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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SHYAM SUNDAR

Shyam Sundar Jhunjhunwala passed away on 28 July, 2011 after a fairly long illness. He was 84. He was associated with the Sri Aurobindo Society as well as Auroville for many years.

THE OTHER EARTHS

An irised multitude of hills and seas,
 And glint of brooks in the green wilderness,
And trackless stars, and miracled symphonies
 Of hues that float in ethers shadowless,

A dance of fireflies in the fretted gloom,
 In a pale midnight the moon's silver flare,
Fire-importunities of scarlet bloom
 And bright suddenness of wings in a golden air,

Strange bird and animal forms like memories cast
 On the rapt silence of unearthly woods,
Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast
 Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes,

Through glimmering veils of wonder and delight
World after world bursts on the awakened sight.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 562)

‘TO KNOW THEE AND SERVE THEE BETTER . . .’

March 12, 1914

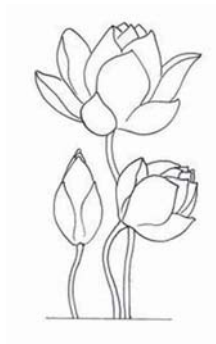
O LORD, my one aspiration is to know Thee and serve Thee better every day. What do outer circumstances matter? They seem to me each day more vain and illusory, and I take less and less interest in what is going to happen to us in the outer life; but more and more am I intensely interested in the one thing which seems important to me: to know Thee better in order to serve Thee better. All outer events must converge upon this goal and this goal alone; and for that all depends upon the attitude we have towards them. To seek Thee constantly in all things, to want to manifest Thee ever better in every circumstance, in this attitude lies supreme Peace, perfect serenity, true contentment. In it life blossoms, widens, expands so magnificently in such majestic waves that no storm can any longer disturb it.

O Lord, Thou art our safeguard, our only happiness, Thou art our resplendent light, our pure love, our hope and our strength. Thou art our life, the reality of our being!

In a reverent and joyful adoration I bow to Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 96)



The First Great Realisation

THE FIRST GREAT REALISATION

(Continued from the issue of August 2011)

[Note: We continue in this issue the selection of passages on Nirvana. The quotations are from the Mother's conversations.]

BUDDHA AND NIRVANA

Remedies for the suffering of humanity: the Buddha and Saint Vincent de Paul

Two outstanding beings at the two extremes of thought and action, two of the finest human souls expressing themselves in sensitive and compassionate hearts, received the same psychic shock when they came into contact with the misery of men. Both devoted their whole lives to finding the remedy for the suffering of their fellow-men, and both believed they had found it. But because their solutions, which may be described as contraries, were each in its own domain incomplete and partial, both of them failed to relieve the suffering of humanity.

One in the East, Prince Siddhartha, later known as the Buddha, and the other in the West, Monsieur Vincent, who came to be called Saint Vincent de Paul after his death, stood, so to say, at the two poles of human consciousness, and their methods of assistance were diametrically opposite. Yet both believed in salvation through the spirit, through the Absolute, unknowable to thought, which one called God and the other Nirvana.

Vincent de Paul had an ardent faith and preached to his flock that one must save one's soul. But on coming into contact with human misery, he soon discovered that in order to find one's soul one must have time to look for it. And when do those who labour from morning till night and often from night till morning to eke out a living really have time to think of their souls? So in the simplicity of his charitable heart he concluded that if the poor were at least assured of the barest necessities by those who possess more than they need, these unfortunate people would have enough leisure to lead a better life. He believed in the virtue and efficacy of social work, of active and material charity. He believed that misery could be cured by the multiplication of individual cures, by bringing relief to a greater number, to a very large number of individuals. But this is only a palliative, not a cure. . . .

At the other extreme of consciousness stands the Buddha with his pure and sublime compassion. For him the suffering arising out of life could only be abolished

by the abolition of life; for life and the world are the outcome of the desire to be, the fruit of ignorance. Abolish desire, eliminate ignorance, and the world will disappear and with it all suffering and misery. In a great effort of spiritual aspiration and silent concentration he elaborated his discipline, one of the most uplifting and the most effective disciplines ever given to those who are eager for liberation.

Millions have believed in his doctrine, although the number of individuals capable of putting it into practice has been very small. But the condition of the earth has remained practically the same and there has been no appreciable diminution in the mass of human suffering.

However, men have canonised the first and deified the second in their attempt to express their gratitude and admiration. But very few have sincerely tried to put into practice the lesson and example that were given to them, although that is truly the only effective way of showing one's gratitude. And yet, even if that had been done, the conditions of human life would not have been perceptibly improved. For to help is not the same as to cure, nor is escaping the same as conquering. Indeed, to alleviate physical hardships, the solution proposed by Vincent de Paul can in no way be enough to cure humanity of its misery and suffering, for not all human sufferings come from physical destitution and can be cured by material means — far from it. Bodily well-being does not inevitably bring peace and joy; and poverty is not necessarily a cause of misery, as is shown by the voluntary poverty of the ascetics of all countries and all ages, who found in their destitution the source and condition of a perfect peace and happiness. Whereas on the contrary, the enjoyment of worldly possessions, of all that material wealth can provide in the way of comfort and pleasure and external satisfaction is powerless to prevent one who possesses these things from suffering pain and sorrow.

Neither can the other solution, escape, the solution of the Buddha, present a practical remedy to the problem. For even if we suppose that a very large number of individuals are capable of practising the discipline and achieving the final liberation, this can in no way abolish suffering from earth and cure others of it, all the others who are still incapable of following the path that leads to Nirvana.

Indeed, true happiness is the happiness one can feel in any circumstances whatsoever, because it comes from regions which cannot be affected by any external circumstances. But this happiness is accessible only to a very few individuals, and most of the human race is still subject to terrestrial conditions. So we can say on one hand that a change in the human consciousness is absolutely indispensable and, on the other, that without an integral transformation of the terrestrial atmosphere, the conditions of human life cannot be effectively changed. In either case, the remedy is the same: a new consciousness must manifest on earth and in man. Only the appearance of a new force and light and power accompanying the descent of the supramental consciousness into this world can raise man out of the anguish and pain and misery in which he is submerged. For only the supramental consciousness

bringing down upon earth a higher poise and a purer and truer light can achieve the great miracle of transformation. . . . (M 12: 95-98)

The world as a result of Desire

Buddha said that the world, this terrestrial world (maybe the universe, I don't know, the point isn't very clear), in any case the terrestrial world is the result of Desire (but I know someone who used to say [*laughing*], "Yes, it's God's desire to manifest!"), and that when 'Desire' disappears, the world will disappear and there will be Nirvana. In other words, once the desire to manifest has disappeared, there is no Manifestation anymore.

I don't think Buddha was ignorant; I think he knew very well the existence of invisible beings, of immortal beings (what men call gods) and probably the existence of a supreme God, too — he very likely knew it. But he didn't want people to think about it because it appeared to contradict his opinion that the world was the result of Desire and that, once Desire was withdrawn, the world withdrew — if there is an immortal world, things cannot happen that way. (Conv: 20.3.65)

If the Buddha came back

Buddha retired from the world, sat down in meditation and discovered a way out of earthly suffering and misery, out of all this illness and death and desire and sin and hunger. He saw a Truth which he endeavoured to express and communicate to the disciples and followers who gathered around him. But even before he was dead, his teaching had already begun to be twisted and distorted. It was only after his disappearance that Buddhism as a full-fledged religion reared its head founded upon what the Buddha is supposed to have said and on the supposed significance of these reported sayings. But soon too, because the disciples and the disciples' disciples could not agree on what the Master had said or what he meant by his utterances, there grew up a host of sects and sub-sects in the body of the parent religion — a Southern Path, a Northern Path, a Far Eastern Path, each of them claiming to be the only, the original, the undefiled doctrine of the Buddha. The same fate overtook the teaching of the Christ; that too came to be made in the same way into a set and organised religion. It is often said that, if Jesus came back, he would not be able to recognise what he taught in the forms that have been imposed on it, and if Buddha were to come back and see what has been made of his teaching, he would immediately run back discouraged to Nirvana! All religions have each the same story to tell. The occasion for its birth is the coming of a great Teacher of the world. He comes and reveals and is the incarnation of a Divine Truth. But men seize

upon it, trade upon it, make an almost political organisation out of it. The religion is equipped by them with a government and policy and laws, with its creeds and dogmas, its rules and regulations, its rites and ceremonies, all binding upon its adherents, all absolute and inviolable. Like the State, it too administers rewards to the loyal and assigns punishments for those that revolt or go astray, for the heretic and the renegade. . . . (M 3: 76-77)

Buddhism of the South

Ah! as for Buddhism. The people of the South and the North have different kinds of imagination. The southern people are generally more rigid, aren't they? . . . I don't know, but for Buddhism, the Buddhism of the South is quite rigid and doesn't allow any suppleness in the understanding of the text. And it is a terribly strict Buddhism in which all notion of the Godhead in any form whatsoever, is completely done away with. On the other hand, the Buddhism of the North is an orgy of gods! . . . But the Buddhism of the South has the austerity of Protestantism: there must be no images. And there is no divine Consciousness, besides. One comes into the world through desire, into a world of desire, and abandoning desire one goes out of the world and creation and returns to Nirvana — even the nought is something too concrete. There is no Creator in Buddhism. . . . (M 5: 325-26)

The Buddha and the earth-atmosphere

The Buddha said that Nirvana results in the cessation of rebirth. But isn't the Divine always free to send back into the manifestation the spark that extinguishes itself in Him?

Naturally, each time that one makes a rule one makes a mistake.

Besides, although he has not taken up another physical body, the Buddha himself has returned to work in the earth-atmosphere. (M 16: 382)

Grateful to the Buddha

There is one thing which is not spoken of here, in the Dhammapada: a supreme disinterestedness and a supreme liberation is to follow the discipline of self-perfection, the march of progress, not with a precise end in view as described here, the liberation of Nirvana, but because this march of progress is the profound law and the purpose of earthly life, the truth of universal existence and because you put yourself in

harmony with it, spontaneously, whatever the result may be.

There is a deep trust in the divine Grace, a total surrender to the divine Will, an integral adhesion to the divine Plan which makes one do the thing to be done without concern for the result. That is the perfect liberation.

That is truly the abolition of suffering. The consciousness is filled with an unchanging delight and each step you take reveals a marvel of splendour.

We are grateful to the Buddha for what he has brought for human progress and, as I told you at the beginning, we shall try to realise a little of all the beautiful things he has taught us, but we shall leave the goal and the result of our endeavour to the Supreme Wisdom that surpasses all understanding. (M 3: 297)

Sri Aurobindo's explanation

The Mother says: "Même ceux qui ont la volonté de s'enfuir, quand ils arrivent de l'autre côté, peuvent trouver que la fuite ne sert pas à grand-chose après tout." ["And as for those who have the will of running away, even they when they go over to the other side, may find the flight was not of much use after all."]

What does "arrivent de l'autre côté" mean in this sentence? Does it mean "when they come into this world" or "when they go into the world of silence which they realised"?

No — "arrivent de l'autre côté" simply means "when they die". What Mother intended was that when they actually arrive at their Nirvana they find it is not the ultimate solution or largest realisation of the Supreme and they must eventually come back and have their share of the world action to reach that largest realisation. (M 3: 306-07)

Two questions and Sri Aurobindo's replies

Here's the first question:

"It seems to me that the number of people in the world accepting the truth of our Yoga of Transformation would not be as large as those who accepted Buddhism, Vedanta or Christianity."

Here is Sri Aurobindo's answer. Notice his humour. I draw your attention to his humour.

“Nothing depends on the number. The numbers of Buddhism or Christianity were so great because the majority professed it as a creed without its making the least difference to their external life.

*“If the new consciousness were satisfied with that, it could also and much more easily command homage and acceptance by the whole earth. It is because it is a greater consciousness, the Truth Consciousness, that it will insist on a real change.”**

The second one:

“You have said that the aim of our Yoga is to rise beyond the Nirvana, but in the Ashram there are extremely few who have reached or have tried to reach even the Nirvana. To reach even the Nirvana one has to give up ego and desire. Could it be said that even a few sadhaks in the Ashram have succeeded in doing so? Surely everybody must be making some effort to do this. Why then are they not successful? Is it that after some effort they forget the aim and live here as in ordinary life?”

The answer:

*“I suppose if the Nirvana aim had been put before them, more would have been fit for it, for the Nirvana aim is easier than the one we have put before us — and they would not have found it so difficult to reach the standard. The sadhaks here are of all kinds and in all stages. But the real difficulty even for those who have progressed is with the external man. Even among those who follow the old ideal, the external man of the sadhak remains almost the same even after they have attained to something. The inner being gets free, the outer follows still its fixed nature. Our Yoga can succeed only if the external man too changes, but that is the most difficult of all things. It is only by a change of the physical nature that it can be done, by a descent of the highest light into this lowest part of Nature. It is here that the struggle is going on. The internal being of most of the sadhaks here, however imperfect still, is still different from that of the ordinary man, but the external still clings to its old ways, manners, habits. Many do not seem even to have awakened to the necessity of a change. It is when this is realised and done, that the Yoga will produce its full results in the Ashram itself, and not before.”***

(M 6: 454-56)

*Letter of 29 April 1934.

**Letter of 30 April 1934.

NOT NIRVANA ONLY

A Nirvana behind all the planes of being

What exactly is meant by “the impersonal Divine”?

It's what is called in some philosophies and religions the Formless; something that's beyond all form, even the forms of thought, you see, not necessarily physical forms: forms of thought, forms of movement. It is the conception of something which is beyond not only what can be thought or conceived or seen even with the most subtle eyes, but all that has any kind of perceptible form whatever, even vibrations more subtle than those which infinitely overpass all human perceptions, even in the highest states of being, something which is beyond all manifestation of any order whatever — usually that's how we define the impersonal God. He has nothing, none of the qualities we can conceive of, He is beyond all qualification. It is obviously the quest of something which is the opposite of the creation, and that is why some religions have introduced the idea of what they call Nirvana, that is, of something which is nothing; it is the same quest, the same attempt to find something which would be the opposite of all that we can conceive. So finally we define It, because how can we speak of It? But in experience one tries to go beyond all that belongs to the manifested world, and that is what we call the impersonal Divine.

Well, it happens — and this is very interesting — that there is a region like that, a region which . . . how to put it? . . . which is the negation of all that exists. Behind all the planes of being, even behind the physical, there is a Nirvana. We use the word Nirvana because it is easier, but we can say, “There is an impersonal Divine behind the physical, behind the mind, behind the vital, behind all the regions of being; behind, beyond.” (We are obliged to express ourselves in some sort of way.) It is not necessarily more subtle, it's something else, something absolutely different; that is, in a meditation, for example, if you meditate on Nirvana you can remain in a region of your mind and by a certain concentration produce a kind of reversal of your consciousness and find yourself suddenly in something which is Nirvana, non-existence; and yet in the ascent of your consciousness you have not gone beyond the mind.

One can have a little understanding of these things if one knows the multiplicity of dimensions, if one has understood this principle. First of all you are taught the fourth dimension. If you have understood that principle, of the dimensions, you can understand this. For example, as I said, you don't need to exteriorise yourself to go from one plane to another, when going to the most subtle planes to pass from the

last most subtle plane to what we call Nirvana — to express it somehow. It is not necessary. You can, through a kind of interiorisation and by passing into another dimension or other dimensions . . . you can find in any domain whatever of your being this non-existence. And truly, one can understand a little bit of this without experiencing it. It is very difficult, but still, even without the experience one can understand just a little, if one understands this, this principle of the inner dimensions.

(*Silence*)

It can be put like this (you see, it's one way of saying it) that you carry within yourself both existence and non-existence at the same time, the personal and the impersonal, and . . . yes . . . the manifest and unmanifest . . . the finite and the infinite . . . time and eternity. And all that is in this tiny little body.

There are people who go beyond — even mentally, you see . . . their mental atmosphere goes beyond their body, even their vital atmosphere goes beyond their body — there are people whose consciousness is vast enough to extend over continents and even over other earths and other worlds, but this is a spatial concept. Yet by an interiorisation in other dimensions, the fourth and more, you can find all this in yourself, in one point . . . the infinite. (M 7: 244-45)

You can find it behind everything

You see, all classifications, of any kind, always seem too rigid to me; they lack the suppleness that exists in the universe. We always feel the need to put one box inside another, one box inside another (*Mother laughs*), but that's not how it is! It's more a correspondence than being a part of something. Or all right, one is part of the other — but which one is part of which other? In fact, they are part of something that is neither this, that, nor the other!

There are different LINES of approach. It all ultimately depends on one's aspiration or dominant preoccupation, or on what one needs for one's work. It's as if one went STRAIGHT where one wants to go, ignoring everything else, taking no notice of it — passing through it if necessary, but without paying attention to it. And the need to classify, well . . . it comes afterwards, if one feels like describing things, but it isn't necessary.

It's like that famous Nirvana — you can find it behind everything. There's a psychic nirvana, a mental nirvana, even a vital nirvana. I think I already told you about the experience I had with Tagore in Japan. Tagore always used to say that as soon as he started meditating he entered Nirvana, and he asked me to meditate with him. We sat together in meditation. I was expecting to make a very steep ascent, but he simply went into his MIND, and there . . . (what I do, you see, is tune in to the

person I am meditating with, identify with him — that's how I know what happens). Well, he started meditating, and everything quite rapidly came to a halt, became absolutely immobile (this he did very well), and from there he sort of fell backwards, and it was Nothingness. And he could remain in that state indefinitely! We did in fact stay like that for a rather long time; I don't remember how long, three quarters of an hour or an hour, but anyway it was long enough. I was keeping alert the whole time to see if, by chance, he would go on into something else, but there he stayed — he stayed there nice and calm, without stirring. Then he came back, his mind started up again, and that was that.

I said nothing to him.

But it was a true nirvana: Nothingness. Not a single sensation, not a movement — no thoughts, of course — nothing, not a vibration: just like that, Nirvana. So I quite naturally concluded that there is a nirvana behind the mind, since he went there directly. And through my own experiments in the different zones of the being I became aware that, indeed, there is a nirvana behind everything (there must be a nirvana behind the physical cell too — maybe that's what death is! Who knows, it's possible). A nothingness, nothing stirs any more. And nothing's there any more — nothing's there, there's nothing to stir (*Mother laughs*). It's the Nothing.

(Conv: 30.10.62)

Negative Nirvana

What does "a negative Nirvana" mean?

Negative Nirvana? It is not in today's lesson.

Negative Nirvana means quite simply a Nirvana which contains nothing positive. It means a nought containing nothing positive, an absolute nought. (M 6: 392)

Aspiration for Nirvana

. . . There is a whole part of the most material consciousness, the utterly physical consciousness (precisely the one that participates in incalculable, minuscule activity of every day) which, of course, is very hard to bear. In ordinary life, it's tolerable, it's bearable because you take interest in it and sometimes pleasure — all that life on the surface that makes you . . . you see a pretty thing, it gives you pleasure; you have something tasty in your mouth, it gives you pleasure; anyway, all these little pleasures that are so futile, but help people bear existence. Those who don't have the inner consciousness and the contact with what's behind all that wouldn't be able to live if they didn't have little pleasures. So a host of tiny little problems crop up,

problems of material existence, which explain perfectly well that those who no longer had any desire, and therefore no longer took any pleasure in anything, had one single idea: “What’s the use of it all!” And indeed, if we didn’t have the feeling that all that must be borne because it leads to something else of an altogether different nature and expression, it would be so insipid and puerile, so petty that it would become quite unbearable. That’s certainly what explains the aspiration for Nirvana and the flight from this world. (Conv: 23.9.64)

The impermanence of things

The Buddha, you know, was deeply shocked by the impermanence of things — the impermanence of the whole creation, that there was nothing permanent anywhere. That was the starting point of his quest, when he saw that nothing was permanent — constant and permanent — hence there was nothing one could call ‘forever’. That’s what shocked him, and he felt he had to find something permanent, and in his quest for the Permanent he came upon Nothingness. So his conclusion ran something like this: “Only one thing is permanent — Nothingness. As soon as there’s creation, it’s impermanent.”

Why did he object to impermanence? That, I don’t know — a question of temperament, I suppose. But as far as he was concerned, that’s what Nothingness is good for: it’s permanent.

It’s permanent, the one thing that’s permanent.

...

What Sri Aurobindo says is, “Yes, true, it’s the only permanent thing — a certain permanent Nonbeing behind everything. But why shouldn’t He sometimes — not ‘sometimes,’ but at the SAME time, the same moment — have the fun of being both permanent and impermanent? There’s no objection to that.” In any case, He has none!

Our minds may not like it, but He. . . . (Conv: 30.10.62)

The ideal one puts before oneself

. . . In your consciousness there is still the idea that you unite with “Something” which knows more about it than you and will make you recognise your mistake. But that no longer exists after the identification! That is just the first contact, but not the identification.

In identification there is no longer any difference between the one who is identified and what he is identified with: it is the same thing. So long as there is a

difference, it is not identification.

I say that by any path whatever and by eliminating all that is not of this path, it is possible for each one to be perfectly identified with the Divine, that is to say, to become the Divine — but at only one point, the point he has chosen. But this point is perfect in itself. I don't say it contains everything, I say it is perfect in itself, that is, the identification is perfect — but it is not total. . . .

The difference exists only in the manifestation. By this identification, whatever it may be, one automatically goes out of the manifestation, except at the point where one is identified. And if, in the path one has followed, the aim is to go out, as for instance with those who seek Nirvana, if it is a going out of the manifestation, well, one goes out of the manifestation, it's the end. And once one goes out of the manifestation, there is no longer any difference or any hierarchy, it is finished, one has gone out of the manifestation. That is it, you understand, everything depends on the goal one pursues. If one goes out of the manifestation, one goes out of the manifestation, then there is no longer a possibility of any hierarchy at all. But as soon as one enters the manifestation, there is a hierarchy. That is to say — if we take the realisation of the supramental world — everybody will not be on the same level and made in the same pattern, and with the same capacity and possibility. It's always this illusion, isn't it, of a sort of indefinite repetition of something which always resembles itself — it is not that. In the realisation, the manifestation, there is a hierarchy of capacity and action, and of manifestation. But if the aim is to go out of the manifestation, then quite naturally, at whatever point you go out, you go out.

It all depends on the ideal one puts before oneself. And while you go out because you have chosen to do so, to enter into Pralaya, there is all the rest of the universe which continues. . . . But that's totally immaterial to you. As your aim was to get out of it, you get out of it. But that doesn't mean that the rest also go out! You are the only one to go out, or those who have followed the same aim and the same path as you.

(Long silence)

That is precisely the problem which faced Sri Aurobindo here and me in France: should one limit one's path and reach the goal first, and later take up all the rest and begin the work of integral transformation; or should one go step by step, not leaving anything aside, not eliminating anything on the path, taking in all the possibilities at the same time and progressing at all points at the same time? That is to say, should one retire from life and action until one reaches one's goal, becomes conscious of the Supermind and realises it in oneself; or should one embrace the entire creation and with this entire creation gradually go forward towards the Supermind?

(Silence)

One can understand that things get done by stages: you go forward, reach one stage, and so, as a consequence, take all the rest forward; and then at the same time, in a simultaneous movement, you reach another stage and again take others forward — and so on.

That gives the impression that you are not moving. But everything is on the move in this way. (M 8: 48-50)

Only one aspect of that which is

. . . in spiritual education, the goal you set before you will assume, in the mind's formulation of it, different names according to the environment in which you have been brought up, the path you have followed and the affinities of your temperament. Those who have a religious tendency will call it God and their spiritual effort will be towards identification with the transcendent God beyond all forms, as opposed to the immanent God dwelling in each form. Others will call it the Absolute, the Supreme Origin, others Nirvana; yet others, who view the world as an unreal illusion, will name it the Only Reality and to those who regard all manifestation as falsehood it will be the Sole Truth. And every one of these expressions contains an element of truth, but all are incomplete, expressing only one aspect of that which is. Here too, however, the mental formulation has no great importance and once you have passed through the intermediate stages, the experience is identical. In any case, the most effective starting-point, the swiftest method is total self-giving. Besides, no joy is more perfect than the joy of a total self-giving to whatever is the summit of your conception: for some it is the notion of God, for others that of Perfection. If this self-giving is made with persistence and ardour, a moment comes when you pass beyond the concept and arrive at an experience that escapes all description, but which is almost always identical in its effects. And as your self-giving becomes more and more perfect and integral, it will be accompanied by the aspiration for identification, a total fusion with That to which you have given yourself, and little by little this aspiration will overcome all differences and all resistances, especially if with the aspiration there is an intense and spontaneous love, for then nothing can stand in the way of its victorious drive. (M 12: 36)

Two states and a something beyond

Sri Aurobindo has said that the universe is built upon the delight of existence and that delight, being its origin is necessarily also its goal, so this would mean in fact that delight is the highest state.

But I don't need to tell you that this is not delight as it is understood in the

ordinary human consciousness. . . . Indeed, that delight is beyond the states which are generally considered as the highest from the yogic point of view, as for instance, the state of perfect serenity, of perfect equality of soul, of absolute detachment, of identity with the infinite and eternal Divine, which necessarily raises you above all contingencies. Parallel to this state there can be another which is the state of perfect, integral, universal love, which is the very essence of compassion and the most perfect expression of the Grace which wipes out the consequences of all error and all ignorance. These two states have always been considered as the summit of consciousness; they are what could be called the frontier, the extreme limit of what the individual consciousness can attain in its union with the Divine.

But there is something which lies beyond; it is precisely a state of perfect delight which is not static: delight in a progressive manifestation, a perfect unfolding of the supreme Consciousness.

The first of the two states I spoke about leads almost always to a withdrawal from action, an almost static condition, and very easily would it lead to Nirvana — in fact, it has always been the way prescribed for all those in search of Nirvana. But this state of delight I am speaking about, which is essentially divine because it is free, totally free from all possibility of oppositions and opposites, does not break away from action; on the contrary, it leads to an integral action, perfect in its essence and completely liberated from all ignorance and all bondage to ignorance.

(M 8: 326-27)

Having the two sides together

. . . if he sees the two aspects — that is to say, the Master of Existence and the World-Mother — he may see them with an unequal vision, which would mean that he still separates them and gives more importance to one than to the other. And in that case there is a one-sided tendency; he sees only one side or there is a lack of balance between the two perceptions. And so the power of effectuation is not perfectly supported, that is to say, the action of the Mother does not have the support of what he calls the Master, the action of the Mother does not have a sufficient basis of support from the Master; or else it is the light of a revelation — that is, the Consciousness of the Master — which is not realised, not perfectly dynamic, that is, it is not translated into a creation.

Either the creative Power is not supported by the revelation, or the revelation is not expressed in the creative Power. This is what Sri Aurobindo means. There is a tendency to go towards one or the other, instead of having both at the same time, if one no longer separates them in one's consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo says that when one succeeds in not separating them in one's consciousness, one can fully understand who the Lord of the Sacrifice is. Otherwise

one leans to one side or the other and naturally what one does is incomplete. He says very clearly, doesn't he? that if one leans to the side of the Master without laying stress on the Shakti or the Mother, one goes into the Impersonal and out of the creation, one returns into Nirvana. He says that this tendency towards the Impersonal may exist even in the yoga of works, in Karmayoga, and that impersonal force, impersonal action is always considered as the liberating aspect which frees you from the narrowness of the person. And that is why there is nothing surprising in the overwhelming strength of this experience. . . . Till today this is what has always been considered as yoga: to abandon the personal and enter into the consciousness of the impersonal. Sri Aurobindo speaks of it as an overwhelming experience, for it gives you the impression of liberation from all the ego's limitations. And later, he describes the union: insistence on the personal side and union with the divine Person; then the world is no longer an illusion nor something transient which will disappear after a time, but the constant and dynamic expression of the eternal divine Person.

That is the other side.

And when one has the two together, one is perfect. (M 8: 112-13)

If the Lord wanted only Nirvana, nothing but Nirvana would exist

To be free from all attachment does not mean running away from all occasion for attachment. All these people who assert their asceticism, not only run away but warn others not to try!

This seems so obvious to me. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level.

Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations.

As a matter of fact I have made a whole series of studies on the subject, on the purely physical plane. . . . In order to be above all possible error, we tend to eliminate any occasion for error. For example, if you do not want to say any useless words, you stop speaking; people who take a vow of silence imagine that this is control of speech — it is not true! It is only eliminating the occasion for speech and therefore for saying useless things. It is the same thing with food: eating only what is necessary. In the transitional state we have reached, we no longer want to lead this entirely animal life based on material exchange and food; but it would be foolish to believe that we have reached a state where the body can subsist entirely without food — nevertheless there is already a great difference, since they are trying to find the essential nutrients in things in order to lessen the volume. But the natural tendency is to fast — it is a mistake!

For fear of being mistaken in our actions, we stop doing anything at all; for fear of being mistaken in our speech, we stop speaking; for fear of eating for the pleasure of eating, we do not eat at all — this is not freedom, it is simply reducing the manifestation to a minimum; and the natural conclusion is Nirvana. But if the Lord wanted only Nirvana, nothing but Nirvana would exist! It is obvious that He conceives of the coexistence of all opposites, and that for Him this must be the beginning of a totality. So obviously, if one feels meant for that, one can choose only one of His manifestations, that is to say, the absence of manifestation. But it is still a limitation. And this is not the only way to find Him, far from it!

It is a very common tendency which probably originates from an ancient suggestion or perhaps from some lack, some incapacity — reduce, reduce, reduce one's needs, reduce one's activities, reduce one's words, reduce one's food, reduce one's active life — and all that becomes so narrow. In one's aspiration not to make any more mistakes, one eliminates any occasion for making them. It is not a cure.

But the other way is much, much more difficult. (M 10: 194-95)

True Nirvana: Disappearance of the ego into the splendour of the Supreme

We shall take the last text. It is an interesting one.

“It is neither by moral precepts and observances, nor by a wide knowledge, nor by practising meditation, nor by a solitary life, nor by thinking”, that one attains the true bliss; it is by getting rid of all desires. Certainly it is not easy to get rid of all desires, it sometimes needs a whole lifetime. But to tell the truth, it seems to be a very negative way, although at a certain stage of development, it is a discipline which it is very useful, even indispensable to practise, if one does not want to deceive oneself. Because at first you begin by getting rid of the major desires, those that are most obvious and trouble you so much that you cannot even have any illusions about them; then come subtler desires that take the form of things that have to be done, that are necessary, even at times of commands from within, and it requires time and much sincerity to discover and overcome them; at last it seems as if you had done away with these wretched desires in the material world, in external things, in the world of feelings, in the emotions and sentiments, in the mental world as regards ideas, and then you find them again in the spiritual world, and there they are far more dangerous, more subtle, more penetrating and much more invisible and covered by such a saintly appearance that one dare not call them desires.

And when one has succeeded in overcoming all that, in discovering, dislodging and getting rid of them, even then one has done only the negative side of the work.

The Buddha said or has been made to say that when one is free from all desire, one necessarily enters into infinite bliss. This bliss may be a little dry and anyway it does not seem to me to be the quickest way.

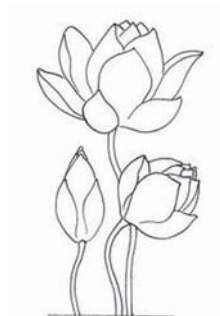
If at the outset one were to seize the problem bodily, jump into it with courage and determination and, instead of undertaking a long, arduous, painful, disappointing hunt after desires, one gives oneself simply, totally, unconditionally, if one surrenders to the Supreme Reality, to the Supreme Will, to the Supreme Being, putting oneself entirely in His hands, in an upsurge of the whole being and all the elements of the being, without calculating, that would be the swiftest and the most radical way to get rid of the ego. People will say that it is difficult to do it, but at least a warmth is there, an ardour, an enthusiasm, a light, a beauty, an ardent and creative life.

It is true that without desire nothing much remains to sustain the ego and one has the impression that the consciousness becomes so hardened that if the ego crumbles into dust, then something of one's self also falls into dust and one is ready to enter into a Nirvana which is annihilation pure and simple.

But what we consider here as the true Nirvana is the disappearance of the ego into the splendour of the Supreme. And this way is what I call the positive way, the self-giving that is integral, total, perfect, without reserve, without bargaining. In the mere fact of not thinking of oneself, not existing for oneself, referring nothing to oneself, thinking only of what is supremely beautiful, luminous, delightful, powerful, compassionate and infinite, there is such a profound delight that nothing can be compared to it.

This is the only thing that deserves . . . that is worthy of being attempted. All the rest is only marking time.

The difference is between climbing a mountain by going round and round, slowly, laboriously, step by step, for hundreds of years, and spreading invisible wings and soaring straight to the summit. (M 3: 267-69)



BEYOND NIRVANA

Inanity of human assertions

431 – The philosophers who reject the world as Maya, are very wise and austere and holy; but I cannot help thinking sometimes that they are also just a little stupid and allow God to cheat them too easily.

432 – For my part, I think I have a right to insist on God giving Himself to me in the world as well as out of it. Why did He make it at all, if He wanted to escape that obligation?

433 – The Mayavadin talks of my Personal God as a dream and prefers to dream of Impersonal Being; the Buddhist puts that aside too as a fiction and prefers to dream of Nirvana and the bliss of nothingness. Thus all the dreamers are busy reviling each other's visions and parading their own as the panacea. What the soul utterly rejoices in, is for thought the ultimate reality.

434 – Beyond Personality the Mayavadin sees indefinable Existence; I followed him there and found my Krishna beyond in indefinable Personality.

As always, this is Sri Aurobindo's wonderful way of making clear to us the inanity of human assertions by which each one arrogantly denies anything that is not his own discovery or his own personal experience.

Wisdom begins with the capacity to admit all theories, even the most contradictory. (M 10: 334-35)

Beyond Nothingness and Existence

We are told that there is a state of consciousness, when we rise above, when we are able to go beyond both the aspect of Nothingness or Nirvana and the aspect of Existence — there is the Nirvana aspect and the Existence aspect, the two simultaneous and complementary aspects of the Supreme — where all things exist eternally and simultaneously; so one can conceive — God knows! This may well be another stupidity — one can conceive of a certain number of things passing into Non-Being, and that to our consciousness would be a disappearance or a destruction.

Is that possible? I do not know. You would have to ask the Lord, but usually

He does not answer such questions. He smiles!

There comes a time when really one can no longer say anything: one has the feeling that whatever one says, even if it isn't absolutely inane, is not far short of it, and that it would actually be better to keep quiet. That is the difficulty. In some of these aphorisms you feel that he has suddenly caught hold of something above and beyond everything that can be thought — so what can one say? (M 10: 99-100)

Not to abolish, but to change

Because all those who begin by being disgusted with life, their first movement is to get away — all of them. I receive truckloads of letters: as soon as they are disgusted with life, as soon as it stops being something marvellous, “Oh, enough! I want to get away, I want to get away.” That's indeed the first movement: you climb up above, but it will be to come back down and change things HERE — it's not to abolish them, but to change them.

Buddha represented the height of abolition. He led to abolition and represented the height of abolition. Very well, but . . . That's when the summit was reached, when the summit was seen. But we must come back down.

They don't understand, they are still up above, all of them.

. . .

Going back to the Divine, yes, that's Nirvana.

Only, as soon as you are there and in contact with the Divine, he tells you, “Go down! Don't stay here, it's not your place!”

But, you know, I am desperately struggling against all those who conceive of spiritual life as . . . brrt! you go off. That's just the beginning. As for me, I always answer with the story of Buddha: as he was about to enter Nirvana, he suddenly realised that the earth had to be changed . . . and stayed on.

I remember, once, it was with Madame David-Neel. It's very interesting. She came to give a lecture (I wasn't acquainted with her, that's where I met her for the first time), I think it was at the Theosophical Society (I forget). I went to the lecture, and while she was speaking, I saw Buddha — I saw him clearly: not above her head, a little to the side. He was present. So after the lecture, I was introduced to her (I didn't know the kind of woman she was!), and I said to her, ‘Oh, Madam, during your speech I saw Buddha present.’ She answered me (*in a furious tone*), ‘Impossible! Buddha is in Nirvana!’ (*Mother laughs*) Oho! . . . “Better keep quiet!” I thought.

But he really was there, whatever she thought!

That's what it is: going away. (Conv: 9.11.66)

After the identification

I believe I have already explained this to you once. If it were a question of leading what till today was considered the true spiritual life, that is, of giving up altogether all physical activities in order to unite with the supreme divine Reality and remain in this union, of leaving life and all outer expression and going away into Nirvana, into an identity which not only will no longer be expressed in the world, but which takes you *out* of the world completely, then it is obvious that all these gymnastics, whether physical, vital, sensory or mental, are absolutely useless, and that those people considered all this simply a waste of time and quite futile. But *for us* who want to realise almost the very opposite, that is, who, after having identified ourselves with the supreme Reality, want to make It descend into life and transform the world, if we offer to this Reality instruments which are refined, rich, developed, fully conscious, the work of transformation will be more effective. (M 8: 365-66)

Not rejection but acceptance — and victory

In the realm of ideas, there aren't any problems, everything was resolved long ago — the problem is in the fact, in the material fact of the body. . . . It is beginning to learn its lesson. It's beginning to learn. And then, instead of the selfish answer that consists in saying, 'Ah, no! I don't want that, I don't want any of it! (*Laughing*) I am above that weakness and disorder,' let it come, accept it and see what the solution is. In other words, instead of the old problem — rejection of life, rejection of the difficulty, rejection of the disorder and the flight into Nirvana — it's the acceptance of everything — and Victory. (Conv: 14.10.64)

“Not a crucified but a glorified body”

. . . this is an attitude which is found everywhere in the world, differently expressed according to the country and the religion, and it was as a reaction against the ignorance of this attitude that I wrote this.* Naturally, there is the same idea in India, this idea of the complete renunciation of all physical reality, the profound contempt for the material world which is considered an illusion and a falsehood, that leaves, as Sri Aurobindo used to say, the field free to the sovereign sway of the adverse forces. If you escape from the concrete reality to seek a distant and abstract one, you leave the whole field of concrete realisation at the full disposal of the

* “A Power greater than that of Evil can alone win the Victory. It is not a crucified but a glorified body that will save the world.”

adverse forces — which have taken hold of it and more or less govern it now — in order to go away yourself to realise what Sri Aurobindo calls here a zero or a void unit — to become the sovereign of a nought. It is the return into Nirvana. This idea is everywhere in the world but expresses itself in different forms.

Because until now evil has been opposed by weakness, by a spiritual force without any power for transformation in the material world, this tremendous effort of goodwill has ended only in deplorable failure and left the world in the same state of misery and corruption and falsehood. It is on the *same* plane as the one where the adverse forces are ruling that one must have a greater power than theirs, a power which can conquer them totally *in that very domain*. To put it otherwise, a spiritual force which would be capable of transforming both the consciousness and the material world. This force is the supramental force. What is necessary is to be receptive to its action on the physical plane, and not to run away into a distant Nirvana leaving the enemy with full power over what one abandons.

It is neither sacrifice nor renunciation nor weakness which can bring the victory. It is only Delight, a delight which is strength, endurance, supreme courage. The delight brought by the supramental force. It is much more difficult than giving everything up and running away, it demands an infinitely greater heroism — but that is the only way to conquer. (M 9: 4-5)

Beyond Nirvana

. . . so many initiates and sages have been attracted by the solution of the void, of Nirvana, for this is obviously a very radical way of escaping from the consequences of an ignorant manifestation.

Only, the solution of changing this manifestation into a true, truly divine reality is a far superior solution. And this is what we want to attempt now, with a certitude of succeeding one day or another, for, in spite of everything, despite everything, what is true is eternally true, and what is true in essence must necessarily become true in the realisation, one day or another. Sri Aurobindo told us that we had taken the first step on the path and that the time had come to accomplish the work, therefore one has only to set out. That's all. (M 9: 12)

Nirvana and labour

There is no existence without labour — if you want to get out of labour you must get out of existence. The only way to accomplish that, is the way to Nirvana, and that way, to follow it, is of all labours the greatest. (M 14: 326)

SOME EXPERIENCES ON THE WAY

An experience of 1914

Sri Aurobindo saw more clearly. He said — it was even the first thing he told the boys around him when I came in 1914 (he had only seen me once) — he told them that I, Mirra (he immediately called me by my first name), ‘was born free.’

And it’s true, I know it, I knew it then. In other words, all this work that usually has to be done to become free was done beforehand, long ago — quite convenient!

He saw me the next day for half an hour. I sat down — it was on the verandah of the ‘Guest House’; I was sitting there on the verandah. There was a table in front of him, and Richard was on the other side facing him. They began talking. Myself, I was seated at his feet, very small, with the table just in front of me — it came to my forehead, which gave me a little protection . . . I didn’t say anything, I didn’t think anything, try anything, want anything — I merely sat near him. When I stood up half an hour later, he had put silence in my head, that’s all, without my even having asked him — perhaps even without his trying.

Oh, I had tried — for years I had tried to catch silence in my head . . . I never succeeded. I could detach myself from it, but it would keep on turning . . . But at that moment, all the mental constructions, all the mental, speculative structures . . . none of it remained — a big hole.

And such a peaceful, such a luminous hole!

Afterwards, I kept very still so as not to disturb it. I didn’t speak, above all I refrained from thinking and held it, held it tight against me — I said to myself, “make it last, make it last, make it last . . .”

Later on, I heard Sri Aurobindo saying that there were two people here to whom he had done this and as soon as there was silence, they panicked: “My God, I’ve gone stupid!!” And they threw it all overboard by starting to think again.

Once it was done, it was done. It was well-rooted.

For years, from 1912 to 1914, I did endless exercises, all kinds of things, even *prānāyāma* — if it would only shut up! Really, if it would only be quiet! . . . I was able to go out (that wasn’t difficult), but inside it kept turning.

This lasted about half an hour. I quietly remained there — I heard the noise of their conversation, but I wasn’t listening. And then when I got up, I no longer knew anything, I no longer thought anything, I no longer had any mental construction — everything was gone, absolutely gone, blank! — as if I had just been born.

(Conv: 20.9.1960)

. . . since Sri Aurobindo gave me mental silence, it [*the mind*] has been absolutely still; it never started up again as before, and the consciousness has been there (*gesture: above the head*), working from there. . . . (Conv. 21.5.69)

Multiplicity in the unity

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

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

. . . This aphorism would lead to an absolute subjectivity and only this absolute subjectivity would be true — well, it is *not* like that. For that is Pralaya, Nirvana. But Nirvana is not the only thing, there is an objectivity which is real, which is not false — but how to put it! . . . It is something I have felt several times — several times, not only in a flash — the reality of . . . how to express it? One is always betrayed by one’s own words. . . . In the perfect sense of Oneness and in the consciousness of Oneness, there is room for objectiveness, objectivity — the one does not destroy the other, not at all. One can have a feeling of differentiation: not that it is not oneself, but it is a different vision. I have told you, everything one can say is nothing, it is nonsense, because words are meant to express the unreal world, but . . . Yes, perhaps this is what Sri Aurobindo calls the sense of multiplicity in unity, it may correspond a little; just as one feels the inner multiplicity of one’s being, something like that . . . I no longer have the feeling of a separate self, not at all, not at all, even in the body, but that does not prevent me from having a certain sense of objective relation — yes, look — this is the same thing as his “relation of consciousness” between earth and sun, which changes (*Mother laughs*). It is true that this is perhaps the best way of saying it! It is a relation of consciousness. It is not at all a relation of self and “others” — not at all, that is completely cancelled — but it might be like a relation of consciousness between the different parts of one’s being. And obviously, that gives objectivity to the different parts. (M 10: 185, 189)

The experience of Siddhartha Buddha

I was blaming my body, I was saying: this poor body, it has an unfortunate atavism: always horrible, horrible imaginations — and they were not imaginations, it was conscious of what was happening . . . oh! . . .

And it [the body] said, with an inner intensity, “Oh! Why does this world exist?” In that way, so it was . . . it was horrid, sad, miserable . . . so it was miserable and . . . so horrible, oh! . . . But immediately it got the Answer — it was not an answer in words, it was simply . . . as though a vastness opening into the Light. Then, there is nothing to say any more.

But how can That, that vastness, become this? . . . I do not know. The question: “How did That become this?” It is in that way that it came to me: “How could That, that Marvel, have become this, this hideous, monstrous thing?”

But the procedure for changing this back again into That, I do not know. . . . The procedure is . . . abdication (how to say it?), self-giving (it is not that). But everything, everything appeared to it so gruesome. There was a whole day very, very, very difficult. And strangely enough, I knew at that moment that it was the exact repetition of the experience that Siddhartha Buddha had had and that it was while he was *in* this experience that he had said: “There is only one way out: Nirvana.” And at the *same time* I was in the state of true consciousness: his solution and the true one. It was really interesting. How the Buddhist solution is only *one* step taken — one step. And it is *beyond* that (not in another way, but *beyond* that) that the true solution lies. It was a decisive experience.

(*Long silence*)

But what, after all, is this creation? . . . Well, separation, and then wickedness, cruelty — the thirst for doing harm, one might say — then suffering, just the joy of inflicting suffering, and then all the illness and decomposition and death — the destruction. All that, forming part of the same thing. What has happened? . . . And the experience that I had was of the *unreality* of these things, as though you had entered into an unreal falsehood, and all disappears as you come out of it — it *does not exist*, it is not. This is what is frightful! What is for us so real, so concrete, so terrifying, all that does not exist. It is . . . you have entered into Falsehood. Why? How? What? . . .

But never, never in the whole life-long existence of this body, not for once even, had it felt . . . such a total, such a deep pain as on that day . . . oh! . . . something which . . . (*Mother presses her throat*). And then at the end of that, the Bliss. And then, pfft! It is wiped away, as though: “not yet, not yet, it is not yet the time.” As though all that, all that which is so frightful did not exist.

In the end, probably — probably — it is only the earth (that I do not know). It

does not seem to be so, for the moon is very concretely a desolation. In short, there is still a feeling very strong and very exact that it is something limited that is like that, in this Falsehood. And *unreal*. And we are all in the Falsehood and Unreality; that is why it is like that. And what was interesting was that this escape into Nirvana was not the solution, was only a remedy, a remedy for a time (how to explain? I do not know), partial. A partial cure, and, one might almost say, momentary.

And then that, for a moment it is a paroxysm. Afterwards comes the long way: one must carry on, carry on *progressively* the work of transformation. And then, the next minute, it is what Sri Aurobindo has called the supramental being. It is as though the passage from the one to the other.

But how will all this change? I do not know. . . .

(After a silence)

I cannot say, it is inexpressible; it was something that contained horror, fright, pain — and a compassion, oh! So intense. . . . Never, never had this body felt like that. And besides, it put the body in a condition quite . . . quite critical for some hours. And afterwards it was as though everything — each and every thing — came with a Smile and a shining Light, as though (translated in a child's image) as though the Lord was saying, "You see, I am everywhere. You see, I am in everything." And it was incredible — incredible. . . . But there is no communication between the two.

Well, it was at the time when the body was saying: "How is it? Is it going to be necessary to con-ti-nue that? Must one, must one con-ti-nue that? The world, people, the whole creation — to continue that?". . . . That appeared . . . I understood all at once: Ah! It is this which they have translated as "eternal hell". It is this. It is someone who has had this perception.

And all the means — which could be called artificial, including Nirvana — all the means of coming out of that are worth nothing. Beginning with the idiot who kills himself to "put an end" to his life (this of course is, of all the idiocies, the most idiotic; it makes one's case still worse), starting from there right up to Nirvana (where one imagines one is able to escape), all that, all that is worth *nothing*. They are all at different levels, but all are worth *nothing*. And then, after that, at the time when you really have the feeling of an everlasting hell, all of a sudden . . . (nothing but a state of consciousness, it is nothing else but that), all of a sudden a state of consciousness . . . in which all is light, splendour, beauty, happiness, goodness . . . and everything inexpressible. And it is like that: "There, there you are", and then, pfft! it appears and then, hop! off it goes. And then the Consciousness which sees, which asserts itself and says, "Now, next step, the next step." So, it is that, it is in the presence of all that that the body had . . . never, never in all its life had it felt such pain, and even now . . .

Is that, is that the lever? . . . I do not know. But the salvation is *physical* — not

at all mental, but *physical*. I mean to say that it is not escape, it is *here*. This I felt very strongly.

But the body had a few very difficult hours. And always, for it, it is all the same; it says, "Well and good"; it is quite ready for the dissolution or . . . There was no question of that. The question was not that; the question was, to know how to receive the Cure. . . . And how is it? — with our means, it is inexpressible.

But it is not that it is veiled or hidden or whatever: it is *there*. Why? What is it in the whole that takes away from you the power to live it? I do not know. It is there. It is *there*. And all the rest, including death and all, becomes truly a falsehood, that is to say, something that does not exist. (M 11: 176-180)

Same vibratory result

There are two things: in a total and absolute way, at each moment, it is the best possible for the divine Goal of the whole; and for one who is consciously connected with the divine Will, it is the most favourable for his own divine realisation.

I believe this is the correct explanation.

For the whole, it is always, at every moment, what is most favourable for the divine evolution. And for the elements consciously linked with the Divine, it is the best for the perfection of their union.

Only you must not forget that it is constantly changing, that it is not a static best; it is a best which if preserved would not be the best a moment later. And it is because the human consciousness always has the tendency to preserve statically what it finds good or considers good, that it realises that it is unseizable. It is this effort to preserve which falsifies things.

(*Silence*)

I saw this when I wanted to understand the position of the Buddha who blamed the Manifestation for its impermanence; for him perfection and permanence were one and the same thing. In his contact with the manifested universe he had observed a perpetual change, therefore he concluded that the manifested world was imperfect and had to disappear. And change (impermanence) does not exist in the Unmanifest, hence the Unmanifest is the true Divine. It was by considering and concentrating on this point, that in fact I saw that his finding was right: the Manifestation is absolutely impermanent, it is a perpetual transformation.

But in the Manifestation, perfection consists in having a movement of transformation or an unfolding identical with the divine Movement, the essential Movement; whereas all that belongs to the inconscient or tamasic creation seeks to preserve exactly the very same existence instead of trying to last through constant transformation.

That is why some thinkers have postulated that the creation was the result of an error. But one finds all possible concepts: perfect creation, then a “fault” which introduced error; the creation itself as a lower movement which must have an end since it had a beginning; then the Vedic concept, as Sri Aurobindo has explained it, of an unfolding or a progressive and infinite discovery — indefinite and infinite — of the All by Himself. . . . Naturally, all these are human interpretations. For the moment, as long as you express yourself in human terms, it is a human translation. But according to the initial position of the human translator (that is to say, whether it is the position which admits “original sin” or an “accident” in the creation or a supreme conscious Will from the beginning in a progressive unfolding), in the yogic attitude, the conclusions or “descents” are different. . . . There are Nihilists, Nirvanists, Illusionists; there are all the religions which admit the devil’s intervention under one form or another; then there is the pure Vedism which is the eternal unfolding of the Supreme in a progressive objectification. And according to taste, one places oneself here, another there or elsewhere, with all the nuances between. But according to what Sri Aurobindo has felt to be the most total truth, according to this conception of a progressive universe, one is led to say that at every minute what happens is the best possible for the unfolding of the whole. It is absolutely logical. And I believe that all contradictions can arise only from a more or less pronounced tendency towards this or that, for one position or another. All who admit the intrusion of a “sin” or an “error” and the conflict resulting from it between forces which pull back and those which pull forward, may naturally contest the possibility. But one has to say that for him who is spiritually linked with the supreme Will or the supreme Truth, for him it is necessarily, at every instant, the best that happens for his personal realisation. In all instances it is like that. An unconditional best can be admitted only by one who sees the universe as an unfolding, as the Supreme’s self-awareness of Himself.

(*Silence*)

To tell you the truth, all these things are of no importance; for that which *is*, goes in every way entirely and absolutely beyond everything that human consciousness can think about it. It is only when you are no longer human that you *know*; but as soon as this knowledge is expressed, human limits re-impose themselves and then you cease to know.

This is incontestable.

And because of this incapacity, there is a kind of futility also in wanting to reduce the problem altogether to something which human reason can understand. In this case it is very wise to say like someone I knew: “We are here, we have a work to do, and what is needed is to do it as well as we can, without worrying about the why and how.” Why is the world as it is? . . . When we are capable of

understanding, we shall understand.

From the practical point of view, this is evident.

Only, each one takes a position. . . . I have all the examples here. I have a sample collection of all attitudes and see very clearly their reactions. I see the same Force — the same, one Force — acting in this sample collection and producing naturally different effects; but these “different” effects, to a deeper vision, are very superficial: it is only “It pleases them to think in this way, that’s all, it just pleases them to think thus.” But as a matter of fact, the inner journey, the inner development, the essential vibration is not affected — not at all. One aspires with all his heart for Nirvana, another aspires with all his will for the supramental manifestation, and in both of them the vibratory result is almost the same. And it is a whole mass of vibrations which is prepared more and more to . . . to receive what must be.

There is a state, a state essentially pragmatic, spiritually pragmatic, in which of all human futilities, the most futile is metaphysics. (M 4: 213-16)

The work is being done very fast

Sri Aurobindo said it several times: as soon as the being is annulled, the essence, the essential purpose of individualisation immediately reappears WITHOUT the ego’s limits. But what you are speaking of, that sort of anguish that makes one stop, is a necessary movement till the whole being is ready, because if that annulment of the personality, of the individual, took place before all the elements of the body, or even of the vital or the mind, were ready . . . you understand, it would be dissolved, and then there’s no knowing what would happen. So this need to get a grip on oneself occurs until one is entirely ready — when one is ready, one can let oneself go. And as soon as the fusion is done . . . (what can I call it?) not the ‘law’ but what we might call the *raison d’être* [of individualisation] comes back, and without the ego’s limitations.

I had that experience in the vital and in the mind; now I see that it’s the same in the body, that there is still a recall because this or that part, this or that element isn’t yet ready and one has to wait until it’s ready. But in fact, in this morning’s experience, all that remained was like pieces of bark floating about.

Which means that the work is being done very fast.

But when the body is ready, it will be able to let itself go like that WITHOUT BEING DISSOLVED. And that’s the work of preparation. The movement, yes, is to let oneself melt entirely. But the result is the ego’s abolition, that is to say, an UNKNOWN state, you understand, which we may call ‘physically unrealised’, because all those who sought Nirvana did so by giving up their body, whereas our work is to make the body, the material substance, capable of melting; but then, the principle of individualisation remains, and all the ego’s drawbacks disappear. That’s

the present attempt. How to keep the form without the ego's presence? — that's the problem. Well, that's how it takes place, little by little, little by little. That's why it takes time: each element is taken up again, transformed. . . . That's the marvel, that is it (for the ordinary consciousness, it's a miracle): it's keeping the form while entirely losing the ego. For the vital and the mind, it's easier to understand (for most people it's very difficult, but still for those who are ready, it's easy to understand, and then the action can be much more rapid), but HERE, this (*Mother points to her body*), for it not to be dissolved by this movement of fusion . . .? Well, that's precisely the experience, that's it. And there is a slight movement of patience, a movement of . . . it's really the deep essence of compassion: the minimum wastage for the maximum effect. That is, one goes as fast as one can, but delays arise from the need to prepare the various elements. (Conv: 3.2.68)

'I know Nirvana very well . . .'

It came last night. It came slowly, but last night it was very strong: no more sequence, no more linking of cause and effect, no more goal, no more *purpose*, no more intention — a kind of Absolute which does not exclude the creation. It is not Nirvana, it has nothing to do with Nirvana (I know Nirvana very well, I've had it — just yesterday evening, for instance, while walking for japa, and even this morning. . . . You see, I begin by an invocation to the Supreme under his three aspects, and no sooner have I uttered the sound, TAT . . . when all is abolished: Nirvana. And the last few days I have noticed that it's instantaneous, so easy! Oh, a delight! . . . Bah! . . .). But it's not Nirvana, it's beyond that; it contains Nirvana and it contains the manifested world and it contains everything else; all the appearances and disappearances — all of that is contained in it. (Conv: 25.4.61)

The permanence Buddha sought

It is said that divine Love doesn't manifest because, in the world's present state of imperfection, the result would be a catastrophe — that's a human vision. Divine Love manifests, has manifested eternally, will manifest eternally, and it's the incapacity of the material world . . . not only of the material world, but of the vital world and the mental world, and of many other worlds that aren't ready, that are incapable — but HE is there, He is there, right there! He is there permanently: it's THE Permanence. The Permanence Buddha sought is there. He claims he found it in Nirvana — it is there, in Love. (Conv: 22.7.64)



NIRVANA

The ear is a flame,
And a fire the mouth,
The eye is a burning
Deep of drouth.

O give no longer
Your soul to feed
This myriad dragon
Of glowing greed!

Each time you blow
Your passion higher
Beauty goes mounting
A funeral pyre:

If ever the spirit
Leaps like a flash,
What can stay after
But a heap of ash? ...

All figures of joy
You rush to meet
Captive your self
In a narrow heat.

Let no form-vision
Your heart compress:
Then life shall cool
To a boundlessness

That never will die!
For who can raze
The flying rampart
Of infinite space?

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very beautiful — quite inspired and perfect.

25 July 1936

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of August 2011)

CHAPTER: VI

The Name Sublime

*He listens for Inspiration's postman knock
And takes delivery of the priceless gift
A little spoilt by the receiver mind
Or mixed with the manufacture of his brain;
When least defaced, then is it most divine.*

Savitri¹

SHAKESPEARE'S oft-quoted words from *Romeo and Juliet*, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet," have sometimes been contested. What can probably be termed as its extreme opposite proposition is presented by an eminent writer of our time, Graham Greene, thus: "There is a magical quality in names — to change the name is to change the character."²

Observations of this nature, provocative and amusing, have always been open to arguments, both in their defence and in their denial. But the name Sri Aurobindo received was unique in the backdrop of the time. That it became immeasurably significant, could be termed chance by rationalists, but those who believe that chance itself is often a pseudonym of Providence, would find behind the moment when the name flashed in the atheist Dr. K. D. Ghose's imagination, an immaculate "Inspiration's postman knock". To the best of our knowledge there was nobody else among the well-known men of the time named Aurobindo (the name was then spelt 'Arabinda'), though there would be a robust crop of Aurobindo's, variously spelt, in the decades that followed.

Aurobindo means *Padma*, the lotus. Its import in India's mystic tradition is vast and the first one in its register of symbolism is the mythological depiction of Brahma the Creator emerging from the lotus that had its source in Vishnu's navel. Next, Mahadevi, the primeval Mother Divinity, is depicted as holding in one of her four arms the lotus, the other three symbols held by her being the *Shankha* (Conch), the *Chakra* (Discus) and the *Gadā* (Mace). In response to a request by Champaklal to write the significance of the white and red lotuses he had painted,³ Sri Aurobindo wrote for the white lotus "Aditi the Divine Mother" and the Mother wrote for the red

lotus “The Avatar Sri Aurobindo”.

But between his first name and the surname, Sri Aurobindo was obliged to carry for some years a label, “Akroyd”, an odd if not jarring addition to the inspired word, probably the upshot of an after-thought by Dr. Ghose (“mixed with the manufacture of his brain”?). He bestowed it on his new-born child to perpetuate the proof of his affection for a valued friend of his London days, Miss Annette Susannah Akroyd (1842-1929) who came to India in 1872 soon after Sri Aurobindo was born and lived in the mansion owned by the legal luminary, Manmohan Ghose, Bar-at-Law. (In St. Paul’s School record, the name is given as Ghose Aravinda Ackroyd.) Inspired by Keshab Chandra Sen’s lectures in England, she founded a school for women in the city and in 1875 married Henry Beveridge, a judge. She had a deep empathy for Dr. K. D. Ghose and his family, as is evident from one of her letters to her sister Fanny Akroyd, dated the 22nd January 1873:

Tell K. G. G. (K. G. Gupta) to write to Dr. Ghose, if he has not done so lately, and not to expect an answer. The poor fellow has been in worlds of trouble — his wife ill with a most alarming illness — fits of some kind — his works in arrear owing to his own illness, and he himself has had fever. Write him a letter yourself won’t you and tell him some English gossip. I am grieved for him, he has had such shameful treatment at the hands of the missionaries — one of whom published most scandalous libels of him. He feels himself also very much alone and I am so afraid of his fretting himself into real illness, with all his present worry.⁴

By ‘missionaries’ Miss Akroyd means the Brahmos. Dr. Ghose was drawn to the basic ideology of the Brahmo movement, though he was a victim of frequent bickering among its sects.

There was an amusing encounter between Miss Akroyd and the venerable Rishi Rajnarain, Sri Aurobindo’s maternal grandfather, as recorded by the Rishi in his memoirs. Here it is, a literal translation from Bengali:

The day after Miss Akroyd arrived in Calcutta I went to meet the famous barrister Manmohan Ghose. After our talk he asked me, “Would you like to meet Miss Akroyd? She has brought some gifts for your family from Miss Sharpe.” “I will be happy to see her,” said I. He led me upstairs and introduced me to Miss Akroyd. Thereafter he went out for a stroll. Miss Akroyd and I talked on several issues of social import. I asked her, “Suppose we conquered England and encouraged the people of your country to imitate our customs, will you like that?” “No,” she said.

. . . As we discussed the freedom of women, I said, “Freedom without the right education is harmful for women.” She responded, “You are right, female

liberty without education would be a frightful evil.” That she was getting angry within while agreeing with everything I said was something I had failed to realise. Unfortunately, I said thereafter, “You consider English manners to be perfect!” No sooner had I said this than she began pounding on the table and stomping on the floor. Her eyes gave out sparks. I was afraid she would thrash me. Trembling, I said, “I beg to be excused, Madam, I didn’t mean anything wrong.” Just then Manmohan Babu returned from his walk. He had left while we were having sweet talks; on return he felt that a fight was imminent. I took leave. Miss Akroyd did a Namaskar though at our first meeting she had shaken hands. Her Namaskar conveyed the message that since you love your national customs so much, I should follow your custom. I was not to accept defeat. I told Manmohan Babu, “Please tell the Memsahib that her Namaskar looked beautiful.” Miss Akroyd was a short-tempered lady. Once Keshab Babu came to see her. Arguments between the two soon resulted in a heated exchange. Even after Keshab Babu left the scene and was descending the staircase, she pursued him and fought once again midway.⁵

Keshab Babu was the famous Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), the Brahmo leader whose views differed from those of the other leaders of the movement, resulting in his forming a separate organisation.

But both Rajnarain and Miss Akroyd obviously rose above the effect of their first encounter before long, for the latter called on Rajnarain’s family and the two met several times. She seems to have resolved to listen to the veteran’s opinions without appreciation or anguish.

Rajnarain’s last reference to the lady (1889) in his autobiography is, “I am sorry to hear that she had grown deaf.”

Rajnarain cast an unparalleled influence on the youth of his time. His patriotic fervour and philosophy apart, he could outdo the youth in his personal conduct even in his ripe old age. Recounts Rabindranath:

When I first knew Rajnarain Babu, I was not old enough to appreciate his many-sidedness. In him were combined many opposites. In spite of his hoary hair and beard he was as young as the youngest of us, his venerable exterior serving only as a white mantle for keeping his youth perpetually fresh. Even his extensive learning had not been able to do him any damage, for it left him absolutely simple. To the end of his life the incessant flow of his hearty laughter suffered no check, neither from the gravity of age nor ill-health, nor domestic affliction, nor profundity of thought, nor variety of knowledge all of which had been his in ample measure. . . . The memory of this smile-sweetened, fervour-illuminated, lifelong-youthful saint is one that is worth cherishing by our countrymen.⁶

Rajnarain's zest becomes vibrantly alive in yet another passage in the celebrated poet's memoirs:

A zamindar in a small way was among our party. He owned a villa on the river-side. One day we had a picnic there together, in defiance of caste rules. In the afternoon there was a tremendous storm. We stood on the river-side stairs leading into the water and shouted out songs to its accompaniment. I cannot truthfully assert that all the seven notes of the scale could properly be distinguished in Rajnarain Babu's singing; nevertheless he sent forth his voice and, as in the old Sanskrit works the text is drowned by the notes, so in Rajnarain Babu's musical efforts the vigorous play of his notes and features overwhelmed his feebler vocal performance; his head swung from side to side marking time, while the storm played havoc with his flowing beard. It was late in the night when we turned homewards in a hackney carriage.⁷

The indomitable Rajnarain who inspired the young generation of Rabindranath with the spirit of nationalism, had, however, no chance to influence Sri Aurobindo who spent the first five years of his life at Khulna (now in Bangladesh) where his father was posted as the head of the district medical service. Even though Sri Aurobindo along with his siblings visited their maternal grandfather's house at Deoghar a few times, he was too young to imbibe any ideological influence from anybody, though his love of and reverence for Rajnarain found a candid articulation in his poem, *Transiit, Non Periit*, written in 1899, at the death of the grand old man.

Hardly anything is known about Sri Aurobindo's days at Khulna on the river Rupsha, gateway to the Sundarbans. The backdrop of the only anecdote of this period of five years is not Khulna but Deoghar. Jogendra, Sri Aurobindo's eldest maternal uncle, once held a mirror before the child Sri Aurobindo and drawing his attention to the reflection, said, "Look, a monkey!" Sri Aurobindo turned it towards him and said, "Look, elder uncle, elder monkey!"⁸

Not only was Dr. Krishnadhan a capable Civil Surgeon and a true friend of the people, but he was also agreeably and alertly responsive to the social and literary cross-currents of his day. He took keen interest in the general welfare of the people around him and he evinced . . . a genuine enthusiasm for the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Being a *persona grata* with European as well as Bengalee society, Dr. Krishnadhan was able to act as a link, a bridge, between the two; and, indeed, he came to be called the 'Suez Canal', for his house served as a common meeting place, day after day, for both Europeans and Bengalees. During the greater part of his active life, Dr. Krishnadhan was also blessed with the companionship of his charming wife, Swarnalata Devi, who was in fact known as the 'Rose of Rungpur' during their stay in that district town.⁹

Dr. K. D. Ghose, “entirely Anglicised in habits, ideas and ideal”, as Sri Aurobindo put it, did not like his children to learn — not even to speak — Bengali. They were taught to speak English and Hindustani. There was no question of his children being sent to any local school. Dr. Ghose did not find any school up to his expectation in Kolkata either. He led his three sons to one of the finest places in the country and one of the best educational institutions, the Loreto Convent at Darjeeling. Founded in 1846 by a group of Irish nuns this was the first school in that hill city.

Here is a contemporary account of the city by an English traveller:

Darjeeling is an exceedingly pretty place, unlike anything I have seen before. It is laid in terraces on the side of the mountain. Looking down from the hotel, the streets form an interlaced and zigzag pattern. I should never know how to get to any given house in the place. It is like one of those labyrinth puzzles that you try to get to the centre of without crossing a line. The safest way is to do as Alice in the ‘Looking-Glass House’, turn your back to a place, and presently you find yourself walking in at the front door . . .¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo seems to have been quite comfortable at Darjeeling. Mrs. Annette Beveridge, (formerly Miss Akroyd) paid a visit to the hill-city in September 1877 and on the 29th of the same month, made a “zigzag down” to the Loreto Convent. She was keen to see her friend’s sons.

At length a lady appeared and had a long chat with me. She told me that the boys had been sent for but they were very long in coming from the boys’ house which is considerably higher. She told me they were very good and industrious and that the little one (Sri Aurobindo) is now quite happy. Then came another lady who is I believe the Rev. Mother but I could not stay longer . . . Coming up the very steep hill towards home I met the boys — all grown and looking so well-dressed in their blue serge and scarlet stockings. The little fellow had a grey suit, very becoming — and is greatly aged — grown tall and boyish. I was struck particularly by the broadening of his forehead. He was pleased to see me I think but all were quite silent except for an extorted yes! or no! I am going to see them again soon mean time please let the doctor hear this . . . They asked if Mr. Ghose was a Christian and also Mrs. Ghose.¹¹

One of the few experiences of his Darjeeling days, as Sri Aurobindo recounted, remains inexplicable, but it is significant in the sense that unusual experiences had begun visiting him:

I was lying down one day when I saw suddenly a great Tamas rushing into me and enveloping me and the whole universe. After that I had a great darkness

always hanging onto me all through my stay in England. I believe that darkness had something to do with the Tamas that came upon me. It left me only when I was coming back to India.¹²

To imagine that the sublime array of snow-clad peaks should have left an impression in the young Sri Aurobindo would be a pardonable conjecture. In any case his narration of an occult hierarchy through physical symbols, as we find in lines from *Savitri* quoted below, would encourage us to think so:

As if from Matter's plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable's reign:
A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.
So it towered up to heights intangible
And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast
As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live
Near to his dream of the Invisible.¹³

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of July 2011)

Chapter XIII *(Continued)*

A Time of Bereavements

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
January 10, 1950

My dear Father,

On the eve of the New Year I received your kind letter and your best wishes. I hope mine too have reached you on time.

Today I am going to commune with you in my dear Maman's memory. Convinced as I am that life does not end at the tomb, I think of her without grief as if she were continuing her progress in an invisible world and as if our love could still reach her and, when needed, help her.

You will say, perhaps, that it is due to a need for consolation, inherent in human nature, and that I am inclined to hold a view which no fact supports. However, the more I advance, the less do I find the proof which could satisfy the doubting intellect. The intellect, basing its deductions on phenomena, cannot, in my opinion, arrive at any certitude. I see that, even when the logic of its reasoning seems irrefutable to itself, it can easily take the wrong road (witness: the wave theory of light¹).

Modern science has destroyed in its foundation even the faith in an intellectual knowledge of the sensible world. In other words, intellectually we cannot know the reality. And if a real knowledge is possible, it is not by the intellect that one can attain it. We are on the eve of a new age of subjectivism. The human mind, its route (thanks to materialism and positivism) cleared of the prejudices and superstitions which encumbered it, is getting ready to rise to a higher, more powerful and more

1. . . . which is not a wrong road!

comprehensive source of knowledge and action.

You ask me if I am happy. Yes, as much as one can be when one is totally dedicated to an arduous enterprise which is, in one's own eyes, the only ideal worth the trouble of being lived, when one sees the path gradually and slowly opening up, the landscape coming into sight, and when the true meaning of the journey begins to reveal itself.

I am happy that you take an interest in the photos of the *Bulletin*. Do not be surprised if you have not yet found me! During the special occasions, I am generally obliged to be with the official invitees. And then, the photos represent only a fraction of the events and the exercises. I was in a tug of war team, I participated in a pillow fight; I even won the 400 m race (in the 'above 40 years' group). But my performances, although satisfactory, are modest compared to what the young ones do. What I seek above all is to keep the body in good shape, in its strength, health and harmony.

I am sending you three photos taken during André Morisset's² (about whom I have spoken to you in my last letter) recent stay. He is director of the Carbone-Lorraine Society, president of the CIPEL (Mazda batteries), etc. May be Albert would have some common acquaintances with him and could invite him to lunch. He would surely accept with pleasure and would give you his considered opinion of the Ashram and of our activities. If you like the idea, I could send him word.

I end, my dear father, with expressions of my faithful and filial affection.
I embrace you lovingly,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
August 6, 1950

My dear Father,

Your photograph made me very happy. I did not have any of you since many years and several times I had thought of asking you for one. I was particularly happy to note your good physique. The Mother, to whom I showed the photo, told

2. Mirra Alfassa's son.

me that you were remarkable. From my side, here is a photo taken at the beginning of the year. It is one of my best; I am not very photogenic. As you will see, I am not fat. I would have liked to put on a little more weight, but I do not succeed in getting any fatter. Apart from that, I am well. The lack of weight reduces my resistance, but I am not weak. I have just won the 800 metres walking race, (for the 'above 50 years'), in 5 minutes 10 seconds. It is not excellent, but it is not bad either. I have sent you the August issue of the *Bulletin of Physical Education* to La Minelle, because it will take a month to arrive, but I am writing to you in Paris, they will forward it to you if you are not there.

Yes, I can understand that you are no longer happy in La Minelle under these conditions. But with the radio, one is no longer isolated and cut off from the world as one would have been in the olden days.

I am waiting for Weiss' book. I think I know what it is about: a translation of a book by Spalding on the Masters. We know Spalding. I think he is one of those persons, more numerous than one would believe, who do not make a clear distinction between their imagination and the reality. The two are superimposed and one is completely deformed by the other. After all, it is perhaps nothing but an exaggeration of the general case, because all of us perceive the reality, more or less, through our imagination. In any case, here, it is obvious. One cannot say that he is honest; neither can one say that he knowingly deceives others. He finds his stories fine and interesting, and that is enough for him; he thinks it good and useful to share them with others. However, I do not think that he is completely unaware. He had come to India with a group of Americans to whom he had made fat promises. He had taken them on tours across India and naturally what they saw did not correspond with what they expected. They were disillusioned and pretty much dissatisfied. I do not think they hid it from their guide. The fact that he had agreed to guide them to what could not but be a disillusion, shows the character of the person! Perhaps he was surprised that his good intentions were not appreciated.

The situation in Korea is disquieting. The business, very well managed, was probably at once a sounding and a manoeuvre to obtain a favourable position. Some people see there a sort of 'containing the abscess' which will prevent the evil from spreading. In any case, I hope that the Americans are not pushed back into the sea, because the reactions, in the United States as well as in Russia, are to be dreaded. It could be an explosion.

We are expecting Repiton for the 15th of August. I cannot wait to hear the glad tidings of you that he will be bringing. He has already told me that he has seen you and has had a long chat with you. Perhaps what he will tell me will clear up a rather curious passage in your letter, where you tell me that the relations between Albert and me have been set right. I do not see to what incident you are alluding, — if it is a letter, I have not received it. I had asked you about the cause of Albert's silence; you did not answer me. And yet, if there has been a mistake or tactlessness on my

part, I would like to know it, at least so as not to repeat it!

So long, my dear Father, I think of you and I embrace you very affectionately.

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
December 5, 1950

My dear Father,

Sri Aurobindo passed away last night, after an attack of uraemia.

Although he has left us physically, we strongly feel his presence.

It is too soon to tell you what changes this event will bring in my life, but I wanted to inform you immediately so that you would get the news from me rather than from the newspapers.

I embrace you affectionately,

Your son,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Addr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India
December 14, 1950

My dear Father,

I have received your letter today and I want to tell you at once how much, in its brevity, it has touched me. I am grateful to you for what you offer me and the manner in which you offer it to me. This is where I am in this regard:

Sri Aurobindo had some chronic difficulties which he had kept under control for many years. Sometime before the *Darshan* of November 24, these got aggravated. Even the *Darshan* would not have taken place but for his great effort of will. An ailment started at the kidneys and at the same time urea and sugar appeared in the blood in increasing quantities, attaining a proportion which ordinarily results in coma or death. Without doubt this hampered the full action of the supramental force. The equilibrium was broken and he succumbed to what is officially declared as a problem of uraemia (the 5th at 26 minutes past 1 in the morning).

We thought of burying him the same day, but as his body did not at all have the appearance of death and remained intact, we waited. The doctors though had examined him with much care and certified death. Many people saw his body luminous, with a golden light.

On the morning of the 7th, the Chief of the Health Service came to examine the body. According to his official report, written 55 hours after the death, the body did not show any sign of decomposition; the government permitted postponement of the burial, which by law had to take place within 48 hours.

Several thousand people, many of whom had come by special plane from Bombay and Calcutta, filed past his body. Many had the impression of a person immersed in a deep meditation, but not at all of death. It is thus that you will see him in the attached photo; it has to be held as though he were sitting with his back resting against the pillow. Mother told us that a part of the consciousness had voluntarily remained in the body. But subsequently, some signs of change appeared and the burial took place on the 9th at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. By special permission, the tomb is in the heart of the Ashram, under a spreading tree with yellow flowers.

Our grief has certainly been great, because the blow was unexpected. Above all, I measured the extent of the loss that the world suffered at a time when it is going through such a grave crisis. But a consolation has been given to us, which has proved to be greater and greater and which alone enables us to face the future. We feel the Presence of Sri Aurobindo, in us and around us, as powerfully if not more than when he was living, and we feel that this Presence is completely identified with that of the Mother. Thus is born and is confirmed this certitude that our Master has not left us, that his action is going on and that his work continues.

The true reasons for his withdrawal from the body are no doubt profound and will be known only later. For the moment I can only have a glimpse of them.

We could have thought that Sri Aurobindo has withdrawn into the Absolute or that he has entered Nirvana. Mother has told us and many of us also think that it is not that and that he remains and will remain with us, not only as a source of inspiration but as a living and active presence, radiating Light and Force until his work is accomplished, that is to say, until the Supramental has descended and is fully manifested on earth. How many years or centuries that will take, she does not say, and

no doubt, it is not important when one sees things on the scale of the cosmos or of humanity!

So Mother has decided that the Ashram should continue, and, with an increased force, she continues to guide it, as she has been doing since its foundation in 1926 when Sri Aurobindo himself gave her the charge. For us, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are, now more than ever, one and the same Person. We have lost the great sweetness of the personal relation with Sri Aurobindo, but not his guidance, his knowledge and his power, and he has left to us the great sweetness of the relation with the Mother.

Certainly, some changes are going to be made in the Ashram. Some will probably be imposed on us by the circumstances themselves; others will result from the shock which this painful event has given us: a greater concentration in the aspiration, a clearer vision of the essential.

In what concerns me, I do not foresee any important changes in the immediate future. That is why, thanking you for your generous offer, I will not accept it. Rest assured that, as you wished, she has permitted me to make my own decision freely.

The end of the year is approaching and the time when one draws up the balance sheet. I send you my best wishes for the New Year, to you, to Denise and the children, and to the whole larger family. I shall be with you in thought during this period, particularly on January 10. At the present stage of human evolution, death is perhaps necessary, not only for those who go away, but also for those who remain. But all the same, it will not always be like this.

I shall keep you informed.

Embrace Albert and tell him that I have not forgotten him.

I hold you affectionately against my heart.

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.)

SRI AUROBINDO AND DILIP KUMAR ROY

(Continued from the issue of July 2011)

PART TWO

WHAT HIS LIFE MEANT

DILIP KUMAR ROY was one of the best-known disciples of Sri Aurobindo. A multi-talented personality, Dilip travelled far and wide, across India and the world. He rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty, and was attracted especially to outstanding intellectuals and men of letters. He excelled in music and the arts and consequently could touch the chord of a wide cross-section in society. Unlike the anglicised men and women, Dilip was firmly rooted to the Indian soil and was exposed to wide cross-currents of contemporary thought. He was a critical modernist who was drawn to the philosophy of 'creative evolution' and the integral yoga envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. His entire early life and career appear to have been a preparatory ground for meeting Sri Aurobindo, his later life, a mission to promote the Aurobindonian vision.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother loved Dilip deeply, and later, also his companion, Indira Devi. Life in the early days of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was somewhat austere, and musical soirées in individual houses were unheard of. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother made an exception in the case of Dilip. Ashramites and visitors attended such sessions. Some of the present-day teachers and inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram¹⁷ recall with fondness their memories associated with Dilip Roy. A number of them joined his music classes and gave group performances.

In the early days of the Ashram, Ashramites and inmates seldom travelled outside. Again, it was different for Dilip. Travel to America? Well, the Mother was concerned: Indira Devi ought to accompany him, she said. Sri Aurobindo's views regarding sadhaks becoming gurus were clear. Yet Sri Aurobindo allowed Indira Devi to become Dilip's disciple.

There were a number of instances when Sri Aurobindo said a firm 'No' to Dilip. To begin with, for quite some time, Sri Aurobindo did not grant Dilip his wish. He kept Dilip waiting, and it was only after a considerable period, accepted him as his disciple. But once the decision was made, there was no holding back. Although the Master did not give messages to famous and influential men in the outside world when they requested him, he gave time and attention to Dilip and other disciples as may be seen in the countless letters Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip regarding life, literature and yoga.

A good instance of the case cited above is seen in the book *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*. Pramatha Choudhuri, a correspondent from Calcutta, entreated Sri Aurobindo to write a few lines as a tribute to Tagore for the proposed *Golden Book of Tagore*. This is what Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip in 1931:

I am afraid Pramatha Choudhuri is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come. I am self-debarred from the press, platform and public. Even if it were otherwise, it would be impossible, under present circumstances, to write at a week's notice. You will present him my excuses in your best and most tactful manner.¹⁸

When Choudhuri persisted, the Master wrote again to Dilip:

I take Pramatha Choudhuri's remark — that Tagore's Golden Book will be incomplete without my contribution — as a complimentary hyperbole. The Golden Book will be as golden and Tagore's work and fame as solid without any lucubration from me to gild the one or buttress the other.¹⁹

Dilip cannot help seeing that while Sri Aurobindo found no time to write tributes, he was supremely compassionate towards disciples like him. As he says:

. . . he not only went on encouraging the poems of such as we but went on actually correcting our English verses — and with what meticulous pains! I myself have written more than six hundred pages of English verse and produced at least two thousand pages in Bengali, and he not only found time to read *all* these carefully but to comment on most of them as well as throw out suggestions for improvement.²⁰

And yet, when Dilip regretted the fact that Tagore

recanted his faith in the Divine, having been overwhelmed by the modern craze for Humanity with a big H, he [Sri Aurobindo] asked me almost with a motherly solicitude not to criticise Tagore adversely for his *volte face*.²¹

The long note that Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip regarding this, explains in very clear terms Tagore's masterly contributions and concludes:

I do not think that we should hastily conclude that Tagore's passing over to the opposite camp is a certitude. He is sensitive and perhaps a little affected by the positive, robustious, slogan-fed practicality of the day — he has passed through

Italy and Persia and was fêted there. But I don't see how he can turn his back on all the ideas of a lifetime.²²

Most of the correspondence that Dilip had with Sri Aurobindo was characterised by the former's remarks in his 'Preface' to *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me* (it was first published in 1952):

I believe . . . that what I have written is worth while 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.²³

An issue came up when Dr. S. Radhakrishnan wanted Sri Aurobindo to write a philosophical article for Westerners. Sri Aurobindo replied:

Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is 'overwhelming' enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.²⁴

When Dilip persisted and declared that Sri Aurobindo was not known in the West and Radhakrishnan would give him wide publicity, the Master was firm that it was "quite impossible" for him "to write philosophy to order". (p. 50) More importantly, he declared his approach to life in the following words:

. . . I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known as a 'leader'. Then again I don't believe in advertisement except for books, and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is poison. It means either a stunt or a boom, and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crests and leave it lifeless and broken, high and dry on the shores of nowhere . . .²⁵

Several instances, absolutely hilarious, have been recorded by Dilip in *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*. One such happened when a fellow sadhak called Bindu was crestfallen that Sri Aurobindo had not relished the food prepared by him. Bindu wrote:

Gurudev,

Nalina brought me back the dishes. I was stunned to find that you had hardly touched them. I am deeply pained, sorely disappointed, utterly dejected and mortally wounded, and cannot imagine why you are so unsympathetic to me.²⁶

Sri Aurobindo's reply was marvellous:

Bindu!

Don't be absurd! Our sympathy towards you is profound and perfect, but it cannot be measured by our sympathy towards your eatables.²⁷

Similarly, there are instances of fun which 'bordered upon irreverence'.²⁸ Here is Dilip at his inimitable best:

O Guru, I send you a Bengali poem of mine entitled *Akuti* which I translated last night into English. Can you revise it? Is it good? Mediocre? Worthless? Frank opinion please! But what about Raihana's letter? Won't return? You keep mum. What's up? Bridge-building? Supramental? Wool-gathering?²⁹

Sri Aurobindo's repartee was hilarious. He wrote:

I shall see if I can get a few minutes for revising your English translation. But you seem to have progressed greatly in your English verse — (How so quickly? Yogic force? Internal combustion? The subliminal self?) Raihana's letter and drawing which have unaccountably turned up again with me. (Poltergeist? Your inadvertence? Mine?)³⁰

Dilip's misunderstanding of the Mother is narrated in the chapter entitled 'The Mother'. At one stage, he wrote to the Mother defiantly:

If you choose to frown on me because I love Sri Aurobindo more than yourself, then I must stay impenitent since I did come here *primarily* for him and accepted you because *he* had wanted me to turn to you. I never made a secret of this, as I saw no reason why I should stifle the voice of truth . . .³¹

The answer of the Mother surprised Dilip totally! Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Mother has no intention of frowning on you. For she told me it was a case of pure misunderstanding. At all events, you should not be so discourteous as to refuse to see her when she personally summons you to be able to explain it all.

Here is Dilip's description of what happened.

I went — sullenly.

Mother smiled at me as only she could, in the circumstances. I could hardly believe my eyes! But her unexpected sweet smile sent a thought flashing through me which I can only describe by the epithet "heart-warming". . . . Then as I sat down on the floor . . . she placed a hand on my shoulder and looked steadfastly at me. I fought bravely with my unruly tears.

"But can I possibly be angry with anyone who loves Sri Aurobindo as you do?" she said, very simply. Her eyes radiated a strange light, a marvellous blend of strength, tenderness and humility. "My own feelings apart, do I not know how Sri Aurobindo cherishes you? So how could you think it possible for me to frown upon one whom *he* greets with a smile? Am I not here to serve him with all I have and am — even as you, his near and dear disciples, are?"

She would have said more had I not burst into tears.³²

Another correspondence engaged the attention of Dilip when sports or physical activities were introduced in the Ashram. Dilip considered this development as 'ultramodern', rather unnecessary and exchanged a series of letters with Sri Aurobindo. Here again, Sri Aurobindo was his characteristic self, explaining to Dilip with patience, kindness and consideration about the evolving nature of his supramental yoga. Sri Aurobindo also wrote a series of articles on this topic that appeared in the *Bulletin of the Department of Physical Education* of the Ashram.

Dilip's book, *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem*, is another example of his commitment to Sri Aurobindo. The friendship that he shared with the English Professor-turned-yogi, Ronald Nixon, has already been referred to earlier. The book shows Dilip as a letter writer par excellence. Through a primarily epistolary method, we see an evolving relationship between two God-touched individuals. Here again, the inextricable link is that of Sri Aurobindo. The letters date-marked Lucknow, Brindavan, Almora, among other places explore the significance of the advent of Krishna and the meaning of Krishna Consciousness *vis-à-vis* the Integral Yoga. Related issues, both sacred and secular, are taken up. Often, Dilip would share Krishnaprem's letter with Sri Aurobindo and seek his comments. For instance, Krishnaprem's letter on 'Hitler and the War' elicits a very significant reply from Sri Aurobindo. While not condoning the Allies for many of their serious flaws, Sri Aurobindo concluded:

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle

the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities open to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them.³³

Aside from the triangular exchange between Dilip, Krishnaprem and Sri Aurobindo, the book contains letters Krishnaprem wrote to others such as Govinda Gopal Mukhopadhyaya, Hem Chandra Majumdar, Abani Nath Roy and Salil Kumar Mukhopadhyaya. Also, there are letters by Yasoda Ma and Madhava Ashish. All in all, a very fruitful exchange between like-minded seekers after the spiritual truth.

The first two parts of the book are written in a narrative style. Part One deals with “Sri Krishnaprem *vis-à-vis* Sri Aurobindo”; Part Two, with reminiscences and Part Three with letters. In all these, the underlying refrain seems to be Dilip’s search for the meaning of greatness in life. At the beginning of Part One, he quotes Aldous Huxley’s memorable lines in his *Along the Road*:

That it is difficult to tell the genuine from the sham is proved by the fact that enormous numbers of people have made mistakes and continue to make them. Genuineness always triumphs in the long run, but at any given moment the majority of people, if they do not actually prefer the sham to the real, at least like it as much, paying an indiscriminate homage to both.³⁴

Dilip then narrates what the Mother told them one day:

I wrote to him [Sri Aurobindo] also what the Mother had told us one day in passing: that most people who called Sri Aurobindo great based their estimate on data which could not reveal the moral core of his greatness. “That is why,” she had added, “a true vision of what *is* the essence of greatness is indispensable, especially to the pilgrims of the Spirit — if only to obviate lamentable mental muddles.”³⁵

If in his earlier books Dilip spoke eloquently of his homage to Sri Aurobindo, the later ones like *Pilgrims of the Stars* continue the same refrain, after the founding of the Hari Krishna Mandir. Divided into Part 1 and Part 2, this book covers familiar ground in a refreshing manner, and recapitulates his experience in life for a new readership. Many of the figures such as Swami Brahmananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Ramana Maharishi and Rabindranath Tagore earlier encountered, are brought in again with fresh perspectives and additional information. The chapter on Madame Calve and Paul Richard offers a detailed account not seen in the earlier books. On the other hand, Part 2, by Indira Devi will be completely new to readers. Earlier, she was in the background. She now acquires an equal status as a Yogi in her own right. Her narrative occupies exactly seventeen chapters, practically the same number as Dilip’s narrative.

Readers will note that Sri Aurobindo is equally present in Indira's story. In the Foreword to the volume, Frederic Spiegelberg, an eminent Western scholar of spirituality who had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo, says:

If the experience of the Darshan could be summed up in a few words, I would have to say it was an amazing and everlasting shock to behold to what extreme height of perfection the human face can be developed. Sri Aurobindo certainly became my guru during those five seconds . . .

And Spiegelberg adds, addressing Dilip,

It remains for me to wonder, when five seconds could mean so much to your gurubhai, how huge must have been the transforming power of that Spirit to a man who, like you, was privileged to be in such close contact for almost a lifetime! Are you still just yourself or have you become a reflection of something towering over all human possibilities?³⁶

Two extracts are worth presenting here. They offer an extremely significant commentary on Sri Aurobindo's life. One comes from India's leading poet Rabindranath Tagore and the other from the French savant Paul Richard who collaborated with Sri Aurobindo in the early days of the philosophical journal, *Arya*.

To Rabindranath, Dilip quoted from memory a passage from *The Synthesis of Yoga* to disprove the charge that his Guru had retired into an "ivory tower":

An individual salvation in heavens beyond, careless of earth, is not our highest objective: the liberation and self-fulfilment of others is as much our own concern — we might almost say, our divine self-interest — as our own liberation.³⁷

Dilip persuaded Rabindranath to meet Sri Aurobindo. The poet promised to do so, if an opportunity arose.³⁸ In 1928 on his way to Colombo the poet met Sri Aurobindo and wrote an account of his conversation in *Modern Review*:

At the very sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and, through this long process of realisation, had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled or cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life.

I felt the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him: "You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you.

India will speak through your voice to the world. Hearken to me. . . .”

Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him: “Aurobindo, accept the salutation of Rabindranath.” Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence: “Aurobindo, accept the salutation of Rabindranath.”³⁹

And as for Paul Richard on Sri Aurobindo let Dilip do the telling again. The conversation takes place in a hotel in Nice in 1927:

Dilip: May I put to you a straight question?

Richard (*smiles*): You are a born questioner, aren't you? Go on. I mean, it is a good sign — this itch to question. Wasn't that why Krishna encouraged the mortal Arjuna to prod His divine wisdom again and again?

Dilip (*smiling*): But my question is a much simpler one. I want you to tell me frankly your opinion of Sri Aurobindo.

Richard (*after a pause*): I have not met his peer in the whole world. To me he is the Lord Shiva incarnate.

Marthe [*wife of a dear friend*]: Please go on, *monsieur*.

Richard: I can assure you, *madame*, that if Aurobindo came out of his seclusion today, he would overtop all others as a king of kings. But he has chosen to decline his country's invitation to resume his leadership — a renunciation I look upon as the most convincing proof of his spiritual royalty.⁴⁰

And finally, we have the correspondence between Dilip and Subhas Chandra Bose regarding Sri Aurobindo. Bose was then in Mandalay Central Jail in Burma. Unlike his earlier admiration of the Master, now he could not appreciate Sri Aurobindo's decision, to leave “politics for philosophy”. In a letter dated 9th October 1925, to Dilip, this is what Subhas wrote:

I subscribe to most of what you write about Sri Aurobindo, if not to all. He is a ‘Dhyani’ (a contemplative) and I feel, goes even deeper than Vivekananda, though I have a profound reverence for the latter. So I agree with you when you say that one may from time to time — and on occasion for a long spell — remain withdrawn in silent contemplation in perfect seclusion. But here there is a danger: the active side of man might get atrophied if he remained cut off for too long from the tides of life and society. . . . For a variety of reasons, our nation has been sliding pauselessly down to the zero line in the sphere of action. So what we badly need today is a double dose of the activist serum, *rajas*.⁴¹

But elsewhere, such as in his speech at the Hooghly District Students' Conference on 22 July 1929, Subhas spoke highly of Sri Aurobindo. Again, on 17 July 1931 at Narail, he said that Sri Aurobindo gave a "new form and shape" to the "nascent idea of freedom". However, in his speech at the Third Session of the All India Youth Congress held in Calcutta on 25 December 1928, Subhas spoke against the passivism taught by "two schools of thought which have their centres at Sabarmati and Pondicherry".⁴²

Dilip's correspondence with Subhas continued. On 10 September 1932, from a jail in Madras, he said that he "appreciated Sri Aurobindo's action". Later when he reached Vienna in March 1933, Dilip helped Subhas get in touch with his friends like Madame Mueller, named Nilima by Sri Aurobindo. However, as a successive exchange between Dilip and Subhas showed, the misunderstanding between the two persisted. Subhas could not see a reconciliation between the life-affirming attitude of Integral Yoga and the life of seclusion that many like Dilip and Anilbaran embraced.

However, a fruitful meeting eventually took place between Dilip and Subhas on 17 March 1937 in the old Elgin Road house. Subhas declared that it was an impulsive remark he had made and that "we don't always mean the things we say when we are rubbed the wrong way".⁴³

According to historian Amalendu Dey, as the later events showed, Subhas did not heed the advice of Dilip. Sri Aurobindo had earlier said of Dilip's 'despairing friend' Subhas: "all this insistence upon action is absurd if one has not the right by which to act."⁴⁴ As Dey concludes:

The perception of Sri Aurobindo on contemporary political events was quite different from the perception of Subhas Chandra Bose as a politician during a crucial period of Indian history.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION:

It would thus be seen that Dilip Kumar Roy was a true disciple in the best sense of the term. He was sincere, loyal and dedicated to the Master and the ideals he stood for. He did not efface himself or silence his mind before a towering personality. Rather, he learnt to constantly open his rational and intuitive self to higher influences. He sought inspiration from Sri Aurobindo and in accordance with his teaching carved out a path for himself and his companion, Indira Devi.

For a talented, multi-faceted, intellectually gifted personality like Dilip Kumar Roy, to give up the ego, to become a fitting instrument and spread the message of the Guru in the world would not have come too easily. One could recall here the views of Huxley and the Mother regarding the meaning of greatness. It was Dilip

Kumar Roy's singular good fortune that he discovered for himself one of the greatest figures of the 20th Century and shaped his life under his abiding influence.

(Concluded)

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, p. XIII.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
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28. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.
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31. *Ibid.*, p. 432.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 433-34.
33. *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1968, 1992, p. 229. Letter dated 3 September 1943.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
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36. *Pilgrims of the Stars*, Macmillan, Timeless Books, New York, London, p. XII.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
38. *Ibid.*
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40. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
41. *Netaji Collected Works*, ed. Sisir Bose, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1980, p. 2.
42. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 272-274.
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Love cannot be cold — for there is no such thing as cold love, but the love of which the Mother speaks in that passage is something very pure, fixed and constant; it does not leap into fire and sink for want of fuel, but is steady and all-embracing and self-existent like the light of the sun. There is also a divine love that is personal, but it is not like the ordinary personal human love dependent on any return from the person — it is personal but not egoistic: it goes from the real being in the one to the real being in the other. But to find that, liberation from the ordinary human way of approach is necessary.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 755)

THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of July 2011)

Now I remember Bharati-di.

Her real name was Suzanne Karpelès. She was born in France. She had studied at the Sorbonne University in Paris. It was there that along with her own language, she also studied Sanskrit and Pali and became an expert in them. Her sister was one of the renowned artists of Shantiniketan, being in charge of one of the art sections. That is why, from a young age, Suzanne had been going to Shantiniketan. And that is how she came to know many learned people there. After finishing her studies in France, she went to Shantiniketan. At a gathering of Sanskrit pandits in Kolkata, she read out a speech she had written in Sanskrit. It was in this gathering that she was conferred the title “Bharati”. That is why we used to call her Bharati-di in the Ashram. She was a Buddhist. She had translated from Pali into French the *Dhammapada*, which is a collection of Buddha’s teachings. The Mother took up this book for study in her class. Bharati-di also worked in Cambodia for the French government. She had done a lot of work related to Buddhism. She was the director of a museum in France. She was the Vice-President of the Buddhist Society. She was the Assistant Editor of the Buddhist Encyclopaedia which was published from Sri Lanka. Such a person was Bharati-di.

She came to the Ashram, and very soon acquired the reputation of a good French teacher. One day, after meeting her, as soon as I expressed my request, she accepted to take up the responsibility of teaching me French. The next day, as instructed by her, I went to the school and saw her. We spoke for about ten minutes, and after that the bell rang and our class started. She began by giving a dictation. She gave me a piece of paper to write on. I wrote the word “*Dictée*” (dictation) and the date of that day. I could not write anything more. I could not follow the pronunciation not even of one word.

Everybody gave her their notebooks. I too gave her my piece of paper. All the others in the class were very much younger than me and they all knew French better than I did. They knew very well that I did not know anything and their ears were pricked in curiosity to know what she was going to say after seeing my paper. So that no one would be able to see anything or understand anything, Bharati-di placed the paper in a thick file and looked at it carefully for a long time. Then she looked at me and asked, “Is your name Pramila?” I said “yes” by nodding my head. She came near me and patting my back, said, “Come to my office tomorrow and take the class book.” My classmates thought that they had misjudged me. Perhaps, after all, I knew French very well.

The next day in her office, she gave me the textbook being used in the class. She made me read three times the text of the dictation that she was going to give that day in her class and she asked me to learn the spellings well. She continued in this way until she saw that I had no difficulty following her pronunciation. She then discontinued this method. She forbade me to speak to anyone about these secret classes that she gave me.

This was a proof of her greatness. She did not let anybody feel belittled. She spoke to the Mother and got me a copy of the book, *Prières et Méditations* when she started teaching this book in her class.

She was very generous. Once she bought some apples from an apple-seller and asked her man-servant to get ten rupees from her drawer. He brought a bunch of notes and put them in her hand. She gave the apple-seller a note of five rupees and three notes of two rupees. The man wanted some more money as a tip. She gave him another two rupees. I remarked that she had paid him an amount which was double the price. In answer she said that in her country things cost even more and that here everything was cheaper. When I told her that her servant had brought fish worth three rupees by paying five rupees, she replied that Krishna, her servant, was very honest. I saw countless examples of her generosity. Everybody used to cheat her. Even though she knew that she was being cheated, still she gave, and said, "Don't think I am stupid. They are poor. I am happy to see a smile on their faces." When she went for the wedding of her driver's son, not only did she give an expensive gift herself, but she also handed us more gifts from herself to give to him.

*

Whatever we learnt in our class through books, we learnt much more than that by listening to all the stories she told us. In her class she used to tell us interesting stories about great personalities, writers, artists and learned people from various countries. She had an exceptional skill for recounting stories. Her students used to really enjoy them. She could explain difficult lessons in a simple manner. I heard many stories from her and I will try to recount some of those. She received the affection of Rabindranath Tagore, Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife Abala Bose.

*

This happened one day when Bharati-di was with Jagadish Chandra Bose. Acharya Bose was taking Abala Bose and Bharati-di to the Town Hall where he was to deliver a lecture. That day he arrived forty minutes after the appointed time. When the assembled audience wanted to know the reason for his delay, he replied with his

smile of simplicity, “On the way, my eyes fell on many new plants and trees. As I was discussing them with my companions I did not realise when I had crossed the place where I was supposed to stop. We had gone eight miles beyond our destination and had to return all the way, but this stretch again was interspersed with many halts. This is the reason why I am late. I cannot take a few steps on my way without being stopped by the plants and trees of this country. By stopping to get acquainted with them I have wasted your precious time. Please forgive me.” Everyone was charmed by the way he expressed himself.

Husband and wife were both good speakers. Bharati-di used to address them as ‘Kaka’ and ‘Kakima’ (Uncle and Aunt).

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

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

The love that belongs to the spiritual planes is of a different kind — the psychic has its own more personal love, bhakti, surrender. Love in the higher or spiritual mind is more universal and impersonal. The two must go together to make the highest divine love.

* * *

Universal love is always universal — psychic love can individualise itself.

* * *

Cosmic love depends on the realisation of oneness of self with all. Psychic love or feeling for all can exist without this realisation.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 765-66)

THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of July 2011)

4. Hush-a-bye! Krishna!

WHEN Srila Prabhupada's translation and explication of the *Bhagavata* was issued in thirty volumes several decades ago, one of its several charming facets was the portfolio of pictures that came with each one of them. While Krishna at any age, in any pass does not pall, the baby Krishna is truly every mother's dream. Just watch the face of a young mother carrying a chubby little baby when someone accosts her: "Your baby? He is just like (*sākshāt*) Krishna!"

Who cares for all those anti-Krishna fulminations that really began with Shishupala, the cheat, the liar, the deserter? He is *my* Baby Krishna, the mother thinks and goes on her way smiling and kissing the baby.

Krishna is, of course, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to use Srila Prabhupada's words. But it is Krishna the baby that rivets our attention. When we read the *Bhagavata*, for just one moment we are non-plussed because the newborn babe is not 'normal' at all. Whoever heard of a baby having four hands holding conch-shell, club, disc and lotus flower in each one of them? The baby is born with a brilliant necklace too, flashing the *kaustubha* gem. Not a 'naked new born babe here' (Shakespeare) but a child wrapped in yellow silk! Stone-studded ornaments too!

Fancy a child listening to all this description laid on thickly by her grandmother. There is a list of the ornaments the baby is adorned with, the yellow silk has a zari border, the conch-shell, wheel, mace and the lotus are all made of gold, and there was this beautiful peacock feather on the baby's crown. Ah, a tiny flute in his hand too! Apparently my grandmother had no patience with so-called realism and logic. But she knew what the child wanted. Visuals, colour, joy, wonderment, amazement. All this came to me and must have had a powerful impact in enriching my awareness of the physical world which is multi-layered with many para-physical areas. She was also true to the Puranic tale. The *Purana* was meant to give comfort to the listener that those days of assaults from foreigners on our culture would pass. The deliverer will come! *Tamadbhutam bālakam ambujekshanam . . .*

Lotus-eyed, four-armed, sporting the conch, mace and other weapons; with the luminous *Srivatsa* mark on the chest and the shining *Kaustubha* on the chest; wearing a yellow cloth; possessed of the majesty and grace of a heavy rain cloud; with locks gleaming with the lustre of the diadem and ear-rings

studded with precious stones; bedecked with splendid ornaments like bracelets, armlets and waist-girdle — such was the luminous form of the unique child that greeted Vasudeva's vision.¹

Imagine the scene on the *pial* in front of a village house as twilight is flowing into night. The granny touches the plastic bangles on the child's hands, the cheap necklace bought in the Saturday fair, the faded dress. But she is speaking of stone-studded jewels and gold-laced garments. For the child the frock and the bangles are lost in this abundance and the eyes glow as if actually seeing the baby in the prison in Kamsa's palace. This is how the great story of Krishna and the rest of ancient Indian history, religion and spirituality were infused into the psyche of children and remained there safely guarded in spite of the horrors of the present, the counter-cultures from other spaces and the desperate worry over the future.

This is only the beginning. Having inserted the idea that this is no ordinary child, the grandma has to be ready for the "What next, granny?" As the avatar has to be one like us and posit victory over evil, there is an easy transition to what is considered a 'natural' physiognomy. Whether it is the 11th century Mohammedan invaders or 19th century British Raj or 20th century Terrorists, the land needs a deliverer and he has to be one of us and at the same time far, far superior so that he can annihilate the destroyers of peace. Vasudeva hails his son and so does Devaki. But Devaki's prayer is novel. Any mother would have been proud of this beautiful, rare baby who was glowing with such rich ornaments, but Devaki is afraid at this revelation. A mother is proud of her child and wants to show him around but is also afraid for him, lest the 'evil eye' fall upon the little one! Here the evil eye of Kamsa was also a killer eye. Hence her request:

O Madhusudana! Let not that sinful Kamsa know that thou hast been born of me. The timid one that I am, anxiety for Thy safety makes me afraid of Kamsa. O soul of the worlds! Therefore withdraw this transcendental form, glorious with its four arms sporting discus, mace, and lotus and conch.²

So Krishna became an ordinary baby. The total faith of the little child in the village *pial* takes in the manifestation and the transformation in its stride which is made of pure faith in the storyteller. Granny knows everything! The visual of an ordinary baby snuggling in the hands of Devaki slowly withdraws from the vision of the child who is embraced by sweet sleep, listening to the old lady's voice, soothed by the familiar Tamil song accompanied by a rhythmic tapping on the back:

1. Skanda X, chapter 3, verses 9-10. All translations from the *Bhagavata* used in this series of essays are by Swami Tapasyananda.

2. Skanda X, chapter 3, verses 29-30.

Brahma sent for you this lovely little cradle
 Which is inlaid with gems and diamonds.
 Lovely little one! hush-a-bye!
 Lord who measured the worlds! hush-a-bye!

Kapali who rides the Nandi bull has sent you
 A waist cord strung alternately with gold beads
 And gems red as pomegranate blossoms.
 Also a tiny dagger. My Lord! Do not cry!
 Do not cry! One who measured the worlds! Hush-a-bye!³

If the *Vishnu Purana* spoke of Krishna's birth and childhood, Perialwar (7th century) was the one who seemed to have meditated upon the phenomenon of the Supreme being born as a human child. He was a Brahmin of Srivilliputtur in South India and used to offer flower garlands to the presiding deity of the place, Vatapatrasayi (Krishna as resting on the banyan leaf). He was also a hymnologist who used to compose mellifluous Tamil verses in praise of the Lord. The *Vishnu Purana* was his basic scriptural text. So involved was he in Krishna as a baby that he becomes Yashoda in his verses describing the play of the child that form part of *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, revered as scripture by the followers of the Ramanuja Sampradaya. The happy mother Yashoda who is exhilarated that her baby has learnt to crawl in the backyard calls out to the moon to come and have fun watching the sight:

Young full moon! My son is crawling and playing
 In the dust, with his forehead ornament dangling
 And waist-string tinkling. If you have eyes to see,
 Tarry a while to watch Govinda's pranks.⁴

Again the little one is on the lap of Yashoda who teaches Krishna to clap his hands.

With the anklet-bells ringing and the sounds of the bells
 In the golden waistband joining in unison,
 With the coral lips smiling, clap the *chappani* with your hands
 That received the earth in days of yore!
 Little one with dark tresses! Clap the *chappani*.⁵

3. *Perialwar Tirumozhi*, 1-1-2.

4. *Ibid.*, 1-5-1.

5. *Ibid.*, 1-7-1 ('Chappani' is from saha-paani, bringing the palms together).

The maternal closeness with the Supreme as a baby has remained with us ever since Perialwar helped us become one with Krishna in this manner. Be it Devaki fondling the newborn baby (he has his peacock feathers and a tiny flute in his hand) or Pootana's life being sucked out of her enormous breasts by the beloved toddler, or the huge Trinavarta being killed by a pair of tiny hands, or the innocent kick of a tiny foot breaking the massive cart to smithereens, the ISKCON paintings produced under the inspiration of Srila Prabhupada are a joy forever. Though Krishna is shown as a baby who has a blue complexion, in the Cart demon episode he is fair-complexioned. One can pardon the painter. Once we enter Krishna's world, all logic and methodical presentations seem to withdraw from us. We just see and do and enjoy ourselves! All these visions are thanks to the Krishna cycle of legends found in the *Bhagavata*, the works of the Alvars, the Puranas.

The baby Krishna is so much a part of our everyday life that there have been wonderful recordations. One of them came to me from a most unexpected quarter. The much-publicised *Mughal-i-Azam* had been released at last. Not averse to the film world, though I have not had much exposure to it, I went with expectations of a lot of tears and depression. My Punjabi friend was eloquent about Madhubala as a superb tragedienne in the film. They were to come later and I walked out when a heavily manacled Madhubala began to drag her chains towards the stern Akbar to plead her case. For I had gained an unpredicted joy so had no patience to wait for the tears to come. Quite early in the film, Prithviraj Kapoor as Akbar is seen seated in the zenana of his queen Jodha Bai (played by Durga Khote). *Arere*, what do I see here in a Muslim emperor's zenana?

There is a huge, beautiful cradle of intricate workmanship. Soft colours everywhere. Zenana women go around carrying plates of sweets. The sumptuously proportioned Jodha Bai takes up a plate with a lamp and offers *arti* to the image of the baby Krishna in the cradle. Krishna is seen holding a pat of butter in his hand. Durga Khote's face is suffused with love and happiness as a substantial Prithviraj Kapoor looks upon the scene indulgently. Then the Queen feeds the Emperor with prasad. Presently she places in his hands the jewelled cord of the swing. And Akbar pulls it ever so mildly while the image of the gold-sheened Krishna rocks gently with the cradle's motion. I knew then how deep are the roots of Indian culture that see the Supreme as a baby at home: I had only to watch the self-lost audience in the theatre hall at this master stroke from the director of the film.

Did Kamal Amrohi have any precedent for showing this scene? A Hindu icon in a Muslim household! But that seems to have happened around the 11th century itself when the Delhi Sultanate ravaged the Srirangam temple. The idol of Ranganatha was taken away to Delhi but the Sultan's daughter received the icon as a toy. Legends speak of how Sri Ramanuja came to Delhi, pleased the Sultan with his conciliatory tone and begged for the icon. He and his followers did not want any of the enormous quantities of jewels and gold the Sultan had taken but the icon was a must for

worship. The Sultan agreed and asked the Acharya to call out to his god who would come if he were a living divinity. Sri Ramanuja recited a verse of Perialwar:

Just as an elephant moves forward steadily
 Clanging its chains sounding *chalar, pilar*,
 The hanging bells resound and rut flows out
 Of three places,⁶ shall not my Sarangapani
 Toddle around with his big feet,
 His anklet-bells pealing and the waistband-bells a-tinkle?

A wondrous thing happened then. The icon of Ranganatha came crawling out of the zenana and into the court-hall, and went up to the Acharya who lifted his Lord with great Ananda. The Muslim Princess, however, would not part with her soul-friend in the image and followed Ranganatha to Srirangam where she merged with the Lord. A niche was built in her honour next to the sanctum of this famous temple and one may go and worship her even today as the Thulukka Nachiar where the prasada offered happens to be chapathis and butter!⁷

A couple of my friends who are non-believers and owe allegiance to Periyarism⁸ have told me that I should not subscribe to legends like this which are paranormal and cannot be explained in terms of rationalism. I tell them that such legends which have a strong survival vitality must be based upon some real-life incident. In any case, have we conquered all the areas of rationalistic thought or the sciences? Have we found all the answers as to why the earth should move around the sun? We are left with a million whys in our daily life and one more is not going to affect me in any way. I have Sri Aurobindo to help me out of this maze of questions.

To the senses it is always true that the sun moves round the earth; this is false to the reason. To the reason it is always true that the earth moves round the sun; this is false to the supreme vision. Neither earth moves nor sun; there is only a change in the relation of sun-consciousness & earth-consciousness.⁹

So I prefer not to give in to the rationalistic claptrap. While miracles need not be devoured by us lock, stock and barrel, enduring legends like that of Thulukka Nachiar and the baby Krishna crawling in the palace of Delhi Sultans are welcome. In a world riddled with compartmentalisation in terms of religion, I find this instance

6. *Ibid.*, 1-8-1. Three places: the two cheeks and forehead.

7. An identical legend is associated with the Bibi Nachiar Sannidhi in Melkote (Tirunaryanapuram) in Karnataka.

8. The philosophy of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, known as "Periyar", which denies the existence of God.

9. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 434.

of a Muslim goddess in the Hindu temple a sign of the all-embracing culture posited by ancient India.

What did baby Krishna look like? The loving imagination of Indian artists has found immense pleasure in catching him in the net of their visionary eye. The Thanjavur painters who work with gems and gold tissue present a sumptuous baby Krishna. He is heavily bedecked but wears no garment. Just a little baby! I have a much-cherished ancient glass painting of a Thanjavur Krishna. He is sitting on the throne of the divine snake Adishesha, and is holding his right foot with his hands and trying to chew his toe. The painting has hung in the puja room for more than two hundred years, and looks as fresh as if it were done yesterday. In some paintings the lovely baby is seen with Yashoda feeding him butter. The Thanjavur artists follow tradition but bring in subtle changes too. Tradition and individual talent at play!

Of the latter day literature on baby Krishna, Bilwamangal's *Sri Krishna Karnamrutham* is justly famous. The legend of the author has been filmed with great success in several Indian languages. Sri Ramakrishna's disciple Girish Chandra Ghosh put on boards successfully a drama on the subject. Bilwamangal (13th century) was a Sanskrit poet who had fallen in love with a courtesan, Chintamani and neglected his wife who dies. Chintamani was a devotee of Krishna. Thanks to her, Bilwamangal changes his ways and spends the rest of his life singing of Krishna. Bilwamangal's evocation of Krishna as a babe has inspired all the poets, painters and sculptors who have come after:

At the crown the peacock feather
 As an ornament for the thick tresses;
 Worthy of being worshipped
 By the lotus-like eyes of cowherdresses;
 A face that is out to rival the lotus
 And the moon above;
 Your loveliness as a baby
 Makes our sight grow greedy for more.¹⁰

Each verse in *Sri Krishna Karnamrutham* is as it were, a painted picture. To Bilwamangal it is Krishna everywhere but look at that clever fellow! He just cannot be gathered in an embrace!

He shows me an indescribable play
 Right within my vision; this beauty
 Pervades all directions as my eyes

10. Verse I, 31. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

Stand witness. O Mother!
 All the three worlds are full of Krishna
 As a baby for me. But this babe
 Cannot be gathered in my arms. Alas!¹¹

Baby Krishna has brought comfort to millions who have sung his beauty and rocked his cradle. I have known a childless couple who made their entire home a permanent exhibition of Krishna as a child. The lullaby sung to Krishna in the cradle has been made into an exceptional exposition of the *Bhagavad Gita* in the old Tamil poem, *Gitāsāra Thālāttu* (Lullaby on the Essence of Gita). There is a sad tale behind the writing of the poem.

Madhai Tiruvenkatanathar was an erudite scholar who lived probably three hundred years ago. He had a daughter named Kothai whose wedding he celebrated with great éclat. Unfortunately she was widowed soon after and returned to her natal home. A couple of years later, she heard someone singing a lullaby in the house right opposite to hers. The song moved her immensely and she became very sad and depressed. The reason was not far to seek. The girl who was singing the lullaby had been Kothai's classmate and they had been married about the same time. Now the other girl had become a mother and was rocking the cradle and putting her baby to sleep.

Thiruvenkatanathar noted her sorrow and indited a cradle-song for her. It turned out to be a crystalline text of Advaita. He gave the manuscript of *Gitāsāra Thālāttu* and a baby Krishna doll and a cradle to her. The daughter understood the poem which assured her that only the body dies but the soul lives for ever. She began singing the lullaby regularly while rocking her own 'baby' in the cradle. The cradle now contained a Krishna who enchanted her with his smiles and by kicking his tiny legs. Kothai's heart was not only at peace but was now filled with Ananda. That is the secret of Krishna. Where He is meditated upon, there is only joy.

Cast in simple and mellifluous Tamil, each of the 124 verses is a question that contains the answer, for Kothai is addressing the baby Krishna in the cradle.

Are you the one who said:
 Brahman is one, not two.
 You are not different from the Brahman.
 If you overcome the divisive idea,
 You will experience the joy of liberation.
 Are you the one who said:
 Even if one lives in the house
 With wife and relations,

11. Verse I, 60.

The liberated person exists
Like a drop of water on a lotus leaf.¹²

When it is Krishna, you are never amazed at anything. A lullaby in India performs no violence to the baby-idea as we find in the familiar nursery rhyme, ‘Rock-a-bye baby’ taught in India’s English-medium schools: “When the wind blows the cradle will rock / When the bough breaks the cradle will fall.” Here is Gita pronounced in the midst of the Kurukshetra battle, and yet the lullaby spreads a “calm of mind, all passion spent”. *Gītāsāra Thālāttu* is yet another instance of how the finest points in Indian culture percolated down and spread evenly, and strengthened the Indian psyche.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

12. Verses 87, 106. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

The boy with the flute is Sri Krishna, the Lord descended into the world-play from the divine Ananda; his flute is the music of the call which seeks to transform the lower ignorant play of mortal life and bring into it and establish in its place the Lila of his divine Ananda. It was the psychic being in you that heard the call and followed after it.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 392)