to which India has been appointed by the Supreme Divine. Rishi Bankim in his spiritual vision of the Mother received the sublime ‘mantra’ of her worship, the ‘mantra’ ‘Bande Mataram’. That ‘mantra’ converted the people of this vast country to the religion of patriotism and the Mother revealed herself in that illumining moment. Four hundred million of her sons and daughters have heard in their hearts her call and no power on earth can any longer keep them down from their resurgence. A new India is in process of creation which will be a greater embodiment of her life and an incarnation of her ancient will and purpose.

It has often been asked where is the unity, the individuality of India? A continent almost as large as Europe contains a great number of peoples who differ from each other as widely as the peoples who inhabit the many countries of the West, and if

1. *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo.

Europe has not yet been able to achieve any unity worth the name, why talk of the Indian nation or how can one think of India as a single entity one and indivisible? The political philosophers of the West have arrived at certain tests of the unity of national life; they posit as its components the occupation of a defined geographical area with a character of its own, unity of race, unity of language, unity of religion, common subjection, community of economic interest and a common tradition. Does India satisfy all or any of these conditions? It is true that there is a well-defined geographical area bearing the name, but it has no single character of its own one through all its tracts. The immense peninsula exhibits within its bounds every variation of climatic conditions that can be found on the face of the earth. Its seas and mountains, its arid deserts and fertile lands, its hills and dales, plains and plateaus, rivers and lakes, its inexhaustible store of varied mineral and forest wealth, its numerous species of birds and animals, its men and women who in colour and physique, in language and manners, in religious customs and beliefs, in their degree of development and culture represent humanity from one end of the scale to the other, well justify the statement that India is an epitome of the whole earth. There could not possibly be any commonality of economic interest between the diverse peoples inhabiting this vast land and the whole of it was never brought under a common political subjection until the British conquest created some sort of a unity — the unity of submission to a foreign rule. Is it not then idle to talk of one immemorial soul, a single persistent personality of India?

We may readily admit that the “unities” prescribed by Western politicians are not found in India; but these tests are not ultimate; they do not go deep into reality, but only refer to accidental and superficial characteristics. If we apply them to the nations of the West, we shall find that none of them is indispensable to nationhood even as the Westerners themselves conceive and practise it. Professor MacDougall has exposed the futility of attempts to discover the true secrets of nationality in such considerations as geographical boundary, race, language, history and above all economic factors. “Each and all of these conditions, real and important though they are and have been in shaping the history and determining the existence of nations, only play their parts indirectly by affecting men’s minds, their beliefs, opinions and sentiments, especially by favouring or repressing in each people the development of the idea of the nation.” The real unity is rooted in the consciousness of the people and not in any outward circumstance, — though circumstances may help to develop the consciousness.

The true question is whether the people of India as a whole had not developed from ancient times the sense of unity and a self-conscious collective individuality separate from others. There can be no doubt about the answer. National consciousness in European countries has grown from certain external circumstances that shaped and unified a collective life, unity of race, language, position, government, economic interests, and the rest. But in India it is a unity of the spirit that has grown from

within outward; it is the ancient soul of India expressed in her culture and religion that constituted the real bond of oneness in the consciousness of the Indian people. "The Vedic Rishis and their successors made it their chief work to found a spiritual basis of Indian life and to effect the spiritual and cultural unity of the many races and peoples of the peninsula." A spiritual oneness is a flexible thing and does not insist on the so-called "unities" of national existence; "rather it lives diffused in the system and permits readily a great diversity and freedom of life." This principle peculiarly suited the unique psychological and physical conditions of this great land, and the life of its people was allowed to develop through numerous autonomous centres of culture and power. The ancient Indians did not persistently cherish the idea of founding an outward imperial unity by military and political means like the ancient Romans, as that would have required a mechanical uniformity and centralisation which would have seriously hampered the free growth of the cultural life of the people. They moved towards a single political and imperial organisation only when any foreign invasion threatened them with the intrusion of an alien rule and culture. When there was no such danger their main pre-occupation was the free development of life in separate autonomous organisations; and instead of insisting on a mechanical unification under a centralised political power they sought to evolve first a general cultural life which would be the firm foundation of their national life.

This inner unity, spiritual in its inspiration and motive, was established completely at an early period and it became the very stuff of the life of all "this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas." The necessity of a political unification of the whole country was not left out of sight, but the genius of the race sought to effect it in its own way and, left to itself, would have achieved this end less by an artificial and outward method than by a natural inner development out of the free cultural growth of the people. Had India been given sufficient time, freedom and opportunity to organise fully her external socio-political life in her own way on a spiritual and cultural basis, she could have proceeded far enough in realising her time-honoured ideal of a spiritual empire, a 'Dharma Rajya'.

But that was not to be; the time was not ripe; the materials were not ready. Threatened again and again by foreign invasions, she had to patch up a political empire which, though it served its purpose very well for a considerable period of time, inevitably overshadowed the free growth of the life of the people, broke down more than once and, eventually taken up by the invader, led to the present subjection of the country to a foreign rule. Even in the period of disintegration two remarkable attempts were made in which the original inspiration was to build up a national organisation on the basis of 'dharma', or spiritual ideal; one was the Mahratta revival inspired by Ramdas's conception of the Maharashtra 'dharma', and the other was the Sikh Khalsa. These attempts did not succeed for reasons we need not discuss here, but the endeavour showed unmistakably the innate tendency of the national life of India.

“After all, the spiritual and cultural”, as Sri Aurobindo has expressed it,² “is the only enduring unity and it is by a persistent mind and spirit much more than by an enduring physical body and outward organisation that the soul of a people survives. This is a truth the positive Western mind may be unwilling to understand or concede, and yet its proofs are written across the whole story of the ages. The ancient nations, contemporaries of India and many younger-born than she are dead and only their monuments are left behind them. Greece and Egypt exist only on the map and in name, for it is not the soul of Hellas or the deeper nation-soul that built Memphis which we now find at Athens or at Cairo. Rome imposed a political and a purely outward cultural unity on the Mediterranean peoples, but their living spiritual and cultural oneness she could not create, and therefore the East broke away from the West, Africa kept no impress of the Roman interlude, and even the Western nations still called Latin could offer no living resistance to barbarian invaders and had to be reborn by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France. But India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and the British system, the enormous pressure of the Occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slayable, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the South, throwing up, under the pressure of Islam, Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day for her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and the inner mind and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?”

The comparison of India with Europe is quite superficial and cannot carry us very far. Europe has no collective personality like India. The peoples of Europe, the English and the French, the German and the Italian, the Spaniard and the Slav, the

2. This and most of the other quotations in this book have been taken from Sri Aurobindo's “A Defence of Indian Culture” which appeared in the *Arya*.

Scandinavian and the Albanian have radically different natures and are distinctly divided from each other in their national life. But the Bengalees and the Gujeratis, the Tamils and the Mahrattas, the Rajputs and the Punjabis do not differ to a like extent or in a like manner. There is a fundamental sameness in spite of diversity of temperament and type. "The peoples of ancient India were never so much distinct nations sharply divided from each other by a separate political and economic life as sub-peoples of a great spiritual and cultural nation itself firmly separated, physically, from other countries by the seas and the mountains and from other nations by its strong sense of difference, its peculiar common religion and culture." The cultural unity established completely by the Rishis has wonderfully persisted through all vicissitudes and evolved varieties in the different provinces which are related not as France, Germany and Great Britain but rather as Scotland, Wales and England are related to each other. The spiritual unity of the different countries in Europe in the Christian religion or even their cultural unity is not at all so real and complete as the cultural unity of India which is the very basis of her life. And this is so because the basis in the European countries is neither religion nor culture but the political and economic parts of life and in the fundamental movement of their existence they are keenly divided from each other. The danger of political conflicts and a growing interdependence in economic matters are driving them towards unity and the result is a "League of Nations", which, however, as yet shows no sign of effectiveness, for an age-long separatism stands in the way of any real unification. The unity of Europe is only now in doubtful formation, but the collective personality of India is already there, formed, distinct, ancient, inseparable. India has a super-personality which is evolving minor differences in her regional life, while in the West its many separate, long warring and still mutually distrustful countries are unable to evolve a living collective personality of Europe.

It is this super-personality of India that we call Mother India, the Shakti of India; for this super-personality is a power of the universal Divine that manifests in the nature of the country and supports the evolving soul of a great people. The Indian Shakti creates a sort of a 'mandal', a circle, and all those who come under the circle acquire the same fundamental characteristics and the same central nature.³ Even the present communal troubles are due to a formative pressing down of the Indian Shakti, a pressure that is bringing the difficulties of her task to the surface so that she may compose differences, manifest and refound on new lines in the diverse peoples who have made this land their home the essential spiritual and cultural unity of India, blend them into a harmonious outward whole and offer to the world an ideal of human unity diverse in oneness.

3. "The vast mass of the Mussalmans in the country were and are Indians by race, only a very small admixture of Pathan, Turkish and Mogul blood took place, and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest." — ("A Defence of Indian Culture")

India, then, is a single entity and a living personality, Mother India the Soul and inner being, physical India the body and external being. For she develops her mission and she is fulfilling her function through the physical consciousness created by her seas and mountains, her lands "richly watered, richly fruited", her moonlit nights, her flowering trees, as well as through her four hundred million of sons and daughters. The inner and outer life of India constitutes a central being with a unified multiple personality and is a single, if complex whole. As every man is a portion of the divine nature and has a soul to manifest and a special part to play in the world-Lila, so is it with every country upon this earth in the evolution and total destiny of the human peoples; but few men and few countries live consistently or consciously according to their true nature or keep always to their true mission and function and inner life's purpose. Very few nations in the world have been able to preserve their identity through the millenniums like India. In the words of a Western thinker, the people of India are "one of the few eternal races of the earth". While other countries have lost touch with their divine origin and its call, India throughout the ages has been able to preserve that high original and inviolate touch close to her life.

What then is the mission that India is fulfilling and has still to fulfil in the world? For what does she stand? What is it that is her central inner cause of living, her fixed destiny, the persistent direction of her life? By her long spiritual culture and civilisation she has created an atmosphere and a mentality in her people best suited for the embodiment of the new spiritual consciousness which will determine the next step in the evolution of the human race. Mother India, the presiding goddess of the Indian evolution, a consciousness, a force which is a part of the divine consciousness and force, is using the whole life of the race as an instrument to prepare and bring about the formation of that consciousness of the future. This is the mission to which the people have been kept throughout the ages. The soul of India will be entirely revealed when there will be this manifestation of the higher consciousness of a new spiritualised race. What it is to form and create, what it stands for, the real national soul of this people is not the thing that is preached on platforms nor can it be conveyed or expressed by any external formula; it is a spiritual force carrying in itself its own direction and results and it must be seized by her children in their intuition and held in an inner experience. The heart of the meaning of nationalism, its justifying and preserving element is this need of the manifestation of the soul of a nation and it is an abiding power of life that stands in its own truth unaffected by all intellectual nostrums of internationalism or any cosmopolitan evangel. Some of our reformers want to import social and political institutions from the West; others talk of Russian communism; Mahatma Gandhi preaches the Western or Tolstoyan doctrine of Ahimsa and Christ's gospel of redemption by suffering. But no external influence, no imitation of any successful European or American or other foreign idea or force can bring out into formative activity the national soul of India. As Indians our aim should be to discover her true soul power,

and manifest it in new characteristic ways. Each nation has a soul, its peculiar inner power. It is that in it whichever strives towards self-expression and creation and in spite of oblivion from within and every kind of obstacle from without insists on survival. The political freedom of India is bound to come because it is a condition necessary for the manifestation of the Soul of India. It is a thing decreed, inevitable; it will surmount in its assured march all obstacles and enthrone itself in the face of every opponent. For the destiny of the earth and the future of mankind need the independent creative force of India, the ancient Mother.

ANILBARAN RAY

(Reprinted from the book *Mother India* by Anilbaran Ray, published by Gita Prachar Karyalaya, Kalighat, Calcutta. First Edition July 1935; Second Edition August 1946)

The language of the Gita in many matters seems sometimes contradictory because it admits two apparently opposite truths and tries to reconcile them. It admits the ideal of departure from saṁsāra into the Brahman as one possibility; also it affirms the possibility of living free in the Divine (in Me, it says) and acting in the world as the Jivanmukta. It is this latter kind of solution on which it lays the greatest emphasis. So Ramakrishna put the “divine souls” (Ishwarakoti) who can descend the ladder as well as ascend it higher than the Jivas (Jivakoti) who, once having ascended, have not the strength to descend again for divine work. The full truth is in the supramental consciousness and the power to work from there on life and Matter.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 71)

SRI AUROBINDO AND DILIP KUMAR ROY

PREFACE

I believe that what I have written is worthwhile not because of the part I have played in what I cannot help but call a drama, but because through my conflicts and aspirations an aspect of his incredible self comes to the fore, a self whose flowering neither our age nor circumstances could explain.

(Dilip Kumar Roy on Sri Aurobindo)

LIVES of great men and women never cease to interest and inspire us. And yet, in the literary domain, biographies and autobiographies have, in the past, not received the canonical status they deserve. The situation seems to have changed drastically of late. Biographies and autobiographies, along with diaries, memoirs and letters, are receiving a great deal of attention by literary critics especially in the domain of cultural studies in the post-colonial context.

In choosing to write this essay on Sri Aurobindo and Dilip Kumar Roy, I hope to underline the rich tradition of spiritual biographies and autobiographies of our country. I should like to explore here the theme of initiation central to the domain of the sacred. In the spiritual narratives of the world, the theme of initiation occupies a central, albeit, a somewhat enigmatic place. Its purpose and role are generally seen and acknowledged, but less understood even by the devout. Initiation and discipleship — of a formal and informal kind — go hand in hand in all movements of the sacred. Indeed, they are true of the secular as well. The ‘Guru-Shishya Parampara’ of India has acquired over millennia an axiomatic cult status. It parallels myriad other traditions that speak of the ‘circle’ of the Master with His disciples. Thus, we speak of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and his apostles. Similarly, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, constitute the secular trinity that affirms the importance of mentors and disciples, common to both pedagogy and spirituality.

Secular education of the liberal kind informs us that the student ideally chooses his teacher. Esoteric traditions or mysticism, on the other hand, holds that like the Divine Grace, discipleship often comes in an unforeseen gratuitous manner, as a blessing or a boon from heaven. The working of the Divine Grace defies human reasoning or causal action of the existential Karmic kind.

For many years, I have been fascinated by the Dilip Kumar Roy story.¹ I have tried to trace his footsteps through his writings and those of Sri Aurobindo. Through

the publications of the Hari Krishna Mandir, Pune, I began to have a clearer idea of D. K. Roy, especially of his later life after he left Pondicherry for the outside world following the passing of Sri Aurobindo. I must thank Shankar Bandyopadhyaya of the Pune Ashram for the assistance I received.

The opportunity for writing this monograph on D. K. Roy came when I was invited by Indrani Sanyal of the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies of Jadavpur University, Kolkata, to deliver two lectures on Sri Aurobindo and Dilip Kumar Roy. I am grateful to Professor Sanyal for the opportunity to reflect upon this important topic.

PART ONE

DILIP KUMAR ROY: LIFE AND TIMES

INTRODUCTION

Initiation and discipleship are profound truths of spiritual life. The Guru may be benign and benevolent towards each of his many disciples. And yet, in human terms, he may appear close to some and closer to others at different times. I shall take up the spiritual relationship between Sri Aurobindo and Dilip Kumar Roy for my purpose.

I do not mean to suggest that there are no other relationships of this kind in the Aurobindonean context. Indeed, one can right away think of several: Sri Aurobindo and Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sri Aurobindo and Nirodbaran, and so on. And yet, to the human mind, at least, there appears to be something special, and indeed, unique about the Dilip Kumar Roy story. The process of initiation and the outcome of the spiritual encounter leave little doubt in our mind about the depth and many-sided nature of the unique relationship between Sri Aurobindo and Dilip Kumar Roy.

I shall offer, in the first part of this essay, an outline of the life and career of Dilip Kumar Roy. I shall highlight aspects that intersect with the life and works of Sri Aurobindo. The method here will be that of a narrative history of the conventional kind.

In the second part, I shall look at some of the related dimensions of the encounter. It is not my claim that I will be able to cover all aspects of this fascinating relationship. Indeed, due to lack of space, I will not be able to deal, for instance, with the voluminous correspondence Dilip had with Sri Aurobindo over poetry and literature. And finally, I shall try and sum up what in my opinion is the larger significance of the Master-disciple relationship in the Indic context.

Born as the only son of Dwijendra Lal Roy (or D. L. Roy as he is better known) in Calcutta to an aristocratic Brahmin family, on 22 January 1897, Dilip Kumar

Roy's family came from the legendary Nadia district of Bengal, the birth place of Sri Chaitanya. Dilip's forefathers followed the Vaishnava Dharma of Sri Chaitanya. His father's mother traced a lineage of verifiable descent from the saintly Adwaita Goswami.

Dilip lost his mother at the age of six and was taught by tutors till the age of eleven. Passing his matriculation in 1913, he joined the Presidency College on a scholarship. His grandfather Dr. P. C. Mazumdar, a wealthy man, took charge of his education. Dilip passed his IA in 1915 and in 1918, he secured the B.A. degree with Honours in Mathematics.

Dilip had a pronounced spiritual interest from the beginning. But he was not drawn to traditional religiosity. "I did not want to be a monk," he recalled later, "cloistered in a monastery. I yearned to bow to the will of God the Lord but not to the will of a human being."²

Meeting Saradamani of Dakshineswar had a profound effect upon him. He was taken to her in order to be blessed. Dilip wrote:

Mother Saradamani smiled and said: "My son, one who has loved Sri Ramakrishna need not worry about this and that. He has only to remember him in his heart and cherish him as the final inspirer who sought birth on earth only to give us all his lead of light." With these few words she blessed me, touching my head, as I bowed down to the ground at her feet. I was moved to my depths, and a lump in my throat prevented me from speaking. Besides, what was there to say to her, an incarnation of holy Motherhood? Had I not read about her greatness in Sri Ma's *Kathamrita* and Swami Saradananda's *The Great Master*? Had I not been startled by Sri Ramakrishna's tribute to her when he said he saw the Divine Mother in her at the very start? Had I not read about her power of love which had drawn all who came to her to be mothered and sustained by her light?³

As higher education in England beckoned Dilip, his grandfather was keen that Dilip married before undertaking his journey abroad. Dilip, however, was against marriage and was firm in dedicating his life to God.

His grandfather remained skeptical and took him to meet Swami Brahmananda, considered by Sri Ramakrishna as his *Manasa Putra* or 'Spiritual Son'. Dilip was asked by Swamiji to sing a song about the Mother. He chose a song from the famous *Kali Kirtan* of the great devotee Kamalakanta. This is how Dilip records the experience, following his singing:

We waited in silence till he (Swami Brahmananda) came back to normal consciousness. Then he looked intently at me in silence. I lowered my eyes, soothed and, withal, a trifle embarrassed under his steadfast scrutiny. Suddenly

he turned towards my grandfather and said with a beautiful smile: “Pratap Babu, have no misgivings: he will come to no harm abroad.”

My grandfather stared at him uncomprehendingly. Swamiji smiled again. “Do you know what I saw while he was singing? I saw an aura of protection around him . . . Thakur’s (Sri Ramakrishna’s) aura, which is an armour, I tell you, and I know what I am speaking about. So let him go where he will — he will come back unscathed. He may indeed, stumble sometime — but I can assure you that he will not fail.” Then turning his face towards me: “Come my boy — come nearer.”

I could hold myself in no more and rested my brow on his feet as tears of joy and gratitude found an outlet at last.⁴

Dilip was sent to England in 1919. He studied Law beside Mathematics. He also learnt music. In 1920, he passed the first part of the Maths Tripos. In Cambridge, he pursued Music and learnt German and Italian Music. In England, he met Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland and Herman Hesse. He gave lectures in many institutions and toured cities like Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Rome, Florence and Naples. He had illustrious classmates like Subhash Chandra Bose and returned to India in 1922. Back home, Dilip studied the music of the different regions of India. He learnt under Abdul Karim, Fayyaz Khan and Chandar Dubey.

A crucial event took place in the spiritual life of Dilip in 1923, when he met, in Lucknow, the English Professor Ronald Nixon. From Nixon Dilip heard for the first time about Sri Aurobindo and his works. Inspired by his mentor, he read several books of Sri Aurobindo like *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Psychology of Social Development*, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine* that initially appeared in the journal *Arya*. In due course, Ronald Nixon took up ‘sanyasa’ in the Himalayas and came to be known as Sri Krishnaprem. Thanks to Dilip’s help, he had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo in 1948. (After a life of spiritual attainments, Krishnaprem passed away at Nainital on 14 November 1965). In the example of the Englishman who became a devout Hindu, Dilip learned that God did not belong to any community or nation, but to entire mankind.

MEETING SRI AUROBINDO IN 1924

Dilip’s quest now centred on Sri Aurobindo. Obtaining the latter’s permission, he met his future Guru for the first time at Pondicherry in the morning of January 24, 1924. Dilip writes:

It was about eight in the morning. Sri Aurobindo lived then in the house which stands at the main entrance to the ashram. He was seated in a chair on the front

veranda. I bowed before him and took another chair in front. An oblong table stood between us.

“A radiant personality” sang the very air about him. A deep aura of peace encircled him, an ineffable yet concrete peace that drew you almost at once into its magic orbit. But it was his eyes that fascinated me most — shining like beacons. His torso was bare except for a scarf thrown across.

The greatest living yogi of India!⁵

At the end of his meeting with Sri Aurobindo, Dilip asked Sri Aurobindo with a degree of eagerness: “But what about my yoga?”

His glance cut into me like a knife. “Yours is still a mental seeking,” he said. “For my yoga something more is needed. Why not wait till the time comes?”

“When it does, may I count on your help?” I asked anxiously.

He gave an affirmative nod and smiled.⁶

Depressed and downcast, Dilip returned to Calcutta in 1924. Here he engrossed himself in the arts, literature and music. He wrote a book entitled *Indian Music* in 1924, published *Diary of a Wanderer*, a novel, *Mana Parash* in 1925, *Dudhara (The Currents)* in 1927, *Dhola Dhalan (Vacillating Human Spirit in Quest of Certitude)*. In addition, he wrote a number of stories, plays and essays. In 1924, he lent his voice to more than 100 compositions for the HMV Gramophone Company. In this effort, he was ably assisted by Uma Bose, Subbulakshmi, Indira Devi and Manju Gupta.

Despite all this, Dilip’s spiritual vacillation continued. About to take ‘diksha’ from the monk Swami Abhedananda following the latter’s lecture, Dilip happened to meet a friend who was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, “Sit down and close your eyes!”⁷ he was told. Dilip did so and had a profound spiritual experience. His friend said: “You have been accepted by Sri Aurobindo, and therefore there is no need for you to seek a Guru! All that remains is for you to be ready!” Meanwhile, worldly attractions beckoned him. Invited by Edison’s Gramophone Company for recording purposes, Dilip sailed for France on his way to the United States in March 1927. He was bid farewell by Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Subhas Chandra Bose.

After reaching France, Dilip realised that some invisible Power wanted him to turn back to India. Following his inner voice, he decided against going to America and instead went to Nice in France. Here, he met many musicians and delivered lectures on Indian music at the residence of local hosts. One of the notable events that happened here was his meeting Paul Richard. Richard who had returned from India after a stay in the Himalayas and meeting Gandhi at the Ahmedabad Session of the Congress had parted from Mirra and Sri Aurobindo. He visited Dilip in the

hotel suite that belonged to the ambassador of Czechoslovakia. Contents of their conversation appeared in *Among the Great* and *Pilgrims of the Stars*. More complete versions were published in the Bengali travel book, *Edeshe Odeshe*. Richard's admission of his failings and his reverence for Sri Aurobindo as a veritable Shiva incarnate will be taken up in the second part of my essay. Meanwhile, suffice it to state that after a series of lectures, Dilip returned to India in November 1927. Now, stronger than ever in his convictions, he was keen to travel to Pondicherry and become Sri Aurobindo's disciple.

It must be added at this point that aside from his considerable talent as a musician, Dilip began to achieve distinction as a biographer of great personalities. His conversation and recorded talks were invariably of a high order. They reveal not only the minds of the eminent figures, but his own insights, erudition and literary skill. This was the result of training and an earlier resolution dating back to his childhood days worth recalling.

At the age of 13, Dilip happened to read *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, later translated by Swami Nikhilananda and published as *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The narrative that acquired an iconic status in course of time owes its origin to the notes taken by the biographer Mahendranath Gupta. Overwhelmed by emotions at the reading of the *Kathamrita*, Dilip visited Gupta who lived close by. Gupta advised Dilip to keep a record of his meetings with the great men and women he met.

Dilip would not forget this advice for the rest of his life. His book, *Among the Great*⁸ remains a classic in this sense. It contains interviews and correspondence with five eminent figures: Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Romain Rolland and Bertrand Russell. The foreword to this book was written by S. Radhakrishnan.

PONDICHERRY: SECOND VISIT AND ASHRAM LIFE

Meanwhile, arriving in Pondicherry for the second time in August 1928, Dilip learnt that Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn and Mirra, the Mother had taken charge of the Ashram in 1926. He made a request to meet her. From her, he learnt that Sri Aurobindo had said that time had come to begin the practice of Integral Yoga as his disciple.

Dilip remained an inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1928 to 1952. He recalls his days in the Ashram with a sense of deep gratitude:

I was on the whole happy in the Pondicherry *Yogashram* but the norm of what is hailed as happiness is not bliss, which can come only when the soul opens to the Divine Grace. In Sri Aurobindo Ashram I experienced this "outpetalling of the soul-flower" many a time, but most often through his letters showering love. It did, indeed, seem to me, time and time again, that his letters held magic

which soothed the scorch of my heart with their rain of love. I had received loving letters from friends galore as well as world celebrities, but Sri Aurobindo's letters were written in a very different vein. One of my greatest joys — culminating in thrills — was to receive his letters day after incredible day. I stayed in his ashram a little over two decades, assiduously writing letters till the very end.⁹

About his Ashram life, we get some idea from Nirodbaran's Bengali book *Rachana Bichitra*,¹⁰ published from Calcutta on 15 August 1997. Readers will benefit by reading, in particular, the essay '*Dilip Kumar Royer Basantakal Ashram Jiban*'.

Nirodbaran asks: "What was the real personality of Dilip? His radiant, smiling face? His poetic figure or his heavenly voice?" And he answers: "It must indeed be his melodious voice!"¹¹ For, Dilip and music always went hand in hand. Every Saturday, with the Mother's permission, there was organised a musical soirée in Dilip's house. The function often extended upto 10 p.m. It must be added that this building, later known as the 'Trésor House', remained empty for many years. The Mother would not allow any one to use it. She said the house belonged to Dilip and must be kept ready for a possible return of the singer. Meanwhile, at Dilip's initiative, poet Nishikanto joined the Ashram two to three years after Dilip arrived. This led to an artistic collaboration between the two. Nishikanto's Bengali poems that were approved by Sri Aurobindo were set to music by Dilip. Some of these songs include the following: '*Ei Prithibir Pather Pare*', '*Jalbar Mantra Dile More*', and '*Kanakojwala Sabita Barani*'. At times, the sessions were organised during the daytime for the Mother. Once when she was unwell, for her benefit, Dilip sang in an adjacent room. The Mother exclaimed to people around that Dilip's songs were so magnificent, they could magically invoke the presence of the Lord.

Similarly, when Sri Aurobindo was confined to bed after his accident, Dilip and Sahana sang for him. At times, when Dilip was away from Pondicherry and his songs were broadcast, he would request Sri Aurobindo to listen to his songs on radio. Many of these moving accounts are found in the writings of Sahana.

Dilip's correspondence with Sri Aurobindo easily occupies a special place in the annals of spiritual literature. Begun in 1930, when Sri Aurobindo was in seclusion, the correspondence between the two comprise around 4000 to 5000 letters, many of which appeared in the book *Anami*, currently unavailable, and in *Among the Great*, aside from many others. More recently, much of the correspondence has been included in three handy volumes under the title *Sri Aurobindo to Dilip* (Vol. 1, 1929-1933 and Vol. 2, 1934-1935), both published by Hari Krishna Mandir Trust, Pune and Mira Aditi, Mysore, in 2003 and 2005 respectively.

According to Nirodbaran, Dilip's pleasing personality, radiant and smiling face, and gentle behaviour endeared him to several inmates of the Ashram. Nirodbaran felt inspired by Dilip to take up the composition of poetry. With Dilip,

there was seldom the need for gossip or small talk. There was of course good food when the situation demanded. His only flaw, as Nirodbaran recalls, was that he was given to ‘*abhimān*’. As Sri Aurobindo describes it in a light-hearted manner: “He (Dilip) was a spoilt child!” Once Dilip imagined that due to some reason the Mother was unhappy with him. He therefore decided to leave the Ashram and join the Salt Satyagraha Movement of Gandhiji.¹² Luckily he was dissuaded from taking this path by a letter from Sri Aurobindo. In due course, Dilip visited the Ashram of Ramana Maharishi and Swami Ramdas. He travelled to Calcutta for raising funds for the Ashram, and upon his return to Pondicherry, devoted himself to music and the arts.

We also get glimpses of Dilip’s personality from the writings on his niece Esha. Published in 1995, in the form of a book entitled *An Extraordinary Girl*, Esha’s account, as rendered by Nirodbaran, offers many memorable vignettes regarding her famous uncle. Esha first came to the Ashram with Dilip in 1938 when she was 18. Her mother, Maya Devi, however, was not happy with the decision, and after an unpleasant altercation at Pondicherry, succeeded in having Esha back in Calcutta.

Another chapter of Dilip’s life comprises his companionship with Indira Devi. Born in 1920, Indira, a married woman from a respectable background, first met Dilip in Jabalpur. She expressed a desire to become his disciple. While Dilip hesitated to ask Sri Aurobindo, the Master, when asked, to everyone’s surprise, gave a ready consent.

Towards the end of November 1950, Sri Aurobindo’s physical condition worsened. He passed away on 5 December 1950. Dilip received the tragic news from Arindam Basu in Banaras. He had the last Darshan of his Guru and confided sadly to Nirodbaran: “You can’t imagine what I have lost!” He was plunged into grief for a while. Later he left for America on a lecture tour in the company of Indira Devi.

As a sadhak at Pondicherry, he regularly donated his earnings to the Ashram. He declined to accept the Music Chair at the Benaras Hindu University in 1925. Similarly, he declined the post of a Director in the Faculty of Arts at Annamalai University when the coveted position was offered to him.

LAST DAYS: HARI KRISHNA MANDIR, PUNE

After Sri Aurobindo’s passing, Dilip left Pondicherry. The place for him was not the same in the physical absence of the Master despite his reverence for the Mother. After his world tour in 1953, Dilip and Indira Devi visited Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Delhi and Haridwar. A friend, C. V. Mehta invited them to stay in his guest house, ‘Dunlavin Cottage’ in Poona. In 1959, thanks to generous donations by his followers,

a temple dedicated to Krishna was built at Poona in the same premises. Every Sunday, in the forenoon, at 'Hari Krishna Mandir', Dilip addressed the gatherings on topics like the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Savitri*. As Nirodbaran recounts, Dilip continued to express his love for the Mother, in all his correspondence with Nolini Kanta Gupta.

Towards the end of his life, Dilip began to lose his sight, and more tragically, his hearing. One day in 1980, he heard of the imminent arrival of Sri Aurobindo's relics in Bombay. Although seriously ailing, Dilip, along with followers, travelled to Bombay. Eyes laden with tears, overwhelmed with emotions, he stretched his hands and received the relics. He remained in this condition and after two to three days, he left the earth in a state of Samadhi.¹³

In life as in death, Dilip Kumar Roy remained steadfastly loyal to his Guru. In his unflinching devotion and 'Guru Bhakti', he would be second to none. He travelled widely and met many legendary personalities of his times. However, he never courted any one for favour or patronage. He was convinced about the spiritual approach to life and engaged in conversation with distinguished men and women. Some whom he met, like Bertrand Russell, were agnostics, others, like Subhas, were puzzled by Sri Aurobindo's spiritual stance and thought him (unfairly) an escapist. To each of them, Dilip spoke lovingly and patiently, explaining the significance of the evolution in his Master's thinking and consciousness. As a true *Vaishnava* from the land of Nadia, he was a real *Krishna Bhakta*. He combined a heightened intellect with devotional ardour. He was intoxicated by the love of God. Why would the others not be equally made steeped in divine joy, he mused.

(To be continued)

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

References and Notes

I am indebted to my late father Panchanan Mohanty for his booklet *Parama Bhakta: Dilip Kumar Roy* (in Oriya), Cuttack: Matrubhavan, 2000, for a brief but cogent narrative about D. K. Roy. It turned out to be a major source of inspiration for me.

1. Dilip Kumar Roy and Indira Devi, *Pilgrims of the Stars: Autobiography of Two Yogis*, USA: Timeless Books, 1985 (first published in 1973 by Macmillan Publishing Co.).

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

7. *Parama Bhakta: Dilip Kumar Roy* (Oriya), by Panchanan Mohanty, Cuttack: Matrubhavan, 2000, p. 6. Translated by Sachidananda Mohanty.

8. *Among the Great* by Dilip Kumar Roy, Pune: Hari Krishna Mandir, 2006. (First published by Nalanda Publications, Bombay, 1945). Also see *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* by Dilip Kumar Roy, Pondicherry: All India

Books, 1984. (First published in August 1952.)

9. *Pilgrims of the Stars*, op. cit., p. 155.
10. See Panchanan Mohanty, op. cit., p. 10.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

The relation of Guru and disciple is only one of many relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this Yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental ideal. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.

12 December 1929

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 395)

THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

ONE day, when the Mother was walking to the garage on her way to the Tennis Ground, Mridu-di stopped her and wanted to get her permission to send her servant's child to the school. The Mother could not understand her English. In the meantime, Amrita-da came along. The Mother acted as if she had not seen him and started going forward. Amrita-da went to the nearby bathroom and leaving his shoes there, came and stood near her. Seeing him barefoot, the Mother started laughing, because he was convinced that if he went barefoot she would surely speak to him.

*

Once, Amrita-da told Nolini-da that he wanted to do *pranam* to the Mother that day before him. Nolini-da happily agreed. But hearing this exchange of words, she herself came out and called Nolini-da first. When Amrita-da opened his mouth to tell the Mother something, she indicated with her eyes that he should wait next to the tall cupboard nearby. After Nolini-da, about four or five people went and did *pranam* to the Mother, after which it was Amrita-da's turn. Nolini-da came down and stood in the verandah. While Amrita-da was coming down, he said to Nolini-da, "From tomorrow I will give you my papers. Could you please get them signed?" Amrita-da went into his room. Nolini-da went upstairs. Two minutes later, coming down the stairs, he called out, "Amrita, the Mother is calling you." Almost stumbling, Amrita-da ran to the Mother, crossing Nolini-da. He came back ten minutes later. With a radiant smile on his face, he showed Nolini-da all the beautiful books which the Mother had given him as presents. Nolini-da opened the books and looked at the Mother's signatures. We also went closer to have a look. "Why so many gifts, Amrita-da?" someone wanted to know. Amrita-da was a bit embarrassed. "Ask Nolini. He knows everything." Nolini-da looked at us, and, laughing, went into his room.

*

In the evenings, the Mother used to conduct a translation class. One day, Amrita-da came late to this class. He stood at the door with an embarrassed look. The Mother looked at him and what she indicated to him we could not understand. Amrita-da entered the class, almost crawling like a child, so that nobody would notice him. Before the Mother, he was indeed a little child.

*

Once, the Mother came almost twenty minutes ahead of time for this translation class. As it had started raining very suddenly the Mother had stopped her game of tennis at the Tennis Ground and come away to the Playground early. Many who were in this class, had not yet come. The Mother, looking around, said softly, "If somebody recited a French poem now, it wouldn't be bad." Having said this, she looked at Amrita-da. Amrita-da turned to Nolini-da, and sat with his head lowered. The Mother smiled a little and looked at Pavitra-da. He too remained silent. The Mother told him, "You are such a learned man in scientific matters. It's no use asking you." She did not say anything to Nolini-da. . . . The Mother said, "In that case, someone should take courage and come forward. Isn't there anyone who can recite a small poem?" All of a sudden, Benjamin stood up and started reciting the poem written by La Fontaine about the fox and the crow. He continued to recite and enact it. He recited the crow's part in the manner of a crow, and the fox's part in the manner of a fox. Both his recitation and his acting were well expressed. The Mother was very happy. With a smile she showered praises on him for his beautiful acting.

*

Mridu-di was a *sadhika* of the early times. I have already narrated one or two anecdotes about her. Now I remember another story about her. She used to cook for Sri Aurobindo twice a day at the Prasad House. Many who went to this house received the *prasad*. Sri Aurobindo liked her cooking. She had devotion and love in plenty, but her nature was rather rustic. She did not follow any discipline. Command, instruction, advice . . . were strangers to her. She had a habit of complaining always, and she used to quarrel without any reason. One day I heard from Mridu-di herself that many times she had wanted to leave the Ashram for no reason at all, but the Mother had not given her the permission. This time, however, the Mother had agreed. So Mridu-di started crying under Sri Aurobindo's window, in the middle of the road. After this Sri Aurobindo sent a letter through Nolini-da in which he advised her to go and ask the Mother's forgiveness and to offer her *pranam*. She went up to the Mother and with tears in her eyes she said she had nowhere to go. The Mother took her in her arms and forgave her.

*

Now let me tell you another story about Mridu-di. She had been warned by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about her quarrels. Finally Mridu-di promised that she would try to stop quarrelling if in exchange she could have a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo while he was eating. Sri Aurobindo asked her to remain silent for six months and to do her *tapasya*. Mridu-di's *tapasya* began. The young boys used to provoke her in order to try and break her vow of silence. Even though she was

provoked inwardly, she used to restrain herself outwardly. In the middle of all this came her birthday. By then, she had completed three months of her *tapasya*. For these three months she did not quarrel with anybody. She requested the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to allow her to see Sri Aurobindo while he ate . . . so that she could be at peace, otherwise, if the young boys started provoking her again, her three months' long *tapasya* would be undone. Sri Aurobindo granted her the permission. This is what Mridu-di told us one day as she tried to describe that scene. The Mother looked like a heavenly worshipper before the deity in a temple, as she arranged the food offering before it. She placed every item carefully and with great awareness. With her soft hands and her unperturbed gaze, with a concentrated mind, taking all her time, she arranged all the dishes. In every movement one could see her heart's love and devotion. Sri Aurobindo was God himself and the Mother was the Universal Mother herself.

*

There are many stories about Mridu-di. One day she sent some boiled cucumbers, which were bitter, to Sri Aurobindo. However, the Mother understood this in time. Seeing that Sri Aurobindo was not enjoying this, she immediately removed the bowl. If the Mother had not taken it away, Sri Aurobindo would perhaps have eaten all of it. Luckily, nothing untoward happened. One evening, in the Ashram, Mridu-di suddenly said, "You know, the Mother can speak Bengali." I said, "I have heard that she can understand Bengali, and that she can write it too." Mridu-di said, "The Mother can also speak Bengali. Yesterday the Mother was sitting alone on a chair. When she saw me she said, 'Mridu, can you bring those two plates of flowers to me? Please keep those three vases which are next to them on the table near your hand.' Astonished, I said, 'Mother, you can speak Bengali! How embarrassing! The other day when you said to me that you cannot understand the English I speak, I replied that you too could not speak Bengali. You did not say then that you knew Bengali.'"

*

This Mridu-di, with her unusual nature, one night, after spending a long time doing *pranam* at the Samadhi, went to her room in Prasad House and fell asleep. The next morning, as she hadn't woken up as usual, her door was forcefully opened only to discover that Mridu-di had shut her eyes in eternal slumber. The Mother had said that after Sri Aurobindo had left his body, Mridu-di had no desire to live any more. Her good fortune was that she did not have to bear any suffering caused by illnesses. I received Sri Aurobindo's *prasad* from Mridu-di very often.

*

Talking of this *prasad*, I am reminded of an incident which occurred in 1947. We used to live at that time on the top floor of Shivabhai House. At that time, in that area there were no houses which belonged to the Ashram. On the day the date chosen to be India's Independence Day was announced, some people started an agitation against the Ashram. Some drunkards came and started throwing stones at our house on the nights of the 12th and 13th August. On the night of the 14th we gathered in the Ashram so that we could hear on the 15th, over the radio, what Sri Aurobindo had written about his own birthday and the occasion of the Independence of India. The miscreants, at that time, caused great harm to the Ashram.¹ We informed the Mother about the fact that we felt these hooligans were going to make our house a target of their anger. After the incident on the evening of the 14th, the Mother asked us not to go back home. From the 14th up to the 17th we remained inside the Ashram. Nolini-da and Amrita-da gave us some mats and some cushions and it was decided that we could all sleep at night in Madhav Pandit's office. It was after 1 o'clock at night that Amrita-da came with a large pot full of some food which had been offered to Sri Aurobindo and from which he had already eaten some. It was thanks to these hooligans that we got this special *prasad*. We also had the good fortune of spending four nights under the same roof as the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the Ashram. We got to see that most people who lived in that house continued to work until very late in the night. Also, they would be up before four o'clock in the morning and finish their ablutions. I wondered when they got to sleep. One of them gave me this answer, "At the Bakery, you too get up at two o'clock in the morning. If we sleep, how will we get our work done? By living with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, we have got used to staying up all night." During the day they used to take a very short rest after their meal. It is worth mentioning that on 15th August 1947, as we celebrated Sri Aurobindo's birthday, no untoward incident took place, and it was during this time that Pranab-da showed his organisational skills and by succeeding in protecting the Ashram, became the Mother's special servitor. It was from this time that the Mother started drawing him close to herself.

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

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

1. A member of the Ashram, named Moolshankar, who was one of the attendants of Sri Aurobindo, was struck with a knife during the agitation, and he died. Another member of the Ashram, Chimanbhai, narrowly escaped. — Translator's note

THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of June 2011)

3. In Quest of the Flute

THE search for the origins of Krishna's flute naturally takes us to the *Vishnu Purana*. As in the *Harivamsam*, the cowherds are astonished by Krishna's superhuman deeds. Is he human or divine? Krishna shrugs off their question. He is neither a god nor a yaksha, nor gandharva nor a demon. I am one of you! *Aham vo bāndhavo jāto!* Nectarean words that have come to the help of millions of sufferers. He is a duty-conscious relative, a *bandhu* who will never abandon us! The power of the name!

When Prahlada's father
Chastised him,
Was he not saved
By the name Narahari?
When the lady was disrobed
In the royal court,
The name Krishna saved her!

Yama's minions came to Ajamila
For dragging him away!
Was he not saved then
By the name Narayana?
Your name itself is enough!¹

The cowherds were content that Krishna was one of them. This was followed by Krishna, Balarama and the cowherdesses gathering in the autumnal moonlight. Krishna began to sing sweetly in a voice that ranged easily in higher and lower reaches. Listening to him, other cowherdesses left their homes and came to the place where Krishna was singing. But where is the flute? Did I say "Krishna is playing the reed in the delightful haze of autumnal moonlight" in the *Vishnu Purana*? No! It is his voice:

Coming there a gopi joined his voice and began singing slowly while another did so in her mind. A gopi felt shy as she repeated "Krishna, Krishna" while

1. A Kannada song of Purandaradasa.

another was overcome with love and stood beside him. Yet another saw the elders in the front of her house and so remained indoors, with closed eyes meditating upon him. Another thought of him as the Supreme and gained Realisation even as she was self-lost in thought (*chintayanti*).

So the night proceeded with the gopis playing games among themselves enacting scenes of togetherness with Krishna and his astonishing deeds. Presently Krishna joined them and after some preliminary problems, successfully formed the Ras circle. He then began to sing as they moved in unison. While his voice rose high describing the beauty of autumn (*sharad*), all the gopis could do was to repeat his name.

By the time we come to the *Bhagavata* several centuries later, the spaces reverberate with Krishna's flute's call and it has been pursuing us ever since up in the hills, down in the dales, in the remotest hamlet which is covered by sky-high palms and the urban conglomerations where the audio cassettes sneak through the urban noises to whisper in our ears, *jādu bhari mohan ki muraliyā*, Krishna's flute is filled with magic . . .

So whence came this reed to Krishna's lips in the *Bhagavata* and filled the world of bhakti in India with its graceful showers of music? As a student having to learn the history of poetics, I had come across Aristotle's statement that "the flute is not an instrument that has a good moral effect; it is too exciting." I gave it a passing nod and no more. I was learning Carnatic music at that time. I spent very little time practising music for I found it a great joy just to be reading books *about* music! There was God's plenty here for Carnatic music is a treasure house of instrumental and percussion play. Prof. P. Sambamoorthy told us all that we needed about the flute, and mercifully, never quoted Aristotle. To the Indian consciousness that is never a few yards away from a picture or icon of Krishna playing the flute, H. A. Popley provided the right "connect" in his foreword to the book:

The flute is not only one of the most distinctive instruments of India's musical genius but it is one of the most universal instruments in the world . . . In India it is closely associated with one of the most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon, but long before that it was associated with the ubiquitous shepherd, perhaps the most ancient of all occupations . . . A simple, inexpensive piece of bamboo and a little practice, together with some native art, and the heart is ravished by the simple beauty of the music. This is what gives the flute such a charm to us all . . .²

Here perhaps is the explanation why one feels at home with the Krishna avatar. Such an innocent cowherd trilling away in the open spaces! Not only India, but the entire humanity, as we have been noticing in the phenomenon of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. For, the wily Krishna sports the musical instrument that is found all over the world. Why, it was quite popular in ancient Egypt as the *sebi*. Is there a single country where the flute has not found a native range? Of course, probing its history has given me some uneasy moments. Apparently in very, very ancient times, flutes were made of bones! Ouch! Clay whistles are familiar though. You can wander in the market of a town in Gujarat like Patan and pick up plenty of clay whistles shaped artistically. And they blow shrill tunes too.

Today, it is the bamboo flute that rules the musical world. Krishna holds a piece of bamboo, the *venu*. So we hail him as Venugopala, the cowherd with a bamboo in hand. Prof. Sambamoorthy has meditated upon the manner in which man learnt to make bamboos into musical instruments:

How did the idea of preparing musical pipes of the flute type first strike man? It was in this wise. In his sojournings after the necessities of life, he came across bamboo forests from whence he heard sweet musical notes. Close observations revealed to him that these sweet notes were the results of currents of wind dashing against the holes drilled on the sides of the bamboo stems by the chafers and beetles in their innocent quest after food. The idea of preparing musical pipes by artificially drilling holes on the sides of such bamboo stems or other suitable material and supplying his own air to produce the notes, naturally struck him.³

Salutations to you O beetles and chafers and the entire family Scarabaeidae! I shall not consider you anymore as an enemy to the flowers in my garden! From you has the world come to know of the eternal music of open spaces. Of course, the flute is no more the rough-hewn whistler with a couple of holes. Man's imagination and artistry have increased the number of holes, produced wonderful fingering systems and even a method where the double flute can give the drone and musical notes at the same time. With its simplicity as well as infinite variety, the flute has gone into literature in a big way. An ancient Tamil epic like *Silappadhikaram* has plentiful matter on the flute. On one hand the flute is associated with Krishna (obviously a very early recordation of Krishna's closeness to the instrument) and we have the brilliant '*Aychiar Kuravai*' where the cowherdesses dance the *rāsa-līlā* and sing of the various flutes of Krishna:

3. Op. cit., pp. 37-38.

If Mayavan, who brought down the wood-apple fruits using a calf as a stick comes among our cows, shall we not hear the sweet music of his cassia-flute?

If Mayavan, who churned the ocean using the snake as the churning rope, comes among our cows, shall we not hear the lilting music of his lily-flute?

If Mayavan, who felled the kurunda tree in the forest area, comes among our cattle, shall we not hear the ravishing music of his flute made of Arabian jasmine?⁴

Were the flutes shaped like any of these flowers? The science of playing the flute gets recordation in the epic too. Of the flute-accompanist for Madhavi's dance:

"... he was proficient in the two kinds of manipulations *chittiram* and *vanjanai* — by which the harsh sounds of the song are made pleasing to the ear; he had the same degree of proficiency in music as the composer of songs; he could handle without flaw the four kinds of *varttanai*; he could judge when the modulated notes *kural* and *ili* harmonised perfectly; knowing well the nature of the tuned tabor, he played on the flute in harmony with the tabor-player . . ."⁵

Silappadhikaram (circa 3rd century A.D.) belongs to the late Sangam Age in Tamil literature. By the time it was composed, Krishna had come to be known as the Flute-Player of Brindavan. In ancient Sangam literature the flute is already a popular instrument though it is not associated with Krishna yet. Here is the lowly, innocent cowherd out in the woods in *Perum Panatrupadai* (circa 2nd century B.C.), an early prototype of Krishna:

"And on his neck a garland of wild blooms closely threaded,
Gathered from high bough and vine; clad in a single piece,
He eats his milk and rice and abides in the woods
With the cows that yearn for their young.
On his flute with black holes made with a burning brand —
From the fire-stick, as he rubs, first comes the smell of smoke,
Then a thin wisp, and then the flame attests his victory —
He sounds the sweet strains of the Palai mode."⁶

Though Vishnu is very much in early Tamil literature as Tirumal or Mayon, he is not associated with the flute. He is the destroyer of Kesi, the horse-demon; he is the Supreme who takes avatars like Narasimha. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata* Krishna is

4. Translations from *Silappadhikaram* quoted in the essay are by S. Krishnamoorthy.

5. Translated by S. Krishnamoorthy.

6. Translated by N. Raghunathan.

the Yadava hero who makes politically powerful speeches as when he calls for the slaying of Jarasandha:

. . . “Now is the call of Fate:
 Fallen is Dimbhuc, fallen Hunsu great;
 Kunsu is slain and all his host; the hour
 Is sighted when King Jarasundha’s power
 Must bow to death; yet not in violent war
 ’Tis conquerable nor all the gods that are,
 Nor the embattled Titans overwhelm:
 In deadly duel we must vanquish him. . . .”⁷

This is a far cry from the peace-loving flautist herding the cows in ancient Tamil land. According to the poetics, Mayon is the presiding deity of the forests. The landscape is one of forests. Yet the Lord himself is not shown as playing the flute. There is a flute-playing cowherd in the Shiva cycle of legends whose history has been recorded by Sekkizhar in the *Peria Puranam* (12th century). An expert in grazing cows, Anayar cultivated his music as an offering to the Divine. He wedded the seven notes of the musical scale to the Five Syllables (Na-ma-si-va-ya) to invoke Shiva and remain in self-absorbed bliss.

“Thus he sustained the cowherd clan
 So the cattle could register increase
 And the cowherds serve; he took to the flute
 Which releases music loved by Shiva.

Even as he played the flute of lovable music
 In praise of Shiva, the Lord of Hosts,
 The melody of the reed melted
 The very bones of all living beings.

The mobile things and immobile ones
 Were synthesised body and soul by music.
 The cause was the devotee’s flute
 Who serves Shiva, the wearer of Konrai blooms.”⁸

Day after day, even as the cowherd-devotee sought to use up the inexhaustible reservoir of music projected through the triple-stairway of octaves (*mandara*,

7. Translated by Sri Aurobindo: *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 56.

8. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

maddhima and *tara*), the flora and fauna of the wilds seemed caught in a trance of Shiva-consciousness. There seemed a yogic stillness everywhere. Even as the cows forgot to chew the cud, birds and other cowherds came and stood near Anayar bathing in the waves of melody. Such was the calm that spread all over the place that nature ceased to be “red in tooth and claw”. Then the tremendous transformation took place. Shiva appeared along with Parvati, riding the Nandi and remained laving in the sounds of the flute. And then:

“As the immortals showered flowers on earth
And countless sages recited the Rig Veda,
Shiva returned to His golden residence
Accompanied by his devotee playing the flute.”

Ancient Tamil literature does not present a flute-playing God till we come to *Silappadhikaram*. As for the Sanskrit Puranas, they seem more interested in the Rasa dance of Krishna. Perhaps, it was the Tamil world that first linked Krishna with the flute as those cowherds recorded in ancient Sangam literature. If Krishna belonged to the Yadava (or Vrishni) clan, his origins must have been the guileless cowherd in the scenario of the forests. Sometime, somewhere, somehow, the intrepid hero trying to manage the load of humanity’s vagaries — in the *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsam* and the early Puranas — became one with the peace-loving cowherd flauting away without a care in the world.

Who could have been the linking agent of the two disparate characters? Whose vision was so incandescently pure that could make it a natural transformation? Who but the Tamil hymnologists, the Alvars of South India? It is in the *Bhagavata* that we see Krishna as the flute-player mesmerising the cowherd clan. It is in this Purana that we have the story of Krishna subduing the seven bulls to marry Satya, an obvious insertion of a typically Tamil custom where the hero subdued fierce bulls to claim his prize, a bride. In ancient Tamil culture, Mayon (Vishnu) was the presiding deity of Mullai land (forests). Whenever a girl child was born into a family in this area, the family would set aside the bull-calf that was also born on that day and bring it up as a fierce animal. The hero who could subdue this bull would be entitled to marry the girl, and the custom was known as “*eru thazhuvudhal*” (subduing the bull). The folklore of Tamil Nadu said Krishna had subdued seven bulls to marry his cousin, Pinnai. Apparently this Tamil feature was quietly absorbed by the *Bhagavata*. In the same manner the Tamil culture placed the flute in the hands of Krishna, thanks to the Alvar phenomenon.

This is not research in the conventional sense. Krishna has always challenged me with a million questions, and this is but one of them. None of the questions can be answered with finality. The intellect fails in his presence but the heart simply enfolds him with a gesture of impatience. Why do you want to know whether there

were one or two Krishnas? What does it matter if the flute came into Krishna's hand much later than the Mahabharata War? Can you imagine Krishna without his flute? He would then look so stern, the Magisterial Teacher of Yoga! I would then lose all the vasts of Krishna literature that have kept me bound to him down these decades. I do not want to do that. All those sweet moments listening to Perialwar's hymns, eyes closed, visualising myself in a green, green forest, brought to me as it is by *Savitri* though I am sitting within the walls of my ancient home, with plaster peeling away, and everything ought to look drab:

“Asocas burned in crimson spots of flame,
Pure like the breath of an unstained desire
White jasmines haunted the enamoured air,
Pale mango-blossoms fed the liquid voice
Of the love-maddened coil, and the brown bee
Muttered in fragrance mid the honey-buds.
The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
All Nature was at beauty's festival.”⁹

Perialwar's vision presents to him such a sublime scene. Perhaps there was no need for him to imagine the scene. He lived long before we transformed our lovely motherland (*sujalām*, *suphalām*, *malayajaśītalām*, *śasya śyāmalām*) into an air-conditioned nightmare of concrete building blocks. Did Perialwar find himself in the forests near his native Srivilliputtur and spent hours listening to the cowherd boys playing the flute? Did he remain transfixed for a while when one of the ill-clad urchins stopped, removed the reed from his lips and smiled self-consciously at the venerable Brahmin who seemed half-asleep under the banyan tree? Did Perialwar see in the smile the mischievous beam of our *Natkhat Nandkishore*? We would never know. The Flute-Player of Brindavan is the reality in the outpourings of Perialwar that keep us in thrall today.

As Govinda played the flute, his jaw rested
On his right shoulder; his hands crossed,
Eyelashes were drawn up; the stomach
Was drawn in and lips came together;
With tresses flying loose, red-lined eyes
Glancing around, their deer-like forms thin,
The cowherdresses held up with one hand
Their slipping garments, and stood listening.

As the tiny fingers stroked the flute,
 The red face grew intent on the stops
 And the eyelashes held drops of sweat.
 Varieties of birds flew out of their perches
 And lay around Govinda like dried up plants.
 The cattle spread out their legs,
 Bent their heads and stood still, ears unmoving.¹⁰

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

10. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

Krishna represents both the universal Godhead and the immanent Godhead, he whom one can meet within one's being and in all that constitutes the manifested world.

And do you want to know why he is always represented as a child? It is because he is in constant progression. To the extent that the world is perfected, his play is also perfected — what was the play of yesterday will no longer be the play of tomorrow; his play will become more and more harmonious, benign and joyful to the extent that the world becomes capable of responding to it and enjoying it with the Divine.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 14)